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Editors:

José Adrián Badillo-Carlos

Oswaldo Sandoval

Advisor:

Dr. Rocío Quispe-Agnoli

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Migrations and Borders in Literature, Art, and Theater: An Introduction.

Yo no crucé la frontera, la frontera me cruzó
[I didn't cross the border, the border crossed me]
(Los Tigres del Norte, "Somos más americanos")

Yo no sé de donde soy, mi casa está en la frontera
[I don't know where I am from, my home is at border]
(Jorge Drexler, "Frontera")

Los Tigres del Norte, a Norteño musical group based in Los Angeles and one of the most internationally popular bands of Mexican traditional music, express the idea of belonging in their song "Somos más americanos" [We Are More American] as a paradox of mobility and stasis: "I didn't cross the border, the border crossed me." This paradox is the direct consequence of Empire and it points out the encroachment of US expansion into Mexican spaces after the Mexican-American War of 1846-48, where the Mexican population living in those areas remained in the colonized spaces, later becoming US citizens. Empire has multiplied this mobility-stasis equation and has complicated the category of identity. The other important factor for cultural reformulation is globalization and modern mobility. As James Clifford proposes, in globalization, cultural meanings appear in spaces of heterogeneity, where identity is paradoxically mediated by experience of stasis and movement (Routes 5). Jorge Drexler, a Uruguayan-born singer, the son of a Jewish and Holocaust-survivor German father and a Spanish/Portuguese mother, has lived in many countries such as Uruguay, Israel, and Spain, and has been at the intersection of different national and ethnic identities. He defines his identity at the border of cultures with his song "Frontera" [Border] which recognizes the idea of nation as the main source of conflict and war. Drexler mixes in his music traditional local rhythms and melodies from Latin America such as tango, milonga, murga, and candombe with global sounds such as bossa nova, jazz, pop, and

electronic music. In both cases, these artists articulate the complexity of identity in a world where the interactions of the local and the global have become the rule.

The two main processes of colonial expansion and capitalist globalization have become new foci in literature and cultural analysis, whereas before, the main attention was put on national cultures and literatures. As Susan Stanford Friedman points out, the new framing emphasizes

greater understanding of the porousness of the cultural borders of the nation-state; how the history of empire and (post)colonialism binds the literatures of different parts of the world together; how national literatures are formed in conjunctions with the literatures of other nations; and how interconnected and mutually constitutive the cultures of the world have always been—and will continue to be in ever-intensified ways, because of the new technologies of knowledge and communication. (262)

The nation as a category of study has become somewhat obsolete in a globalized world with an increase of deterritorialization and the intensification of mobility. These contemporary characteristics are shaping symbolic products and cultural exchanges. More than ever, diaspora, exile, travel, and migration are at the center of individual and collective experiences. Even within the nation, certain populations may suffer from invisibility and marginalization, and this phenomenon can be understood as a form of “internal” exile. Also, globalization transforms the notion of identity and establishes different relationships to our places of origin.

In a globalized world, routes are becoming just as strong as roots. As James Clifford points out

Dwelling was understood to be the local ground of collective life, travel a supplement; roots always precede routes. But what would happen, I began to ask,

if travel were untethered, seen as a complex and pervasive spectrum of human experiences? Practices of displacement might emerge as constitutive of cultural meanings rather than as their simple transfer or extension.” (*Routes* 3)

Locality is transformed by travel and displacement. Local cultures become placed and displaced within the new web of interconnections. Even people who do not move have seen their towns and cities become filled with tourists and migrants from distant lands. Clifford later continues: “Here I survey contemporary articulations of “diaspora,” seen as potential subversions of nationality—ways of sustaining connections with more than one place while practicing nonabsolutists forms of citizenship” (*Routes* 9). We are at a junction where the meaning of citizenship is being reformulated at the heart of capital consumption and the re-formulations of insiders and outsiders in our societies.

The old categories of nation, border, culture and identity seem to be under scrutiny and transformation. As Arjun Appadurai reminds us, “[t]he complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics that we have only begun to theorize” (33). He finds these disjunctures at the level of national formations and proposes exploring them in the relationship among five dimensions of global cultural flows: ethnoscapas (movement of people), mediascapas (media and their products), technoscapas (technology), financescapas (global capital), and ideoscapas (ideologies of states and social forces). However, as Néstor García Canclini has pointed out, these flows are not symmetrical and they can be unidirectional (51). The cultural space has become increasingly more glocalized (with the interdependence and interpenetration of the global and the local). This transforms the nation-state, even though we cannot totally understand it as post-national, since the state still plays an important role. As Stuart Hall has pointed out the global political economy contradictorily supports

religious differences, gendered and ethnic divisions. Even though, our time is characterized by fluidity and double or triple attachments, the *scapes* and globalizing flows have sometimes contradictory effects, such as the resurgence of xenophobia as in for example, the British Brexit vote to leave the European Union or Donald Trump's political use of nativist policies and dictums to get elected.

Borders can be material, but also spiritual, as Gloria Anzaldúa has taught us when talking about the hybridity of the *mestiza*: “Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three culture and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages” (100). Anzaldúa shows that certain groups (migrants, exiles, colonials, among others) live everyday with socio-cultural conflict, bilingualism, and hybridity.

Some decolonialist thinkers such as Walter D. Mignolo have named Anzaldúa's ideas ‘border thinking’: an epistemology of the subaltern caught in the interactions between local histories and global design (38).

Globalization has brought economic gains for some and its dark side has brought violence, drug trafficking, and unemployment. We have witnessed the transformation of the Welfare State model to a neoliberal version where the ‘invisible hand of the market’ is supposed to sustain the direction of human societies without the intervention of government. Social disintegration and violence have been connected by specialists with global forces related to the war on terror, the war on drugs, the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, and the dwindling of job security and of investment in collective services. These factors influence the movement of people searching for security or for a “better life” in the context of poverty, violence, and social disintegration.

Literature, art, TV, and films respond to these changes and offer narratives to understand globalization. Culture intervenes in reality and it helps make sense of the disjunctions that come along with globalization and mobility. As Doris Sommer affirms “Culture enables agency. Where structures or conditions can seem intractable, creative practices add dangerous supplements that add angles for intervention and locate room for maneuver” (3). Forms of culture speak about the politics of the individual and the collective, and culture both represents and transforms material reality. Many of the essays of this collection explore creative agency. Agency apprehends the context of the individual in history and accentuates individual memory. Cultural representations rewrite history and provide us with alternative versions of reality. More than ever, we have the possibility of hearing and engaging the voice and narratives of migrants, refugees, and subaltern or marginalized groups.

Martín Ruiz-Mendoza proposes to explore the meaning of Colombian artist Doris Salcedo’s art installation entitled *Shibboleth*. This work was a 548-foot-long crack sculpted in Colombian rock and transported to Europe, for exhibition at London’s Tate Modern museum in 2007. Ruiz-Mendoza argues that Salcedo’s work articulates a critique of modernity, imperialism, globalization, racism, and xenophobia in contemporary Western societies. The crack symbolically represents a silent form of violence, also the reverse of walls and borders, and the dark side of globalization.

In “Beyond Exile: Travel, Life Writing, and Return in *Con pasión absoluta*,” Seth Roberts analyzes Canadian-Guatemalan author Carol Zardetto’s 2005 novel presenting the textual ambivalence in her work between exile and origins, life writing and fiction. The novel offers the sense of insecurity and rootlessness that happens in the diasporic experience of women. The protagonist, Irena Ferrara, embarks in a return-to-origins travel narrative. This return becomes

increasingly an impossibility as the essay considers the female protagonist as a traveler torn between Guatemala, Canada, and other locations in the Americas who recovers the past through the act of life writing and using her own subjective memory. According to Roberts, the female self appears at the center of the nation, history, and the global discourse of displacement.

Miriam Yvonn Márquez-Barragan analyzes the work of Cuban-American writer Daína Chaviano in “Boleros entre las ruinas: Memoria íntima y memoria histórica en *La isla de los amores infinitos* de Daína Chaviano.” Her analysis presents the importance of Cuban musical memory in conjunction with the metaphorical meaning of the phantasmagoric ruins left behind. The female protagonist, Cecilia, recreates the past through the Cuban diasporic collective memory present in Miami to bring the ghosts of history into the present.

Continuing with the woman’s voice as the place of enunciation to understand globalization, Judit Fuente-Cuesta analyzes a novel by Lucía Etxebarría titled *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (1998). Fuente-Cuesta argues that Etxebarría’s novel supports the efforts of the Spanish Popular Party (1996-2004) which tried to position Spain as an important player in the transnational stage of politics. Etxebarría’s novel presents the migration to Edinburgh of her Spanish protagonist, Beatriz, and the cultural context of British and American popular cultural references present in Spanish contemporary culture.

Alba Rivera analyses Judith Ortiz Cofer’s autobiographical narrative *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood*. At the cultural junctures between Puerto Rico and the United States, Rivera analyses Ortiz Cofer’s oral style and narration which serves simultaneously as an affirmation and critique of ‘Puertoricanness’ by creating a queer perspective of Puerto Rican culture. According to Rivera, the book emphasizes the rewriting of different forms

of Puerto Rican female identities within the genre of the memoir and in clear conflict with masculine versions of *Boricua* History.

Stacey Alex analyses the play *Home/Land*, an Albany Park Theater Project (APTP) collective creation. She argues that self-representation of the (im)migrant communities undermines the “infantilization of the migrant,” which is, according to Alex, the preferred representation in mainstream media. This theatrical intervention resists social exclusion through counter-storytelling and it reclaims a space where undocumented people can be directed celebrated through their stories and own voices. Alex’s essay analyzes APTP’s narrative strategy to resist xenophobia and persecution. It also considers how the kind of representations developed by APTP may be used as a tool to combat fear of racial and cultural “Other” in educational settings.

Movement and globalization transform our communities and hybridize world cultures. This Tropos Journal number examines the political implications of art, literature, and representation of migrant, diasporic or global identities. Our voices respond to movement and memory. They also trace where we have been, where we are, and point towards where we will, someday, arrive.

Miguel A. Cabañas

Associate Professor of Spanish
and Chicano/Latino Studies
Michigan State University

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The Stranger and the Crack: Doris Salcedo's *Shibboleth*

MARTÍN RUIZ-MENDOZA
University of Michigan

ABSTRACT

This essay offers a critical exploration of *Shibboleth*, a 548-foot-long crack sculpted at Doris Salcedo's workshop in Bogotá and exhibited at London's Tate Modern in 2007. The main objective is to establish a dialogue between that work and some of the ideas in which it is grounded. Given the centrality of those ideas in current debates around colonialism, imperialism, globalization, migration, and ethnic difference, the essay aims to explore the critical potency of *Shibboleth* vis-à-vis today's political horizon. The first part analyzes Salcedo's intention to articulate a critique of modernity by aesthetically hinting at its dark side, which the artist associates with the pervasiveness of exclusion, racism and xenophobia in contemporary Western societies. By revisiting Bauman (1997), this section suggests that, since those traits are in fact constitutive of the modern State, it is necessary to see *Shibboleth* as a more radical critique of the modern project itself. The second part addresses the spatial component of that critique to suggest that *Shibboleth* opens the possibility for a non-dialectical form of expressing negativity. The essay concludes with a reflection about the way in which Salcedo's piece puts even critical art into question by articulating an aesthetics of impotence grounded in the quest for attending the stranger.

Keywords: Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*, borders, the stranger, modernity.

RESUMEN

Este ensayo propone una exploración crítica de *Shibboleth*, una grieta de 150 metros esculpida en el taller de la artista Doris Salcedo en Bogotá y exhibida en 2007 en la galería Tate Modern de Londres. El objetivo principal es establecer un diálogo entre la obra y algunas de las ideas que le dan sustento. Dada la centralidad de esas ideas en debates actuales en torno al colonialismo, el imperialismo, la globalización, la migración y la diferencia étnica, el ensayo busca explorar el potencial crítico de *Shibboleth* de cara al horizonte político de hoy. La primera parte analiza la intención de Salcedo de articular una crítica de la modernidad por medio de la elaboración estética de su lado oscuro, que la artista asocia con la preeminencia de la exclusión, el racismo y la xenofobia en las sociedades occidentales contemporáneas. Por medio de una relectura de Bauman (1997), esta sección sugiere que, dado el carácter constitutivo de esos elementos en la formación del Estado moderno, es necesario entender *Shibboleth* como una crítica más radical del proyecto moderno en sí mismo. La segunda parte aborda el componente espacial de esa crítica para sugerir que *Shibboleth* abre el camino para una forma no dialéctica de expresar la negatividad. El ensayo concluye con una reflexión sobre cómo Salcedo cuestiona inclusive el arte crítico por medio de la articulación de una estética de la impotencia fundada en un compromiso de atender al extraño.

Palabras clave: Doris Salcedo, *Shibboleth*, límites, el extraño, modernidad.

The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a survivor of Ephraim said, “Let me cross over,” the men of Gilead asked him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” If he replied, “No,” they said, “All right, say ‘Shibboleth.’” If he said, “Sibboleth,” because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed at that time.
(*Judges 12:5*)

Heart: make yourself known even here,
here in the midst of the market.
Cry out the shibboleth
into your homeland strangeness.
(Paul Celan, *Shibboleth*)

On October 12, 2007, *The London Evening Standard*'s Norman Lebrecht bombastically referred to London as the cultural capital of the world. To prove his point, he alluded to cold facts such as the following: “Tate Modern has posted its highest attendances, 5.2 million in 2006, with a claim to be the most popular free museum on earth. Its crack in the floor is certainly the most talked-about art installation of the moment, an unmissable comment by Doris Salcedo on divisions in society and within the individual psyche” (13). As unmissable as this comment may have been, it was not received with the same enthusiasm by all of Lebrecht's colleagues. Rachel Cooke, for instance, wrote two days after in *The Observer* that “[...] since beyond its message, *Shibboleth* is just a crack, as charming or as charmless as all cracks are, it is not exactly a work that can hold the attention for more than the five seconds it takes to think: ah, a crack” (14). The nonchalant banality of this statement evokes the all-too-familiar argument of the Situationists, according to which the dictum of the spectacle has permeated all cultural spheres. Salcedo's work – apparently nothing but a crack– resists that dictum, inevitably leading to Ms. Cooke's boredom.

Was *Shibboleth* just a crack? The importance of Salcedo's work depends on the way we answer this question. In purely material terms, the answer would have to be affirmative: *Shibboleth*

was a 548-foot-long crack made of concrete cast extracted from a Colombian rock face, in which a chain-link wire fence was embedded. The crack was produced at Salcedo's studio in Bogotá and then shipped to London. The laborious procedure that the transportation and installation of the piece entailed strikes the spectator as nothing less than a spectacular engineering –let alone logistical– achievement. Once installed, however, the crack became –at least for the distracted viewer– just a crack.

“Attentiveness is the natural prayer of the soul”, wrote Paul Celan quoting Malebranche via Walter Benjamin's essay on Kafka (“The Meridian” 50). Salcedo, whose debt with the Rumanian poet has been overtly recognized by the artist herself (Basualdo 2000), created *Shibboleth* as a site of reflection that demands, first and foremost, a disposition to attend.¹ The latter word has more than one meaning. It can be used in the sense of being present at, but it also means to deal with, to give care or look after, and to pay attention to. In Salcedo's work, the word resonates in all its polysemy. For the attentive participant, *Shibboleth* bears witness to an uncanny reality that we would rather not have to deal with, but which demands our care. That reality becomes manifest in Salcedo's proposal, where she writes that she wanted the crack to intrude on the space of Tate Modern's Turbine Hall “in the same way the appearance of immigrants disturbs the consensus and homogeneity of European societies” (65).

Seen against the background of Salcedo's intellectual elaborations, it becomes clear that *Shibboleth* is not just a crack. However, the work only becomes more than that after those elaborations are disclosed. As Michael Kelly observes: “Without some indication from Salcedo about her intentions for this installation, how would the public know that the “crack” was even an

¹ As Michael Kelly points out, “the goal of attentiveness in Salcedo's art is not merely Michael Fried's idea of absorption in aesthetic pleasure. The aim of Salcedo's art is rather to engage viewers in an affective experience that in turn stimulates critical reflection about the moral-political demands enacted in it” (*A Hunger for Aesthetics* 158).

art installation or that the cast inside the crack had political as well as aesthetic value? *Shibboleth* might have been mistaken for an artless crack in the floor” (*A Hunger for Aesthetics* 136). Andrew Mead’s critique of the work leads to the same question, which he ventures to answer in a non-flattering way: “Unless prompted by the handout that explains Salcedo’s intentions, would you ever conclude that ‘this negative space represents the area occupied by those that have been left out of the history of modernity’? I doubt it” (“Shibboleth” 57).

It seems that Rachel Cooke, after all, is not to be blamed. Salcedo’s work is in itself a shibboleth that demands knowledge of the theoretical and political code that renders it meaningful. It is possible –and maybe even necessary– to build upon this idea to articulate a critique of the intricate relationship between political discourse and aesthetics in contemporary art.² The following pages, however, are not devoted to such an ambitious enterprise. Rather, they are an attempt to make the implicit explicit, i.e., to reconstruct the dialogue between Salcedo’s work and the ideas that make it not only meaningful but also important.

The Dark Side of Modernity?

In his 1961 speech on the occasion of the award of the Georg Büchner Prize, Paul Celan states that art, “with all its attributes and future additions, is also a problem and, as we can see, one that is variable, tough, longlived, let us say, eternal” (“The Meridian” 38). Echoing Celan’s insight, Salcedo explores artistic creation as an experiential endeavor which entails danger. In her

² Rebecca Comay hints at that critique in her analysis of *Shibboleth*, in which she states that the event that the piece attempts to trace becomes “a generic placeholder, to which the spectator responds by filling in the blank—Guantanamo, LA, Chicago, Auschwitz. . . . Salcedo herself occasionally proposes such analogies and they are all pertinent and compelling. But with this drift to analogy we risk redoubling the original effacement: the work threatens to become a portable empathy machine that we adapt to our own emotional agendas” (“Material Remains” 53). The image of a portable empathy machine, seen against the background of Salcedo’s itinerant crack, is especially suggestive.

contribution to PBS's *Art21* series, she states that "my work is based not on my experience, but on somebody else's experience. Experience comes from the Latin word *experiri*, which means to test, to prove; from the Latin word *periri*, which means peril or danger; and also from the Indo-European root *per*, which means going across. Experience means going across danger" (*Compassion* 41:00).

As abstract as this etymological lucubration may seem, Salcedo locates the perilous venture of her work within the cultural and geographical borders of its site of production. As a Colombian artist, she is indebted to the testimony of the victims of the world's longest internal war, who are also the victims of imperialism and colonialism.³ She conceives her art as an encounter with the ruins that these devastating experiences have left behind. This evokes Walter Benjamin's reading of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*. As he puts it in the ninth of his "Theses on The Philosophy of History": "Where we perceive a chain of events, [the angel of history] sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet" (257). From Benjamin's perspective, the accumulation of ruins is inherent to progress, not merely as its dark side but rather as its constitutive logic.

Salcedo's work is an attempt to aesthetically articulate Benjamin's insight. This becomes manifest in her original proposal for *Shibboleth*, where she describes the project as "an attempt to address the section of humankind that has been left out of the history of modernity, and kept at the margin of high Western culture" (64). The installation, however, does not represent the experience of the underdogs of modernity from the perspective of Colombian victims. The massive crack in

³ The Colombian conflict can be seen in itself as the very crystallization of the inveterate history of colonialism and imperialism that traverses the country's history. An especially compelling argument supporting this perspective through a critique of the regimes of capitalist accumulation that laid the foundations of paramilitary forces can be found in Juanita Bernal's PhD dissertation *The Secret History of Paramilitarism: Capitalist Insurrections in Colombia's 20th and 21st Centuries* (University of Michigan, 2017).

Tate Modern's floor speaks about elusive victims: victims who are not always identified as such because they are not far away from that cultural capital of the world which Lebrecht boasts of. These victims are not the slaughtered of Colombian war, nor the distant bearers of the distant burdens of some other distant genocide. They inhabit the civilized polis but are not fully a part of it because their presence "is widely perceived as the sole vector of decadence, capable of jeopardizing the historical and cultural heritage that gave shape to Europe's identity" ("Proposal" 65).

Identity constitution, as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have pointed out, takes place against a "radical outside, without a common measure with the inside" (*New Reflections* 18). This idea is at the core of the political antagonism between friend and foe already identified by Carl Schmitt (2007) as the basis of true politics.⁴ The etymological connection between *enemy* ('hostis') and *strange* ('hospes') that Jacob Burckhardt reminds us of is especially telling in this respect.⁵ As the current political climate –not only in Europe but also, and especially, in the United States– has made manifest, this connection has particularly devastating connotations for minority and marginalized communities that are often portrayed, through overtly racist rhetorical mechanisms, as the strange and, therefore, the enemy. Salcedo's critique of these mechanisms or, rather, of the effects they have on the everyday life of concrete individuals, builds upon the fact that the

⁴ Laclau and Mouffe, however, do not follow Schmitt's thesis verbatim. According to Mouffe, "the friend/enemy distinction can be considered as merely one of the possible forms of expression of the antagonistic dimension which is constitutive of the political" (*On the Political* 16), which allows for the articulation of what she considers to be the challenge for democratic politics, namely, to try to establish the we/they relation in a different way.

⁵ Significantly enough, Burckhardt refers to that connection in relation to the political unrest which followed the death of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, around 1480. That unrest resulted in what the historian describes as the collapse of morality amidst social chaos: "In certain districts of Italy, where civilization had made little progress, the country people were disposed to murder any stranger who fell into their hands. This was especially the case in the more remote parts of the Kingdom of Naples, where the barbarism dated probably from the days of the Roman *latifundia*, and when the stranger and the enemy (*hospes* and *hostis*) were in all good faith to be one and the same" (*The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* 293).

increasing homogeneity of so-called first world societies has resulted in the identification of the radical outside with the immigrant, who is perceived as a boycotter of the identity constitution process which defines the inside.

On April 29, 2017, at a Pennsylvania rally, US President Donald Trump perfectly illustrated this discourse by dedicating *The Snake*, by Al Wilson, to the Border Patrol and the I.C.E. agents “for doing such an incredible job”. The song tells the story of a “tender hearted woman” who takes care of a frozen snake who then bites her. The woman protests before dying: “I saved you, and you’ve beaten me, but why?”, to which the snake replies: “You knew damn well I was a snake before you took me in”. Trump’s point could not have been clearer: immigrants trespassing the US border are but “vicious snakes” who one day will bite the hand that “saves” them. The friend/foe dichotomy, as well as the ‘hostis’/‘hospes’ connection, take new connotations in this speech, insofar as the enemy is here represented as a person from the outside who, once inside, betrays the hospitality of the host.⁶ Trump’s commitment to render the border distinctly visible via the construction of a billion-dollar wall is the logical, albeit materially absurd consequence of his discourse.

Ten years prior to Trump’s possession, Doris Salcedo was already offering a glimpse of the infamous wall. In fact, the depth of some segments of the crack made *Shibboleth* look like an inverted wall: a wall growing downwards. The desert-like rock formation which the crack revealed, as well as the chain-link wire fence embedded in it, powerfully evoked the landscape of

⁶ It is worth noting that deception and betrayal are the tropes *par excellence* of ethnocidal violence. As Arjun Appadurai has pointed out, the idea of the Jews as “pretenders” was one of the quintessential justifications for their mass extermination by the Nazis. By the same token, the Tutsis in Rwanda perceived the Hutus as the enemies within, i.e., as “foreigners who hid their origins, as malign tricksters who were hiding their true identity” (“Dead Certainty” 72). The implications of Trump’s remarks are all the more disturbing when analyzed against this background.

a walled US-Mexican border. The wall-like crack hinted at the future wall as the massive, impossible-to-ignore residue of a catastrophe.

In Salcedo's proposal for the project, this catastrophe is presented as the uncanny materialization of the dark side of modernity: "*Shibboleth* (...) addresses the w(hole) in history that marks the bottomless difference that separates whites from non-whites. The w(hole) in history that I am referring to is the history of racism, which runs parallel to the history of modernity, and is its untold dark side" (65). As an archaeology of that w(hole), which is not only a counter-archaeology (Weizman 2007) but also an archaeology of the present and of the future, *Shibboleth* is a reminder of the scar –or, rather, the open wound– which the modern project has to deal with.

The materiality of the work, however, is more powerful than the intentions of the artist, insofar as what *Shibboleth* renders visible is not the dark side of modernity, but the very essence of the modern State itself, which, as Zygmunt Bauman aptly observes, "legislated order into existence and defined order as the clarity of binding divisions, classifications, allocations and boundaries" (*Postmodernity and its Discontents* 18). Borders, along with the racist mindset they produce and reproduce, are not the untold side of the modern project (the ominous face in whose concealment would depend the project's success) but rather its constitutive feature.

This brings us back to the *stranger/enemy* connection, which Bauman elaborates as the cornerstone of the modern State. Building upon the premise that the latter constituted itself as "the guardian and the sole guarantee of orderly life", Bauman observes that "the typical *modern* strangers where the waste of the State's ordering zeal. (...) The strangers exhaled uncertainty where certainty and clarity should have ruled" (18). The invention of divisions and boundaries was not an accessory feature of the modern State but its condition of possibility. Order building –the

very heart and soul of that State– depended on what Bauman characterizes as a war of attrition against the strangers and the strange.

That war, which was also –and fundamentally– a war against uncertainty, was fought following two strategies: that of *assimilation* (making the different similar) and that of *exclusion*, which Bauman defines as a quest for either “confining the strangers within the visible walls of the ghettos or behind the invisible, yet no less tangible, prohibitions of *commensality*, *connubium* and *comercium*”, or “*expelling* [them] beyond the frontiers of the managed and manageable territory” (18). When neither of these measures was viable, the only solution left was the physical destruction of the strangers. Significantly enough, Bauman does not refer to these approaches as the bright and the dark side of modernity, respectively, but rather as different versions (the liberal and the nationalist) of the same project.

Traversing Spatial Negativity

As Mieke Bal (2010) has suggested, Doris Salcedo’s artworks confront the challenge that Theodor Adorno expressed so bluntly: how to commemorate a traumatic event which demands and yet refuses commemoration? In the case of *Shibboleth*, that event is difficult to trace because, as I have tried to show thus far, it runs parallel with the history of modernity, not as its dark side but as its constitutive logic. *Shibboleth* does not *represent* that untraceable event but, rather, *spatializes* it. It is very significant in this sense that Salcedo refers to the work as a negative space (“Proposal” 65). This may imply an attempt to aesthetically articulate a project of negative dialectics to solve Adorno’s riddle in his own terms. However, seeing Salcedo’s art as an instrument of dialectics eclipses its affective power, which Bal aptly links to its political power. That power rests on the possibility, extensively explored by Jacques Rancière, to raise questions “about what is seen, and

what can be said (...), about who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, about the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 12).

Shibboleth raises those questions by affecting the very structure of a prominent site of European high art. The massive crack that intrudes on such an iconic space suggests that the border between the inside and the outside in contemporary Western societies has to be aesthetically explored not as a discreet, invisible line, but rather as a violent, shattering disruption of the *civilized* space. Salcedo’s intervention therefore stands as a silent reminder of the spatial component of segregation in the Global North. The very location of the work’s exhibition site is very telling in this respect. As Achim Borchardt-Hume observes: “While visitors to the museum delight in the views across the river to the City of London, the windowless back of the building overlooks the less salubrious areas of South London, traditionally home to the immigrant communities whose contribution to [the city’s industrial past] goes widely unrecognised” (“Sculpting Critical Space” 20). In her contribution to the same volume, Eyal Weizman reads Salcedo’s work vis-à-vis the history of Tate Modern, which goes back to the commission in 1947 of the Bankside Power Station (where the museum is now located) as part of a strategy to boost the reconstruction and growth of post-war London. In Weizman’s words: “This was the time when the beginning of the British decolonization process (in India, Pakistan, Palestine and Israel) led to extensive labor-migration flows (from East Asia, Africa and the Caribbean). The colonial geographies and economies of a decommissioning Empire were thereafter folded into the ethnic and spatial differences of inner cities” (“Seismic Archaeology” 20).

It is worth noting that, in Weizman’s reconstruction of colonialism in post-war London, the colonial project does not vanish after the British decolonization process. Rather, its logic is incorporated and reproduced in the very configuration of post-colonial urban geographies. The

spatial borders which result from this geographical transposition of colonialism are not merely indexical marks of ethnic difference. Their true *raison d'être* is the creation of the difference which they supposedly mark. This evokes the argument mobilized by Arjun Appadurai, according to which ethnic violence in contemporary societies is a way to create, vis-à-vis the fundamental uncertainty that results from globalization, the very bodies which that violence is set to destroy. In other words, ethnic violence in the globalized world is not merely a mechanism to destroy the other but also –and more fundamentally– a way to produce that other. In Appadurai's words: "The most horrible forms of ethnocidal violence are mechanisms *for producing persons* out of what are otherwise diffuse, large-scale labels that have effects but no locations" ("Death Certainty" 241).

Referring to the presence of borders in contemporary developed societies as evocative of the symbolic mechanisms of ethnocidal violence may seem not only exaggerated but simply wrong. Coming from a country where that kind of violence is pervasive, Salcedo is fully aware of the fundamental difference between, say, victims of paramilitary massacres and those who die crossing a border. However, the questions that *Shibboleth* raises suggest that those experiences of victimhood are not incommensurable insofar as both are marked by the presence of a border which ignites violence in the first place. In the case of ethnocidal violence, that border marks the presence of the stranger/enemy in a territory that is not yet homogeneous, but which will supposedly become so after the extermination of the other.⁷ On the other hand, the border that ignites violence against immigrants in so-called first-world societies is a territorial (i.e., physical) border, but it shares some of the symbolic features of the ethnocidal border. The creation of the immigrant as the

⁷ The homogeneity threatened by that other is not only racial but also cultural and even economic. To allude to an example familiar to Salcedo, the Afro-Colombian communities of the Pacific Coast have been a privileged target of paramilitary violence not only due to the racist motives of that violence but also because the extermination of those communities serves the neoliberal interests that constitute the economic platform of Colombian paramilitary forces.

stranger/enemy presupposes the existence of a symbolic border which justifies violence and exclusion, opening the way for a form of war that is rhetorically presented as a crusade against illegal immigration, but whose true nature is that of a war against immigrants.⁸

Shibboleth has been critically received as the most universal piece that Salcedo has produced so far precisely because it addresses the violence that is inherent to all borders. However, it is worth noting that Salcedo's works always display a critical consciousness of their exhibition sites.⁹ It is therefore impoverishing to see *Shibboleth* as universal in the sense of a fill-in-the-blank piece, to use Rebecca Comay's terms (see footnote 2). The specificity of the reality that the work intends to address can be approached from an exploration of the spatial relation it establishes with its exhibition site.

Even before conceiving the piece, Salcedo was struck by the fact that those who entered the Turbine Hall would always look up in awe, as if the building was extraordinary. The artist could see in this reaction towards an industrial building "an incredibly narcissistic gesture" (*Compassion* 50:15). *Shibboleth* was therefore conceived as an attempt to turn that perspective upside down, making the spectator look down "as a way to see reality" (51:10).¹⁰ Being the image

⁸ The ethnic component of that war can be understood as a consequence of what Appadurai and Bauman refer to as the postmodern uncertainty, which triggers psychological anxiety and poses the need for affirming identity amidst global socioeconomic conditions that lead to its inevitable dissolution. In Appadurai's words: "[B]ecause of the disjunctive and unstable interplay of commerce, media, national policies, and consumer fantasies, ethnicity, once a genie contained in the bottle of some sort of locality (however large), has now become a global force, forever slipping in and through the cracks between states and borders" (*Modernity at Large* 41).

⁹ Think, for example, of *Noviembre 6 y 7*, described by Salcedo as "an act of memory to mark the tragic events that occurred at the Palace of Justice in Bogotá on 6 and 7 November 1985" ("An Act of Memory" 83). The piece, exhibited at the Palace itself, began on 6 November at 11:35 am, when the first victim was assassinated. At that moment, a wooden, empty chair slowly lowered over the façade of the south wall of the Palace, followed by other 300 hundred chairs that lowered gradually to create a statement of absence "allowing one to be aware of the fragility of those who were behind those walls 17 years ago" (83).

¹⁰ From Borchardt-Hume's point of view, the piece thoroughly accomplishes that inversion: "To experience the work, visitors have to commit the time it takes to walk its 150-meter length, the concrete void steadily drawing their gaze downwards. Akin to a procession, this walk invites us to look at what we have been

par excellence of precariousness and deterioration, the crack is a reminder of the process of decay to which all matter is subject. In purely material grounds, the reality that the work makes visible is the fact that the Turbine Hall is just a building, i.e., a potential ruin. Thus interpreted, *Shibboleth* would be a critique of the all-too-prevalent fetishism of culture, which obliterates the material reality in which cultural production and transmission are grounded.

Salcedo's crack, however, goes beyond that critique by juxtaposing the material image of physical decay to a moral sphere, suggesting that there is a bottomless gap that divides the native from the foreign in contemporary societies. Although that gap is made invisible by the prevailing discourse of globalization and free trade that has tuned the song of the current stage of modernity¹¹, its presence in the real world exposes the limits of citizenship and the pervasiveness of racial hatred in the civilized, enlightened West.

No one has delved into the dialectics of this phenomenon better than Slavoj Žižek, who writes the following à propos of the plan approved in 2005 by the European Union to establish a border police force to protect the Schengen territory from the influx of immigrants:

This is the truth of globalisation: the construction of new walls safeguarding prosperous Europe from the immigrant flood. One is tempted to resuscitate here the old Marxist “humanist” opposition of “relations between things” and “relations between persons”: in the much-celebrated free circulation opened up by global capitalism, it is “things” (commodities) which freely circulate, while the circulation

conditioned to look away from, and to recognize the limitations of the humanist ideals at the heart of Western art and culture” (“Sculpting Critical Space” 21).

¹¹ As Appadurai aptly synthesizes it, globalization “marks a set of transitions in the global political economy since the 1970s, in which multinational forms of capitalist organization began to be replaced by transnational (Rouse 1995), flexible (Harvey 1989), and irregular (Lash and Urry 1987, 1994) forms of organization, as labor, finance, technology, and technological capital began to be assembled in ways that treated national boundaries as mere constraints or fictions” (“Death Certainty” 228).

of “persons” is more and more controlled. We are not dealing with “globalisation” as an unfinished project but with a true “dialectics of globalisation”: the segregation of the people *is* the reality of economic globalisation. (*Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* 102)

Reading Žižek’s diagnosis of globalization vis-à-vis Bauman’s analysis of the role of borders in the formation of the modern State reveals that the liberal version of the modern project not only has failed to prove less violent than the overtly exclusionary one but, as the dialectics of globalization have made manifest, it can be even crueler. Žižek uncompromisingly expresses it in the following terms: “This new racism of the developed is in a way much more brutal than the previous ones: its implicit legitimisation is neither naturalist (the “natural” superiority of the developed West) nor any longer culturalist (we in the West also want to preserve our cultural identity), but unabashed economic egotism” (102).¹²

Salcedo’s work addresses precisely the cruelty that lies in the underground of our supposedly free, borderless world. By opening a crack in a building that embodies the cultural achievements of that world, Salcedo aesthetically articulates a reminder of the borders in which the everyday life of contemporary Western cities is grounded. To the discourses that praise globalization as the materialization of the cosmopolitan dream that is at the core of the enlightened

¹² Derek Gregory (2004) arrives at the same conclusion in his analysis of what he calls the ‘colonial present’, marked by the increased trans-border connectivity for the global rich and increased segregation for the global poor. The relations between the native and the alien in the developed West are themselves determined by economic segregation. As Bauman has pointed out, the rich and the poor inhabitants of contemporary cities see the strangers in function of their own economic situation. For the rich, the presence of strangers “is a break in the tedium”, whereas for those who experience the world “as a trap, not as an adventure park”, the strangers are menacing agents in whom their own lack of power crystallizes (28-29). As Žižek points out: “If one were to open the borders, the first to rebel would be the local working classes” (103). The overt racism and xenophobia in which contemporary Euro-American right-wing populism is grounded leaves the real problem (i.e., economic inequality) intact by channeling this rebellious élan towards the exclusion of (poor) foreigners.

adventure, Salcedo responds with an attempt to experiment with spatial negativity as a mechanism of desublimation capable of hinting at the gap that wounds the cosmopolitan fantasy.

The Gap and the Encounter

In his “Conversation in the Mountains”, Paul Celan refers to poetry as a perpetual search for a language which can fill the gap. The content of that gap, however, is never made explicit by the poet. What he does suggest is that such a language may well not exist. Small wonder that vicinity with silence is the essence of Celan’s poetry. However, the silence which the poet is after is not merely a generic void. He describes it in “The Meridian” as “a terrifying silence that takes our breath and words away” (47). Insofar as it travels “into the uncanny and strange” (44), art is a conversation –an often “desperate conversation” (50)– with that silence. But it is also an encounter: an encounter “between an ‘altogether other’ and a not so very distant, a quite closer ‘other’– conceivable, perhaps, again and again” (48).

Celan’s reflections on poetry and art in general shed light on the encounter that Salcedo’s *Shibboleth* promotes. The crack in Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall was the ultimate cipher of the intellectual and aesthetic affinity between Salcedo and Celan. But it was more than that. The reader who has followed me thus far will remember Salcedo’s reference to art as a way of traveling across the danger posed by the experience of the other. In *Shibboleth*, that experience is not constructed as an object given to representation. Rather, the work seeks to produce a negative encounter or, better still, an encounter with the negativity that is inherent to the dialectics of modernity. Nevertheless, as I have pointed out above, *Shibboleth* is not an aesthetic translation of the Adorno’s philosophy. What the work suggests is precisely that art has the power to resist translation in order to create an encounter with the impossibility of filling the gap.

Salcedo therefore puts even critical art into question, insofar as she does not take for granted the possibility of what Mouffe understands as the unique commitment of that art, which would consist in “making visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate, giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony” (*Agonistics* 93). As attuned as it might be with that commitment, *Shibboleth* problematizes the optimism in which such a vision of art is grounded. This optimism builds upon the belief that art can actually communicate the experience of the silenced other by translating it into something not only audible but also meaningful. The outcome of this commitment would be the domestication of that experience: instead of going across danger, art would bring the dangerous back home.

Salcedo’s work resists that outcome by suggesting that silence is the best (perhaps the only) possible way to commemorate what resists and yet demands commemoration. Instead of voicing the experience of the silenced other, *Shibboleth* hints at that experience through the silent mark that it has left behind. The silence of that mark is, as Celan would put it, a terrifying silence. It is the silence of the silenced. But it is also a silence that stands as the uncanny residue of progress: the silence that Benjamin’s angel of history would perceive while hurling ruins in front of his feet.

True to the commitment of capturing and commemorating that silence, *Shibboleth* stands at the crossroads of two quests that are not easily reconcilable: on the one hand, there is the quest for listening to the silenced other without eluding the danger entailed in that listening experience. On the other hand –echoing Celan–, there is the quest “to speak on behalf of the *strange*” (“The Meridian” 48). Attending the silenced other (the one standing at the other side of the border, unable to cry out the shibboleth) can open the path for an encounter with the strange, but that encounter does not presuppose the equivalence of the stranger and the strange. Moreover, in order for that encounter to take place, we should first give up the idea that the stranger is a potential enemy who

inhabits the outside. This is not to advocate in favor of the intellectual demand to be true to Freud's legacy and recognize that we are inhabited by strangers or, to put it in Kristeva's terms, that we are strangers to ourselves. As important as this insight continues to be today, the intellectual crusade mobilized around it has already enough advocates. I would rather like to conclude by suggesting that the strangeness that *Shibboleth* spatializes calls for a re-articulation of the commitment of contemporary art with the so-called "other". The crack in Tate Modern's floor resists the representation of the experience of the victims of racism and xenophobia to suggest instead that critical works can be created out of art's inherent impotence in the face of the silenced other. In fact, Salcedo defines all of her work as a product of impotence, insofar as it has to deal with the fact that she always arrives too late (*Compassion* 53:33). Given this tardiness, Salcedo approaches artistic creation as an ever-unfinished (and perhaps unrealizable) attempt to trace the elusive scars that haunt the present. Only such a creative impotence can lead to an encounter that can be neither anticipated nor put into words.

With *Shibboleth*, Salcedo vindicates Rilke's modest and yet potent definition of works of art as nothing more –nor less– than "strangely silent and patient things that stand around in all their otherness among the things we use every day, among all the busy people, the beasts of burden, the playing children" ("On Completing the Circle" 37). It is difficult to think of a better definition for *Shibboleth*, although, by way of conclusion, I would give it a slight twist. What may seem as an artless crack is in fact a strangely silent and patient reminder of the negativity that grounds the moves of those typically modern characters evoked by Rilke.

In April 2008, after the tenure of the installation expired, the segment of the floor disrupted by *Shibboleth* was filled up again. The work, now buried, left behind a trace that cannot be removed. Salcedo's intervention permanently altered its exhibition space. Today's visitors to the

Turbine Hall continue to witness the physical remnant of a crack whose strange otherness continues to demand our attention, to call for that natural prayer of the soul that important works of art inspire. The potential encounter is still there, provided, of course, that we look down.

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Beyond Exile: Travel, Life Writing, and Return in *Con pasión absoluta*

SETH ROBERTS
The University of Alabama

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the exile and return in Carol Zardetto's 2005 novel *Con pasión absoluta*. While return is often considered a closing phase of exile, in the novel the protagonist's journey to her native Guatemala is an unexpected and instructive experience. Rather than a linear movement from flight to exile and finally back to one's origins, the novel portrays return as the inspiration for a wide-ranging exploration of the protagonist's origins. Imagining Guatemala as a nation of exiles condemned to an elusive home is a defining characteristic of *Con pasión absoluta* and the protagonist's exhaustive adjustment to her origins. In the context of the cynicism that pervades the postwar period in Central America, travel writing and life writing permit the author to record her experiences in a fictional setting as the role of women is emphasized on personal and national fronts.

Keywords: *exile, journey, return, adjustment, postwar*

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza el exilio y el retorno en *Con pasión absoluta* (2005) por Carol Zardetto. Aunque en muchos casos el retorno significa la conclusión de la experiencia ardua del exilio, en la novela la llegada de la protagonista a su país natal inicia una etapa nueva de descubrimiento. En vez de un movimiento directo entre el éxodo, el exilio y últimamente el retorno, la llegada a Guatemala se caracteriza por una búsqueda de un pasado complicado. Imaginar Guatemala como una nación de exilios condenados a un patria fugaz es una característica fundamental de la novela y la búsqueda incesante de la protagonista. En el contexto del cinismo del período de posguerra en Centroamérica, la escritura del viaje y el género de *life writing* permite a la autora narrar sus experiencias en el ámbito ficcional mientras que enfatiza el papel de las mujeres a nivel personal y nacional.

Palabras Clave: *exilio, viaje, regreso, ajuste, posguerra*

What does it mean to return? The anguish of initial separation and subsequent challenges of assimilation in a foreign environment are common themes in the literature of exile. Similarly, the hope of returning—although in many cases an unlikely or unplanned event—holds a special place for those separated from their origins. While the return may be simply overlooked or considered a closing chapter in the long-awaited voyage home, this crucial step summons complex confrontation between the remembered world left behind and the much-altered present. Despite the importance of return, this complex re-encounter remains a misunderstood and little-studied field. Homecomings take many different forms and these “messy points of convergence” challenge the assumption that going home is a fulfilling close to exile (Markowitz 23).

The return from exile was an important aspect of postwar Guatemala, and Carol Zardetto’s 2005 novel *Con pasión absoluta* narrates the unexpected homecoming of Irene Ferrara to her hometown of Guatemala City. Sent by her father into exile as a teenager during the worst years of violence in the early 1980s, Irene’s return in the mid 1990s is a rediscovery of home from the unique perspective of both an insider and an outsider, in a world at once both familiar and foreign. These sensations are incorporated into a polyphonic fictional narrative that weaves personal asides and experiences of exile throughout her family history. Her journey of return disproves assumptions of an orderly close to the exile experience “depicted as an unproblematic reestablishment of the conditions existing before flight...” (Stølen 9). Imagining Guatemala as an incomprehensible home is a defining feature of the novel and Irene’s search for her origins is a complex process weaving explorations of family and nation. This article argues that women’s travel writing and life writing offer insights into the parallels between the two literary genres and also the position of privileged Guatemalan women who travel and record their lives. The following discussion explores both literary genres through the lens of a female

character whose exile and return challenges established notions of self and nation. This thesis is developed by brief introductions to both travel writing and life writing followed by examples that illuminate the power of each genre to override traditional male-dominated narrative discourse and present new concepts of exile and return within the context of postwar Central America.

Returns involve traumatic confrontations between exiles and what was left behind, and the experience of displaced Central Americans is especially harrowing given the upheaval of recent decades. While the 1990s saw the signing of peace treaties ending prolonged armed conflicts in the region, the hopes of these agreements have given way to a strong sense of cynicism in the face of violent crime and the weary process of bringing perpetrators of war crimes to justice. In Guatemala, the signing of peace agreements in 1996 formally ended a protracted armed conflict recognized as the “longest and bloodiest of Latin America’s Cold War civil wars” (Jonas *Centaur*s 37). The record of violence is staggering: according to the army’s own statistics, 440 indigenous highland villages were destroyed, 150,000 Mayas were killed or disappeared, and over one million individuals were displaced either internally or to southern Mexico (Jonas “Migration”) Despite initial optimism, the accords did not usher in a new era of peace and stability. High rates of crime, the rise of gangs, and endemic corruption continue to plague Guatemala in the aftermath of peace.¹ A lasting legacy of the accords is the intransigence of government officials and military leaders in bringing about change. The army’s desire to outlast the peace process was matched by the limited mandate of truth commissions, amnesty for war crimes, resistance to any semblance of tax reform, and a series of toothless economic

¹The murder of the Guatemalan Bishop Juan José Gerardi in 1998 was a shocking reminder of the ongoing struggle to curb violence. Francisco Goldman’s study of the criminal investigation illustrates the complex nature of life and death in Guatemala: “The murder, which had at first seemed like a clear-cut political crime—a consequence of the REMHI report—had become a baroque story of perhaps perverse human passions” (65-66).

measures that “...does almost nothing to improve daily life for the majority of Guatemalans” (Jonas *Centaurus* 98).

The Central American literature of the postwar period reflects the intractable social issues affecting the region. Works of this period tend to focus on individuals struggling to survive in the menacing environment of urban city centers corrupted by violence and cynicism: “Los nuevos temas comenzaron a girar en torno a personajes que se movían en una sociedad violenta, aparentemente sin valores o con un sentido de la vida más bien amoral, personajes que destilaban desencanto y cinismo, vacíos existenciales y con una escala de valores bastante degradada” (Escudos 140). The fictional production of the 1990s and 2000s abandoned the politically committed literature of earlier generations as revolutionary dreams and armed struggles came to an end. In Beatriz Cortez’s *Estética de cinismo*, cynicism is emphasized as a defining characteristic of postwar narratives. Questioning hegemonic power structures and exploring the transformation of cultural identity are central aims of a fiction lacking unifying themes or commonalities among authors of the region. Cortez observes that these narratives are imbued with a cynicism that defines a morally corrupt period immersed in chaos and corruption: “Se trata de sociedades con un doble estándar cuyos habitantes definen y luego ignoran las normas sociales que establecen la decencia, el buen gusto, la moralidad y la buena reputación” (27).

These sentiments of pessimism and despair are evident in *Con pasión absoluta* through Irene’s anguished return to the place of her youth: “Tuve conciencia de que todo había cambiado. El mundo de mi infancia se había roto y no se podía reparar” (283). The return shatters Irene’s tentative self-identity and is a turbulent exposure to an obscure past. Like the return, her time in exile is a challenging but formative experience that offers a distinct outsider’s perspective on the long-term events of her home. While in Canada during the early 1990s she learns the details of

the Guatemalan peace process, discovers investigations into war crimes, and expands her personal boundaries with a series of exhilarating yet ultimately flawed relationships. As Zardetto observes, "...los guatemaltecos somos todos exiliados de la patria posible y estamos condenados a vivir una patria que se empeña en ser imposible" (Fernández Hall).

For Irene, the return to Guatemala is unexpected and solely motivated by the imminent death of her grandmother, Victoria. The tropical sensations of the lush Guatemalan environment are a shocking change for both Irene and the novel's author. Zardetto recounts the impact of the tropics as she arrives from Canada: "La contracción produjo una explosión interna muy poderosa. Un factor importante en este proceso fue el trópico. Los colores, olores, la tibieza del ambiente, fueron despertando una memoria aletargada que me llevaba de la mano a la infancia y, por ende, al encuentro con Guatemala" (Fernández Hall). Set against the backdrop of Guatemala stretching from the nineteenth century to the present day, female members of Irene's family are revealed in detailed accounts such as personal anecdotes, historical events, newspaper articles, and personal letters.

Although the destiny of the Ferrara family is treated in detail, the return to Guatemala is the central event that sparks a profound personal and national interrogation. Upon viewing her home for the first time in many years, Irene states "Se confunden los tiempos, las visiones" (44). The interconnectedness between Irene's youth, her family's past, and contemporary postwar Guatemala is demonstrated in frequent alternations of time and space. In her eyes, time is a fluid and mysterious concept that is obscured by her unanchored life as an exile and returnee: "El tiempo es inmediato y vertiginoso y desconocido. Las historias son hilos de tiempo que quieren tejerse y destejerse. Tejerse y destejerse, en la infinita espera" (224). Ironically, in Zardetto's words, the protagonist journeys back to a place she had sworn to avoid: "...se trata del retorno de

una mujer a Guatemala, lugar donde se había jurado no volver; su desesperado intento por comprender un pasado doloroso, una patria enigmática y en ese intento, dar un salto que la pueda llevar de la pasión, a la compasión absoluta” (Lemus 41).²

The discussion that follows analyzes the relation of return to travel writing and life writing. Especially notable is the persistent interplay between fiction and reality as travel accounts are remembered and transcribed onto the written page. Irene’s identity is defined in large part by her lack of a firm individuality: from her broken family life to her trips throughout Latin America and eventual return to Guatemala, travel is an ever-present facet of her emergent sense of self. When viewed as a traveler, Irene’s outlook on displacement and the journey home take on new meaning. As the narration merges accounts of the Ferrara family set against the background of Guatemala, Irene’s travel places her in a unique position to view the nation through the lens of exile. Through her status as a female traveler who journeys alone and reconnects to her homeland, Irene is uniquely situated to demonstrate the intersections of travel, gender, exile, and the consequences of return that are so deeply connected.

Like travel writing, texts that incorporate notions of the self are as varied as they are commonplace. For female authors such as Zardetto, life writing is a valuable tool to express personal experiences of displacement, suffering, or personal pain ignored in customary literary fields. Noted for the use of non-traditional sources and techniques, the genre is recognized for integrating varied source material such as diaries, oral histories, and an assortment of texts of varied degrees of formality. As Zardetto brings her experiences to life through the fictional world

² Similarly, in Horacio Castellanos Moya’s *El asco* the protagonist reluctantly returns to his native El Salvador due to the death of his mother: “...la muerte de mi madre es la única razón que me pudo obligar a regresar a esta podredumbre...” (22).

of the Ferrara family, life writing informs the ramifications of return through the eyes of a fictional female protagonist.

Travel Writing and Return

Viewing *Con pasión absoluta* through the lens of travel demonstrates the unique contribution to literature written by women with a central focus on the lives and struggles of marginalized female protagonists. While the novel undermines and gradually reconstructs images of personal and national identity from within Guatemala and from the distance of exile, travel—in both physical and symbolic terms—is a key facet of a return that questions traditional assumptions of exile and especially that of a female traveler and writer.

Hayden White refers to travel narratives as “fictions of factual representations” and the linking of realistic and fictional elements is a defining characteristic of the travel writing genre (Thompson 30). Zardetto’s status as a Guatemalan in Canada who later returns to her place of birth is closely paralleled in *Con pasión absoluta*, and like the author, Irene’s nomadic existence becomes a continual journey that does not neatly end with the arrival in Guatemala. Additionally, Irene’s return as a form of travel emphasizes themes associated with travel writing such as the interplay between autobiography and fiction, the function of writing, and the position of women writers who travel and record their experiences. In many cases, a journey is a decisive method of exploring the past of both the place traveled to and the site of return after a significant period of absence. Rather than being labeled as an exile whose life follows the patterns of displacement and return, it is constructive to consider Irene as a traveler torn between Guatemala, Canada, and locations in the United States and throughout Latin America. When she is moved by the tropical sensations of her home and gripped by a sudden interest in the country’s recently war-torn past,

it is not surprising that what emerges is a complex amalgam of painful recollections and sobering reflections on national history influenced by her experiences as a traveler, exile, and returnee.

In its most basic form, travel is movement through space that involves a negotiation of spaces, places, and identities between the individual traveler and what is observed during the voyage (Thompson 9). The ever-present conflict of the self and the other is inevitably shaped by the state of mind of the traveler, their perspectives and goals, and the process of transferring the experience into a physical text. As a catalyst for an interrogation into the lives of the Ferrara family and of Guatemala, travel opens new windows into how an exile functions as a traveler between home and displacement. As a traveler, Irene's search encompasses shifting time periods, family histories, physical locations, and states of mind that are brought together in the intricate narration.

In *Con pasión absoluta*, return is a decisive moment of awakening that prioritizes the relationship between writing and travel. The return draws parallels between lived experience, the act of writing, and travel: "...el viaje al país natal es el elemento que dispara la memoria. Viaje como escritura...y escritura como viaje..." (Grinberg Pla). As the raw material that initially sparks this interest in a sweeping examination of familial and national ties, the return is one stage in a continuum of travels and a unique vantage point to examine memory and gender.

The interconnected links between manifestations of cultural practices and travel in its many forms is especially telling in relation to recent feminist writing. In the long record of travel writing, it is rare to find women who journey independently and record their explorations. But in addition to being uncommon, these writers are labeled as "...unusual, marked as special in the dominant discourses and practices" (Clifford 105). In writing both about and against the cultures they come into contact with, women grapple with the world around them and actively redefine

long-held viewpoints on society and gender. This is especially true in *Con pasión absoluta*, in which a female exile and traveler mirrors the author's own lived experiences of overturning established notions of exile.

Travel as a journey from one point to another involves a questioning of what occurs both during the event and in its aftermath. From this vantage point, exile ceases to be a linear movement from home to a distant land and instead highlights the mixed elements of displacement present during assimilation and survival in exile. The event is complicated by the interstitial spaces of displacement and corresponding physical and psychological sites of remembrance. It is in these remembered spaces and in-between places that Irene is awakened to her personal past and desire to interrogate and write a more inclusive personal and national history.

In travel writing, texts featuring marginalized or subaltern figures are frequently associated with questions of up-rootedness. Displacement is a repeated theme in recent iterations of the genre, personified by the traveler as an exile in a foreign land distanced from any tangible impressions of home or belonging (Youngs 79). And while the genre incorporates many approaches to identity and the construction of the self based on physical, social, and temporal factors, the role of women has been undervalued. Even though travel writing has been labeled as “the most socially important of all literary genres,” the works of female travelers have received much less critical attention and commercial success (Youngs 1).

In the novel, Irene struggles to make sense of the injustices of a patriarchal society from which she has been displaced. Similar to the way the return sparks an interrogation into obscured accounts of the Ferrara family, the voyage home becomes part of a larger journey tinged with

memories of youth in Guatemala, flight into exile, and a fragmented existence.³ Instead of viewing exile as a series of points on a timeline, this journey defies chronological time and intertwines the past and the present with the goal of subverting established literary and social conventions to create new spaces for women to share their visions of the world. Yet travel is not limited to the subject of exile. Irene frequently mentions her trips throughout Latin America and the U.S., including her short stay in Los Angeles on the way to Canada, vacations with lovers to South America, and a spiritually reaffirming tour of Machu Picchu. In each of these locations Irene's complex consciousness emerges as she comes into contact with love, heartbreak, and frustration.

Irene's travel to her hometown reflects the correspondence between travel and life writing forged in memory. Arriving at the hair salon managed by her aunts and mother for many years, Irene is disheartened to discover that the building is now closed and abandoned. In contrast to the way her aunt Ibis is remembered as extravagant and deceitful, Irene's grandmother Victoria is recounted in loving terms. Memories of her grandmother's fantastic tales inform the Guatemala of the past and the homeland of the present day. Colorful tales of mythological Guatemalan figures such as La Llorona, El Cadejo, La Ciguanaba, and El Sombrerón recall the close relationship between Victoria and her granddaughter: "Pasaba horas escuchándola y ella, con infinita paciencia, repetía una y otra vez los vericuetos y senderos que me sabía de memoria. Caminos de un mundo perdido que traían su vertiente a mi mar" (20). While Victoria served as a formative influence for Irene, her imminent death symbolizes the close of a cycle. As a strong influence in her grandchildren's lives, Victoria's passing ruptures Irene's ties to the past and leads her to reevaluate her conceptions of her personal identity. Her

³ Ivannia Barboza Brenes argues that fragmentation adds a sense of meaning to Irene's existence: "Son varias Irene fragmentadas a un mismo tiempo, separadas y unidas de nuevo para definirla como sujeto. Esa pluralidad de fragmentos da sentido a su vida" (42).

grandmother's statement that legends such as La Llorona do not appear in the present day due to modern technology such as electric lights reflects her dissatisfaction: "Ahora, todo es al revés...." (21)

Like the hybrid sense of self that permeates modern travel writing, *Con pasión absoluta* reveals a fragile identity that is simultaneously brought into focus and challenged. After returning to Guatemala, Irene demonstrates her uneasiness by considering going back to Canada or even leaving for an unspecified destination as a desperate act of adding purpose to her life or toppling her confused and hopeless circumstances. In describing her memories of exile, she employs vivid and highly symbolic language as a reminder that she is emotionally powerless and must remain in Guatemala: "A cualquier sitio menos allá. Estaba vivo en mi piel, su memoria era el mar en que sumergía mi cabeza para encontrar oxígeno. Sabía con claridad que no podía volver. Mi partida había sido un viaje sin posibilidad de retorno. La puerta estaba sellada. Ángeles oscuros con espadas flamígeras vedaban el paso" (80). When referring to a trip with no possibility of return, her words echo the intrinsic difficulty of homecoming and the open-ended nature of the physical and emotional ties that are bound up in memory. Yet her unambiguous assertion that return is not an option and that the door of that stage of her life has been forever closed is inaccurate: by the end of the novel her destiny remains undetermined and the reader is left to question whether she will remain in Guatemala, go back to Vancouver, or begin her life anew in a new location. The uncertainty of her fate underscores the fundamental nature of return as travel: Irene's confused thoughts and actions repeatedly accentuate that it is anything but a closing phase that concludes the phase of exile.

From the moment of initial arrival in Guatemala City, Irene's travels throughout the city are a disorienting experience. As she observes the local landscape through the window of a taxi,

a busy city street is a marker of how little she recognizes her surroundings. Overcrowded and dirty, full of advertisements in English, bright lights, pedestrians wearing vividly colored clothing, and jam-packed with unorganized and loud traffic, the drive from the airport into town is a rude reintroduction to the hectic pace of life (14-15). As she passes through her local neighborhood for the first time in many years, her memories of the place differ greatly from what she views. Far removed from the peaceful streets of her youth, the area is now a stifling city center jammed with traffic, loud noise, and pollution: “El bullicio, el movimiento, el tráfico agobiante, marean. Polvo y humo entran en convivencia. Forman una nube difusa que no deja respirar” (26). This striking introduction to her remembered home shatters preconceived notions of self and identity: “Mi vida está suspendida. Con exasperación me percató de que no tengo voluntad para reinventar mi propia historia. El pasado abre su enorme boca, me traga. Quise borrarlo y, ahora comprendo, me miraba de regreso con su intangible reflejo” (69). The frustration inherent in this worldview is the culmination of a life defined by constant movement and travels without a fixed home or sense of family.

A series of letters between Irene and her family address the raw emotions that consume her readjustment to Guatemala and the painful memories it provokes. Written in italics to stand out from the surrounding text, she implies that she left for Canada only carrying a worthless suitcase and a blank page in which to write her life from scratch. Irene discounts her previous life in Guatemala and makes reference to the fact that she must continually write and re-write her life as she wanders through an unsettled life (151). It is fitting that she relates her feelings to the act of opening a suitcase after returning from a long trip: “Me pasa como aquel que regresa de un largo viaje y tiene su equipaje recién abierto. Revueltas están las cosas nuevas, la ropa sucia, los recuerdos del viaje... Habrá que ponerlas en su sitio antes que dejen de parecer un desorden.

Estoy en una etapa transitoria y nebulosa, tratando de romper, tratando de negar...” (152). The image of a traveler arriving home, opening their suitcase, and unpacking dirty clothes and travel supplies also implicitly refers to the heavy psychological baggage that must be confronted in the readjustment to a much-altered Guatemala. For the protagonist, travel brings into focus the reality of a postwar Guatemala that is a place of exotic beauty tinged with an inescapable insecurity and violence.

These disordered and contradictory memories are the catalyst for bringing order to a tenuous self-identity within the greater national scope. The real and symbolic allusions to the return as travel intensify Irene’s vague feelings of self-belonging that hinge on uncovering the life stories of the female members of her family. As she declares in her letter, “Así que te escribo este mensaje para que sepas que soy una confusión de cosas, que no tengo forma, que no sé nada de mi vida y que cuando te hablo, tenés que entender que sólo digo intentos, aproximaciones...” (153). Irene’s fragile identity is linked to both her distance in exile, unfamiliarity with modern Guatemala, and her status as a traveler. In her process of readjustment, Irene’s travel highlights the position of women as exiles and returnees coping with familial and societal alterations in the turbulent postwar period in Guatemala.

Life Writing as an Emancipatory Act

Zardetto’s return from exile and the goal of becoming a writer contributes significantly to the focus of the work. Like Irene, Zardetto chooses writing as a method of putting her experiences into perspective and challenging established social concepts. Existing in the

imprecise space between autobiography and fiction, the incorporation of life writing permits the author to create a clearly fictional text largely based on factual or personal information.⁴

Irene's disjointed existence is reflected through an assortment of voices that present her familial background within the context of the wider nation and from the distance of the exile. During her arrival in Guatemala City, expressions of a continued uprootedness and a lack of familiarity with her home contrast sharply with the idea of return as a triumphant conclusion: "...me encontraba perdida en un ancho y largo limbo. Me sentía al final de muchas cosas, sin saber qué había más allá de un horizonte secuestrado por la niebla" (53-54). As an example of life writing, *Con pasión absoluta* stresses how this flexible genre incorporates an extensive mix of historical sources and narrative techniques that prioritize the overlooked role of women as both citizens of Guatemala and exiles displaced due to armed conflict.

A lawyer by training, Zardetto worked as a vice minister of education and for the Guatemalan General Consul in Vancouver from 1997-2000 before eventually returning home and dedicating herself to literature full time. Her time in Canada corresponded with the immediate postwar years in Guatemala in which the promise of peace was overshadowed by rising rates of crime and poverty. *Con pasión absoluta* is her first novel and a valuable contribution to the emerging field of Central American fiction written by women.⁵ When writing on the relegation of literature written by females, Zardetto asserts that "...existe una transformación poderosa que sucede cuando la mujer hace la transición de 'objeto de la literatura' a sujeto que narra el mundo por medio de la palabra" ("Literatura femenina"). For

⁴ Life writing resembles the genre of autofiction, in which autobiographical elements are narrated in a clearly fictional setting. In contemporary Central American literature, autofiction is commonly found in the works of Castellanos Moya, Zardetto, and the Guatemalan writer Rodrigo Rey Rosa.

⁵ In addition to Zardetto, female authors such as Jacinta Escudos, Anacristina Rossi, and Claudia Hernández are important contributors to contemporary Central American fiction.

Zardetto, and in turn Irene, writing is a crucial factor in the adjustment to the contemporary landscape. The action of transforming thoughts, memories, and emotions into the written word awakens a newly empowered conception of Irene's sense of self.

Life writing is not a new genre but early texts appearing in the eighteenth century were treated as narrow categories closely related to biography and autobiography.⁶ According to Marlene Kadar, life writing may be generally considered an all-encompassing genre that prioritizes the personal nature of texts but also incorporates a range of narrative styles including letters, diaries, documents, and oral narratives of a private and relatively less official nature (4). In the novel, Zardetto is free to set Irene's life story and that of her family within a highly creative narrative framework that includes intimate details of the protagonist's emotional state.

Life writing offers several critical advantages to feminist writers and their proponents. As a type of nontraditional literature, the genre readily subverts accepted writing techniques and popular styles as a manner of expressing viewpoints relegated to the margins of society. Existing in the imprecise gray area between fiction and nonfiction, a working definition of life writing at once confronts and accepts the difficult nature of writing the self in the text. Kadar acknowledges the intricate relationship shared by fiction and autobiography and suggests a continuum between the two fields: "...'autobiographical' is a loaded word, the 'real' accuracy of which cannot be proved and does not equate with either 'objective' or 'subjective' truth." (10). Recent studies of life writing are instructive in understanding how identity and belonging are molded and challenged in Latin American literature. In autobiographies produced in the twentieth century, the pursuit of a firm sense of belonging proves elusive for authors whose work contains elements

⁶ Carl Thompson offers a succinct definition of life writing: "A collective term sometimes used to denote all the forms of writing which an individual may use to give an account of themselves, and to project an image of the self to a wider audience; so autobiography and memoir, most obviously, but also letters, journals, and many other genres as well" (201).

of their lives. Plagued by self-doubt and anxiety, the search for belonging is a long-standing and unresolved issue: "...the autobiographical subject seems to waver between private and public selves, between self and country, between historicity and fiction, between silence and eloquence as he or she attempts to find the models—of self and of writing—that might best represent it" (Kumaraswami 832-33).

Although life writing is characterized by the insertion of the self into texts of varying fictional content, the field is closely related to autobiographical fiction written by women. Valeria Grinberg Pla's analysis of *Con pasión absoluta* demonstrates the range of approaches that surface when the self is at the center of a text. Arguing that the presence of a journey leads to an exploration, the act of writing functions as an axis that permits each novel to alternate observations of the past, present, and future. In the same manner that Zardetto includes a vast and ever-changing narrative timeline, Grinberg Pla points out that the interplay between personal or local histories and wider histories on the national scale are recognized as a fundamental strategy of Spanish-American autobiographical writing. In Zardetto's novel, history is presented from perspective of women whose gaze differs greatly from previous accounts and continually subverts established norms of gender and literature.

An emergent literature written by women and featuring the voices of marginalized female subjects represents more than a trending field of literary interest and instead carries a crucial social and political importance. In referring to the act of writing as "una práctica política emancipatoria," for contemporary Latin American female writers literature is a powerful tool to surpass traditionally inflexible social mores and shed light on the struggles of women to persevere and reimagine patriarchal societies. (Grinberg Pla).

Central to the development of life writing is the task of writing history in a new light, emphasizing marginalized subjects and their struggles to “redefine contemporary reality by recovering the past” (Barbas-Rhoden 8). In *Con pasión absoluta*, life writing is decisive in reimagining the modern nation. Irene’s distinct phases of exile and return and her views towards the future encapsulate Zardetto’s life in a literary realm. Like Zardetto, who left her legal career and took up writing as a method of articulating her life and those of the female members of her family, Irene’s return sparks an interest in writing as a possible future career and a tool to express deep-seated emotions and frustrations.

While Irene’s interest in her family is ignited by her return, the national past of Guatemala is revealed in a range of narrations. The nineteenth century is presented through the memories of Mama Juana, Irene’s great-great grandmother. The death of her husband leads Juana to resettle in the isolated town of Barberena, and it is only through her hard work and determination that the family is able to survive. The story of Amparo, Juana’s daughter and later the mother of Victoria, takes place at the dawn of the twentieth century during the rise of the coffee industry. Her life is set against the impending power of coffee growers who are able to buy large quantities of land and take advantage of cheap local or indigenous labor to produce coffee for export and earn significant profit. The importance of the coffee industry is placed within the context of the brutal repression and government interference required to keep large segments of the population in check as planters become increasingly wealthy. As Irene learns more about the background of her ailing grandmother, Victoria’s life is interspersed with segments detailing the process of coffee cultivation and the tyrannical rule of dictator Jorge Ubico in the 1930s and 40s. With a prominent coffee exporter as her father and a mother that is

relegated to the domain of the household, Victoria fades to the background as a symbol of how women are marginalized and disparaged by their husbands and lovers.

Similar to discussion of history from the female vantage point, allusions to literature and its importance to women are not casual. When reminiscing about her aunts Ibis and Aurora and the hair salon they manage, Irene casually mentions that their names are fantastic enough to be taken from the pages of a novel. The role of memory in writing is brought to the forefront when she recalls her relation with a former Uruguayan lover: their time together is described as a history that was written together yet plagued by a lack of commitment and an unsure fate. Irene's inability to find solid footing in life with her paramour is one example of a disjointed existence that is fragmented by her physical displacement, unsuccessful romantic relationships, and unsure future. The fateful romance is summarized as a dead end whose outcome, like the many histories of the novel, is predestined: "En todo caso, ya está y no hay salida. Toda historia, una vez iniciada, conmina a un destino marcado" (49). Her ambivalent attitude towards love reveals a profound emptiness and in a series of contradictory statements, she first argues that love does not exist but then says that "...la vida sin amor será una total pérdida" (58). Travel, writing, and the connectedness of the lives of the author and protagonist merge when the issue of love is broached. In doubting the existence of love, Irene emphasizes her itinerant past and doubts the chances of mending her broken spirit: "¿Pero, qué sé yo del amor? He caminado un largo camino tratando de encontrarlo. Siempre ha sido un extranjero que hable una lengua extraña" (58)

As Irene becomes aware of the long-hidden background of her family, writing and recording these events demonstrates an intense curiosity in the long sweep of Guatemalan history. Yet writing is not a pleasant action and instead lays bare the profound difficulty of putting her situation into words. A constant torment, writing is a window into the past and a

fitting example of an agonizing isolation: “En la pantalla es blanco. *Debo escribir. Debo escribir. Me fatiga esa voz obsesiva. Los días se escurren. Hace ya un par de meses estoy aquí y apenas unas líneas*” (57). Irene’s difficulty in transcribing her life onto paper mirrors her distress as an exile whose world is subject to rapid and unpredictable upheaval. Although writing is a tortuous activity, literature is a fundamental aspect of challenging the traditional pillars of Guatemalan society and creating a new reality.

A vital topic in the Central American texts produced by women is “...the search for antecedents and the confrontation of the lack of women’s history,” and for Irene the return opens a new window to the exploration of these predecessors through the act of writing (Barbas-Rhoden 26). Re-writing personal and national histories to include women is an active undertaking that seeks to shatter perceptions of inferiority.⁷ Zardetto employs a female protagonist among a series of overshadowed yet empowered women whose lives are brought to the forefront through a commitment to recording their experiences. As Irene observes, writing and literature are vital tools in overcoming a fragile reality and transforming an exclusive and ill-defined history. Additionally, as her life is adapted into the written word, she is emboldened by a self-empowerment and security that had never been present during the years of uncertain identity in far-away lands: “Es decir, la convertí en literatura. Nunca me sentí tan dueña de mi destino” (308).

Life writing is an effective genre for women writers as they subvert rigid conceptions of literature and explore new approximations of female belonging and empowerment. After the women of the Ferrara family have been revealed in flashbacks, memories, and letters, Irene

⁷ For the Nicaraguan writer Gioconda Belli, eroticism is both a literary theme and a weapon to challenge views of female passivity. In declaring the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua as an erotic act, Belli affirms the power of eroticism to disturb the social order. Eroticizing operates as “...el acto de nombrar lo prohibido, de desacralizar los tabúes mediante la palabra, recurriendo a una escritura visual, corporal. Gioconda Belli juega con la frontera sagrado/profano” (Marchio).

reflects on the importance of writing and the reshaping of her conception of family and society. As this far-reaching exploration comes to an end, her insistence on transforming history into words is a formidable tool that gives rise to a more secure self-belonging that has overcome lingering sentiments of fragmentation, distance, and pain: “El pasado iba a matarme. Debía aniquilarlo: ésta es la historia de un asesino. Sepulté un ayer que no tiene ya nada que decirme. Lo sepulté en este océano de palabras” (369). After an extensive inquiry, Irene’s perspective shifts as the novel comes to a close. A greater understating of her family and surroundings contributes to a sense of peace that conceals a turbulent past. As an example of life writing, the comment that a menacing personal past has been buried in an ocean of words confirms the author’s stated goal of reimagining exile and Guatemalan society and in the process face her unsettled past.

In *Con pasión absoluta*, the Guatemalan past is re-written to include the contributions of women and their role in the nation. Through the narrative techniques of travel writing and life writing, Zardetto is among the contemporary Central American writers rewriting postwar national literature from a feminine point of view. In society struggling with the stunted progress of peace, the novel’s protagonist is a witness to the unsettled social climate defined by violence. By the end of the novel, Irene’s fate is unclear and the enormity of comprehending the newfound knowledge weighs heavily. She succinctly summarizes her life as an ever-evolving and incomplete process: “Como quien espía por una rendija un panorama que queda, sin remedio, incompleto” (135). Through an elaborate merging of literary styles, texts, and voices, her journey quickly evolves into a wide-ranging encounter with Guatemala: “(Re)encontrarse, (re)construirse y (re)experimentar para Irene son actos decisivos ahora” (Barboza Brenes 43).

Upon setting foot in Guatemala for the first time in many years, Irene exclaims, “He recorrido un círculo perfecto” (21). But when she is quickly overcome by the sights and memories of her home, it is apparent that the return is more representative of new beginnings than a conclusive ending. After the physical return has taken place, a new type of journey begins. Depicted as a wandering soul tormented by her distance from home and an inability to firmly establish a relationship or career, displacement impedes any notion of stability. Like Irene, the women of the Ferrara family including her mother, grandmother, and aunts struggle to establish themselves and bring an end to a nomadic life. For these women, drifting between homes, communities, or periods of exile is a complex process: “Vagar de un lugar a otro es un proceso de doble sentido: es espacial y temporal, posibilitando un sentido de ubicuidad para la protagonista” (Barboza Brenes 33).

As the novel comes to a close, Irene’s fate is left in doubt and no decisions have been made on whether to remain in Guatemala or restart her life in a new location. The final advice from her grandmother before passing away, “Haga su vida,” signals a commitment to an active and independent role in determining her future (368). Viewing the protagonist as a traveler is an important step in altering perceptions of women in Central America. Reminiscent of the complex narrative style of the text, Irene’s life is defined by a never-ending series of voyages from home into exile, throughout the Americas, and eventually back to her place of birth. In this context her return ceases to be a final stage and instead serves as jumping-off point for a discussion of identity and history. Although the novel’s close leaves Irene’s destiny in doubt, a renewed sense of self-identity and belonging replaces the profound emotions of rootlessness that permeated her life in a male-dominated society. Newly emboldened by the act of writing her life, her closing words reflect an ambition to pursue a life free of the influence of social norms or patriarchal

restrictions. The decree that “la vida merece compasión absoluta” implies a newfound optimism in both her future and her ability to flourish whether in Guatemala or in traveling to a new location to begin the next stage of her life (370).

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Boleros entre las ruinas: Memoria íntima y memoria histórica en *La isla de los amores infinitos* de Daína Chaviano

MIRIAM YVONN MÁRQUEZ-BARRAGÁN
University of Cincinnati

RESUMEN

En el presente trabajo analizo *La isla de los amores infinitos* de Daína Chaviano. Observo la reconstrucción de la memoria y la historia través de las ruinas de La Habana como objetos en deterioro. En contraste reviso el fenómeno de la diáspora, la migración o el exilio y la permanencia de la memoria musical, las creencias de lo sobrenatural, insertada en un nuevo espacio que se reconoce como “el nuevo hogar”: Miami. Este nuevo hogar está en una comunidad en la cual se identifican diferencias y similitudes que se rechazan o se fusionan para crear un legado personal y de comunidad. En la novela de Chaviano vemos tipos de memorias que se heredan por la familia y que se conserva a pesar de la migración. También podemos observar cómo las creencias y supersticiones, opuestas al mundo racional, son comunes en el imaginario caribeño, conformando la realidad del universo cubano, tanto dentro como fuera de la isla. Esta memoria es parte de su herencia emocional alimentada por la nostalgia, de los recuerdos propios, familiares o ajenos, un lugar que se inscribe en la memoria porque al mismo tiempo se asume como pérdida. Para ello usaré algunos conceptos de Pierre Nora sobre la “aceleración de la historia” que nos enfrenta a la importancia de las memorias individuales o de las memorias colectivas, así como la distinción que hace James Clifford entre diáspora, inmigración, exilio y viaje.

Palabras Clave: *Chaviano, memoria, migración, diáspora, boleros.*

ABSTRACT

In this work I analyze *La isla de los amores infinitos* (*The island of the eternal love*), by Daina Chaviano. I observe the reconstruction of the memory through the ruins as deteriorating objects. In contrast I review the phenomenon of diaspora, migration, exile and the permanency of musical memory, the supernatural beliefs, inserted in a new space recognized as the “new home”: Miami. This new home is in a community in which differences and similarities are identified. They are rejected or merged to create a personal and community legacy. In Chaviano's novel we see types of memories that are inherited by the family and that are preserved despite the migration. We can also observe how beliefs and superstitions, opposed to the rational world, are common in the Caribbean imaginary, shaping the reality of the Cuban universe, both inside and outside the island. This memory is part of their emotional heritage fueled by nostalgia, by personal or family memories, or memories from others. It is a place inscribed in memory because at the same time it is assumed as a loss. I will use Pierre Nora's concept on the "acceleration of history" that confronts us with the importance of individual memories or collective memories, as well as James Clifford's distinction between diaspora, immigration, exile and travel.

Keywords: *Chaviano, memory, migration, diaspora, boleros.*

Déjame sola/ que desde aquella noche estoy en vela/
Déjame sola si quieres que te evoque con ternura/
ya no hay razón para vestir de blanco mi negrura/
Sé que hoy te vas/ y mi última esperanza me abandona/
no volverás/ y siento que mi cielo se desploma.
(Elena Burke & Meme Solís, *Always Cuba.*)

La cultura cubana está herida de nostalgia. En su imaginario musical y literario habita la pérdida. Dice el escritor y ensayista cubano Ambrosio Fornet que “la verdadera protagonista del drama [cubano] es la memoria” (García Calderón 109) y podemos encontrar reflejada esta tragedia en boleros como “Herido de sombra”, del compositor Pedro Vega Francia e interpretado por Ibrahim Ferrer¹, versos que pueden referirse tanto al amor o desamor a una pareja como a la añoranza que se le tiene al lugar de origen: “Sin destino fijo/ como el humo voy/ surcando el espacio/ buscándote estoy/ tal vez no te encuentre/ quizás te perdí/ para siempre amor” (*Buena Vista Social presents*). La música, tan importante para el alma caribeña, es el mejor vehículo para cantar a las tristezas, a las alegrías y es a través del bolero donde se encuentra la oportunidad melódica para contar y para poetizar los conflictos, principalmente amorosos, pero también relacionados con la patria, donde se conjugan tanto herencias populares de ritmos africanos (similares a las percusiones) como cultas (el romance español y la ópera italiana) lo que permite al bolero nutrirse con bagaje literario y musical, como lo hizo el cantante de boleros Pepe Sánchez² (Santiago 51). Es la unión entre lo

¹ Ibrahim Ferrer es uno de los intérpretes más célebres de la agrupación cubana *Buena Vista Social Club* formada en 1990, que retoma los estilos musicales de la Cuba pre-revolucionaria, como el son, el bolero, además de la guajira y la salsa. En 1998 la agrupación alcanzó el éxito internacional al obtener un Grammy, y un año después el director de cine alemán Wim Wenders documenta el viaje del músico y compositor Ry Cooder y su encuentro con veteranos de la música tradicional cubana. El filme, que es sobre todo un viaje visual y musical por una Habana en ruinas, obtuvo una nominación al Oscar en el año 2000.

² El bolero surge hacia el final del siglo XIX, en Santiago de Cuba. José “Pepe” Sánchez es considerado como el precursor del bolero por la combinación de ritmos afrocubanos acompañados de guitarra así como la mezcla y la estructura del género romántico. “Los primeros boleros del ingenio autoral de José Pepe Sánchez, y que tomó el camino de su primera grabación (sic) fue el tema ‘Tristezas’, el cual fue grabado en ciudad México (sic) en el año 1907 en las voces del dueto de Abrego y Picazo, pero su título fue cambiado por el de ‘Un Beso’”, (“Desde Nueva York”).

popular y culto la que trasciende a la literatura, contrario a otros géneros musicales como la música africana. Dice Fernando Valerio-Holguín que “el bolero ha interpelado a sujetos de distintas clases y grupos sociales en sus valores y sentimientos”³ (22), en este sentido, la literatura ha sido testigo de ello y ha sabido articular el género musical a la estructura narrativa, creando lo que se ha llamado la novela bolero o el bolero literario.⁴ En la novela de Daína Chaviano *La isla de los amores infinitos* (2006) destaca la directa referencia musical al titular cada capítulo con el nombre de un bolero y su conexión con la memoria de una Habana que ha perdido su antiguo esplendor, que en cierto modo, se ha vuelto una ruina y un fantasma. La Habana de los recuerdos de Cecilia, la protagonista de esta novela, está presente aunque ella ya no viva en la isla: es a través de la memoria musical, también supersticiosa y fantasmal, que el recuerdo se construye y forma parte de su nueva realidad en otro país: Estados Unidos.

En el presente trabajo exploro la construcción de la memoria a través de las ruinas de La Habana y como en la migración (diáspora o exilio) permanece la creencia de lo sobrenatural insertada en un nuevo espacio que se reconoce como “el nuevo hogar”, Miami, inmerso en una nueva comunidad en la cual se identifican diferencias y similitudes que se rechazan o se fusionan y que forman parte del legado personal y de comunidad. En la novela de Chaviano vemos tipos de memorias que se heredan por la familia, la videncia de seres sobrenaturales, así como también la

³ Fernando Valerio-Holguín nos dice sobre la novela-bolero que “[...] el bolero, este inmigrante que salió de Cuba durante el modernismo, regresó a su punto de origen, pero como híbrido posmoderno en la novela de Cabrera Infante, *Tres tristes tigres* (1964) que incluye varias secciones tituladas ‘Ella cantaba boleros’ acerca de una cantante llamada Estrella” (22). Nos da un listado de las novelas que él considera que se inscriben dentro de este género como *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976), de Manuel Puig; *Sólo cenizas hallarás* (1980), de Pedro Vergés; *Bolero* (1987) de Lisandro Otero entre otros autores. Para mayor referencia consúltese este ensayo.

⁴ Concepto de Vicente Torres en su libro *La novela bolero latinoamericana*. El autor puntualiza: “Utilizo la expresión *novela bolero* porque éste fue el título que le dio un grupo de escritores venezolanos, quienes advirtieron la afinidad de un conjunto de libros que podían estudiarse debido a elementos comunes, y también elementos variables. Se trata de un puñado de novelas marcadas en su ritmo, en su argumento o en su tema por la música, las canciones, la vida de los músicos y los ídolos populares” (20).

creencia de que los muertos son parte esencial y constante de la vida, aunque el verlos sea un don que pocos poseen, y sobre todo, que sobrepasa lo racional. Este don se conserva a pesar de la migración y de las nuevas generaciones que han tenido contacto con otras expresiones culturales. En la novela también podemos ver cómo estas creencias, opuestas al mundo racional pero comunes en el imaginario latinoamericano, son parte de la realidad del cubano, tanto dentro como fuera de la isla. Esta memoria es parte de su herencia emocional alimentada por la nostalgia de la tierra natal, de sus recuerdos y los recuerdos de otros, un lugar que se inscribe en la memoria porque al mismo tiempo se asume como una pérdida irrecuperable en el tiempo y en el espacio.

Daína Chaviano (La Habana, Cuba, 1960) es una de las escritoras cubanas más destacadas de la narrativa latinoamericana actual. Estudió Lengua y Literatura Inglesa en la Universidad de La Habana y ahora es una escritora que ha sido premiada y celebrada en el escenario literario de nuestros días al situar algunos de sus escritos dentro del “Periodo Especial”, en concreto la novela *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre* (Behar 85). Se caracteriza por ser dueña de una voz original y fresca, nos brinda diferentes miradas de esa Cuba que vivió y que recuerda tras la salida de su país en 1991. *La isla de los amores infinitos* es la última novela perteneciente a la tetralogía “La Habana oculta” que también incluye *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre* (1998), *Casa de juegos* (1999) y *Gata encerrada* (2001). Otros de sus textos son las colecciones de cuentos *Los mundos que amo* (Premio David de Ciencia Ficción), *Amoroso planeta* (1983) y *El abrevadero de los dinosaurios* (1990), y otros títulos como *Historias de hadas para adultos* (1986), la novela *Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre* (1988), el libro de poesía *Confesiones eróticas y otras confesiones* (1994) y la colección de cuentos juveniles *País de dragones* (1997), (Premio Nacional de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil “La Edad de Oro”).⁵

⁵ La publicación de esta obra fue cancelada tras la salida de Chaviano de Cuba.

La isla de los amores infinitos fusiona elementos ficcionales con personajes reales, acontecimientos históricos de Cuba con elementos fantásticos a través de varias historias lejanas en sus orígenes pero enlazadas unas con las otras en el mundo de la isla por medio de la música y el lenguaje. Lo fantasmal es una de las características más atrayentes de la novela, pues está unido a las historias de los ancestros de Cecilia, quienes llegaron a Cuba desde países tan distintos como China, España y Nigeria. Cada familia y comunidad migratoria y trae consigo su comprensión del mundo a través de religión, mitos, supersticiones, rituales, festividades, así como a través de sus danzas, canciones, comidas y vestimentas. Martina Urioste-Buschmann en su ensayo “Festejar la memoria-conmemorar la fiesta” menciona que dichos elementos se concentran, se incrementan y se liberan en “el tiempo festivo” dentro de cada comunidad, en oposición del tiempo cotidiano donde “predomina la rutina, la carencia y el control del arrebató” (2). Estos dos momentos, el de la rutina y la fiesta van conformando la memoria colectiva de los grupos migratorios y diaspóricos, creando al mismo tiempo que el recuerdo de su identidad de origen, una nueva comprensión social:

De esta forma, los participantes perciben y crean una memoria cultural colectiva que permite al nivel grupal e individual la autognosis y el posicionamiento identitario dentro de un marco social más amplio. En consecuencia, recordar y conmemorar son formas de conservar pertenencias culturales que representan estrategias de comunidades diaspóricas caribeñas, como la cubana, para articular sus posicionamientos identitarios dentro de una sociedad. (2)

La novela de Chaviano está seccionada en diferentes partes: la historia principal es la de Cecilia, una periodista cubana radicada-exiliada en Miami, quien a raíz de un reportaje busca desentrañar el misterio de una casa fantasma. Esta historia principal está acompañada de otras tres grandes historias que conocemos por las charlas que sostiene Cecilia con Amalia, una mujer misteriosa

que conoce en un salón de baile de música cubana (elemento que funciona como un secreto vínculo entre las dos mujeres). A través de un narrador omnisciente conocemos la historia de amor de Amalia y Pablo (Pag Li), al tiempo que se traza su genealogía, el mapa de mezclas culturales que conforman sus herencias. Las diferentes historias se remontan al año 1845, y cada una de ellas es precedida por la desventura: un suicidio y la irrupción de la guerra en China, de donde proviene la familia de Pag Li, una maldición para las mujeres de una familia en Cuenca (España) y el rapto de mujeres en Nigeria para ser esclavizadas, son las remotas hebras del tejido genealógico de la historia de Amalia, un microcosmos familiar que muestra la historia cubana en general. Cada una de estas complejas herencias conforma a los individuos de la novela, que ven perdidos sus bienes materiales, económicos y la paz en sus lugares de origen. Migrar los obliga a viajar con muy pocas cosas, su mayor equipaje es su herencia emocional, el vínculo con su familia, la memoria de todo su mundo conocido: “La diáspora es una manera de comprender la figura cubana como un collage, una compilación de fragmentos por el globo” (Weimer 17).

Si entendemos las historias de la novela como una gran historia de la diáspora que conformó la Cuba anterior a la Revolución de 1959 y también el grupo de exiliados que son la comunidad cubana en Miami debo partir con el concepto que proponen Jana Evanz Braziel y Anita Mannur en *Theorizing Diaspora* desde la etimología —*dia*, a través y —*sperien*, “sembrar o desparramar semillas” con lo cual Weimer define diáspora “como un término que históricamente se ha usado para referirse a las comunidades desplazadas que han sido dislocadas de las tierras que esas comunidades siguen identificando como originarias” (18). Weimer puntualiza, tomando los conceptos de James Clifford, que quienes han tenido que emigrar y establecerse en otro lugar sienten o inventan una relación con el lugar del que han sido desplazados (18). Cecilia abandona Cuba como un hecho necesario: la isla era un lugar donde la miseria estaba haciendo mella no solo

en el lugar que la rodeaba, en los edificios y las calles, sino en ella misma, pero del que no puede desvincularse.

Se había marchado de su tierra huyéndole a muchas cosas, a tantas que ya no valía la pena recordarlas. Y mientras veía perderse en el horizonte los edificios que se desmoronaban a lo largo del malecón –durante aquel extraño verano de 1994 en que tantos habían escapado en balsa a plena luz del día, juró que nunca más regresaría. Cuatro años más tarde continuaba a la deriva. No quería saber del país que dejara atrás; pero seguía sintiéndose una forastera en la ciudad que amparaba al mayor número de cubanos en el mundo [Miami], después de La Habana. (Chaviano 20)

Cecilia tiene un recuerdo desagradable de la isla por la vivencia traumática, de carencia y represión. A lo largo de la novela nunca sabemos muy bien los detalles de su vida, pero es lo suficientemente elocuente para revelar que La Habana es un mundo en ruinas, que se está cayendo a trozos y con ella la vida pasada del esplendor donde Cuba “era el centro del mundo conocido por el occidente” (Birkenmaier 10). El rechazo a la idea del regreso por parte de Cecilia lo entendemos por medio de la historia de Amalia, quien es la que explica cómo después de que Fidel Castro llega al poder, ella lo perdió todo: a sus padres, esposo (encarcelado por siete años), dos embarazos, una casa y un negocio, fruto de años de trabajo. La pérdida es lo que genera el distanciamiento, la razón de la migración: estar en el lugar donde se encontró la felicidad, donde se tienen lazos familiares y de amistad, además del sustento económico es, cuando todo esto se ve perdido o en riesgo, el mismo del cual se busca huir. La tierra en donde no se hallan las oportunidades para prosperar ni para estar en paz se convierte en el lugar más temido, así sea el lugar más amado. La inestabilidad social y económica son los catalizadores de la migración de personas de todas clases sociales que sienten la necesidad de separarse de su lugar de origen en la búsqueda de una mejora personal y familiar.

Es en la distancia forzada del que migra donde se genera la pérdida de las tradiciones heredadas en el nicho familiar y la necesidad de recuperarlas a través de la memoria personal, a modo de reconstrucción personal, de enraizarse. Es la memoria la única posibilidad de re-crear un vínculo con el lugar de origen y de pertenencia. David Harvey propone que el espacio es un “producto social, un gigantesco sistema de recursos creados por el hombre” (García 25) que involucra factores económicos, sociales, psicológicos y simbólicos. Este producto social puede ser expresado en bienes tangibles como la arquitectura y la conformación de las ciudades, y por bienes intangibles, como la lengua, las costumbres, la música, el baile, la comida. Cuando el espacio social decae es una muestra irrefutable de la alteración del orden, un reflejo de su decadencia que impacta en sus habitantes. Es a través de los edificios, las casas, las escuelas, hospitales y demás espacios públicos en los que se verán reflejadas las conquistas o, bien, los problemas sociales. Las nuevas construcciones serán la muestra tangible de las ideas, las corrientes políticas y artísticas de un país. Las ruinas por su parte, son evidencia del abandono y la pobreza. A su vez, los productos intangibles también harán evidente, quizá de maneras diferentes o sutiles, lo que sucede en su sociedad.

Dice Pierre Nora en “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire” que: “We have seen the end of societies that had long assured the transmission and conservation of collectively remembered values, whether through churches or schools, the family or the state; the end too of ideologies that prepared a smooth passage from the past to the future or that had indicated what the future should keep from the past—whether for reaction, progress, or even revolution” (7). En el caso de la Cuba socialista observamos una representación dual, pues al mismo tiempo que la ciudad donde se derrumban los bellos edificios representa al pasado lleno de desigualdades que motivaron la revolución, también representan el deterioro de la imagen nacional.

Georg Simmel en “The Ruin” considera que la arquitectura es el único arte que logra un balance entre el la voluntad del hombre y la naturaleza (259). El hombre impone sus esfuerzos y logra un equilibrio con el entorno. Pero si ese balance se trastoca, ya sea por una catástrofe o por la destrucción del hombre o el efecto de su olvido, este equilibrio cede a favor de las fuerzas de la naturaleza, que recupera su orden original, percibido por el hombre como “una tragedia cósmica”, como una venganza de la naturaleza al perturbar su estado original (260). La caída de este espacio arquitectónico, de esta armonía, genera el profundo impacto de la ruina. Este espacio también tiene una inevitable comunión emocional. En el capítulo “Habana de mi amor” Cecilia reflexiona al mirar una grabación: “Por su mente seguían desfilando las estatuas ecuestres de los parques, las fuentes secas y las azoteas destrozadas de los edificios. ¿Por qué las ruinas eran siempre hermosas? ¿Y por qué las ruinas de una ciudad, otrora bella, lo eran aún más? Su corazón se debatía entre dos sentimientos: el amor y el horror.” (321)

El espacio visto desde la arquitectura de una ciudad es parte de la realidad del sujeto y el archivo de una sociedad: *es* la imagen y caracterización pues a través de los edificios y los monumentos se puede saber sobre el presente, y fragmentariamente, del pasado. El espacio genera memorias y emociones contradictorias, en este caso para Cecilia, porque erigir una ciudad significa una victoria sobre la naturaleza, la creación de una sociedad al establecerla y otorgarle un espacio en el cual vivir y desarrollarse, las grandes construcciones simbolizan poderío económico e intelectual mientras que la ruina implica un deterioro de las mismas y que existe un abandono físico que le da paso a la marcha del tiempo y las fuerzas naturales, desplazando al hombre. El temor a la muerte y a la destrucción es lo que genera miedo. Los fantasmas de Cecilia son una representación del miedo a la muerte de su mundo conocido, a lo que el tiempo y la naturaleza van borrando a su paso, incluyendo lo que ama. Dice Simmel que la ruina de un edificio, la muerte de la obra de arte, significa que las fuerzas de la naturaleza crecen y adquieren nuevas formas. La

nueva convivencia del arte en la ruina crea una característica totalmente nueva: naturaleza y ruina como una misma entidad (259). Cecilia contempla la belleza que hay en la ruina, el aspecto majestuoso e imponente de ver una ciudad que se despedaza, pero le horroriza el comprender que ese espacio vencido por el tiempo es la derrota de la idea revolucionaria, el reflejo de la extrema miseria, la experiencia antinatural del hombre viviendo en las ruinas. Los edificios que comienzan a caerse funcionan como una metáfora de la semilla, que es al mismo tiempo el comienzo de las migraciones en masa para no volver, es decir, de la diáspora.

Migrar es perder el espacio físico y ganar el espacio simbólico en la memoria donde es posible crear sobre él. En el documental de 2006 *Habana. Arte nuevo de hacer ruinas* realizado por Florian Borchmeyer y Matthias Hentschler vemos a los cubanos habitando una ciudad en pedazos, un espacio que apenas es un fantasma de su antigua gloria, lo que Chaviano describe en voz de Cecilia. Teatros que se engalanaron con las mejores voces, artistas, bailarines y aquel mundo vibraba con música y alegría, situando la batuta de las artes en América latina, haciendas y hoteles magníficos, edificios que antes fueron hermosos y que ahora son sólo una sombra triste y despedazada. Hay una magia en aquellas ruinas que al mismo son el peligro: la vida y la muerte están aprisionadas en su sostenimiento o en su colapso. Hay quien se empeña en ver a través de los muros derruidos, quien encuentra cierta belleza de la Habana que fue. Dice Reinaldo, una de las personas entrevistadas en el documental:

Yo me siento muy orgulloso de vivir en este lugar, y no quisiera nunca irme de este lugar. Yo me siento parte de este teatro aunque no haiga (sic) escena, no existan bailarines, para mi yo los veo, porque represento también parte del teatro, no oigo música, no oigo bailes pero yo los veo, los presiento, sobre todo las grandes personas que pasaron por este teatro, como el maestro (Enrico) Caruso, el gran

maestro Caruso. Me gusta sentarme en el primer palco actuar cantar, bailar, y los aplaudo. (*Arte nuevo de hacer ruinas*)

Esta anécdota es un ejemplo de algunas personas que viven sobre las ruinas en Cuba, un pensamiento que tiene cierta noción artística, supersticiosa e hipersensible que es capaz de llenar el vacío con sus recuerdos, y por decirlo de otro modo, con fantasmas. Entender aquellos lugares que en un pasado fueron concurridos y de alguna manera “gloriosos”, son depositarios de la historia de un lugar y una sociedad que ya no existe “[...] con cada edificio que se derrumba, un tozo de pensamiento colectivo queda inconcluso” (Calderón 71). “El espacio”, como objeto físico, es fuente de la historia; ahí está contenida la memoria del pasado, siempre incompleta, condenada a deteriorarse progresivamente por el paso del tiempo. Las ruinas representan el miedo a la finitud. Las obras arquitectónicas, que el ser humano construye con el fin de habitar y de legar como evidencia de su existencia, empeñando sus esfuerzos tecnológicos, económicos, intelectuales y físicos, no garantizan su durabilidad en el largo parámetro del tiempo, pues los espacios físicos son inamovibles, contrario a la naturaleza humana, siempre dispuesta a moverse. La ruina representa la confrontación del ser humano con la muerte: una batalla que, tarde o temprano, está perdida. Es por eso que la ruina siempre tendrá un aura fantasmal, llena de leyendas y cuentos alrededor que fascinan y aterrorizan al mismo tiempo, y que, entre toda la gama de herencias intangibles, formarán el legado personal de las personas a donde quiera que estas vayan, parte de sus historias personales, editadas, enriquecidas en la individualidad. Señala Pierre Nora:

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History,

on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. (8)

En el caso de la novela de Chaviano hay una fusión de historia y memoria, ya que la memoria y el espacio están representados en una “casa fantasma” que deambula por Miami y aparece en fechas clave de la historia cubana, fechas patrias funestas:

—Hay un patrón —enfaticó Cecilia—, pero no es de tiempo.

Lisa quedó en suspenso, sospechando que escucharía algo impensable.

—Son fechas patrias... mejor dicho *malas* fechas patrias.

—¿Qué quieres decir? —preguntó la otra, sentándose en el sofá junto a ella.

—Veintiséis de julio. No me digas que no sabes qué ocurrió el 26 de julio.

—¿Cómo no voy a saberlo? Fue el asalto al Cuartel Moncada.

—Peor que eso: fue el inicio de lo que vino después.

—¿Y qué hay con las otras fechas?

—El primero de enero triunfó la revolución, el ocho de enero los rebeldes entraron en La Habana, un trece de agosto nació quién tú sabes... (162)

Las apariciones de la casa fantasma coinciden también otros acontecimientos de la historia cubana como la matanza de los que escaparon del trasbordador *13 de marzo*, la derrota de los exiliados de Playa Girón, el 16 de abril de 1961 cuando se oficializó el comunismo en Cuba entre otros sucesos. Sin duda alguna, esta parte de la novela es un esfuerzo de la autora por denunciar lo que desde su punto de vista significa una tragedia nacional para Cuba. Desde su trinchera literaria, critica cómo el nacimiento de Fidel Castro, el triunfo de la revolución y el establecimiento del comunismo son “desgracias” que persiguen a los cubanos dentro y fuera de la isla. En el caso de Cecilia, esa historia se materializa en “una casa” muy similar a una que había en La Habana la cual es descrita como

“un pozo oscuro y sin fondo.” (57) y al mismo tiempo, los habitantes no son como los fantasmas de otros lugares donde quienes viven ahí buscan venganza o expresan un resentimiento si no que parecen felices: Lisa explica los habitantes fantasmas “[...] han vuelto porque añoran algo que no quieren abandonar. Lo raro es que los fantasmas vuelven siempre al mismo sitio, pero esa casa viaja todo el tiempo” (160). La casa fantasma entonces no solo representa la memoria sino también es la materialización espectral de la historia social y los sentimientos que se trasladan, junto con el individuo, a un nuevo lugar, así como la posibilidad de ver muertos de otras épocas en otros espacios que nada tienen que ver con la persona muerta, sino con la persona que está unida a esos muertos, tal es el caso de las parientas de Cecilia, tía Loló y Delfina, quienes tenían el don de ver a los difuntos y a los ángeles y no sólo eso, también podían hablar con ellos lo cual se asume como un hecho totalmente natural pero no común: “Ni Delfina ni yo tuvimos necesidad de hacer cosas raras para hablar con los ángeles o con los muertos, pero ya nada es como antes” (358). También el contacto con seres sobrenaturales que son parte de una especie de “herencia” que se asume como normal y que se vincula con la familia, especialmente con los lazos femeninos. Como el duende martinico,⁶ que inexplicablemente persigue a la familia de Clara como una especie de don o maldición, y que reaparece donde quiera que la familia vaya:

Aunque su mujer acostumbraba quejarse de la invisible presencia, siempre creyó que todo surgía de su imaginación. Sospechaba que aquella historia, tan arraigada en su familia, la inducía a ver lo inexistente. Y para evitar lo que llamaba “el contagio”, le hizo jurar que jamás de hablaría a la niña de esa tradición visionaria y que mucho menos le contaría historias de duendes ni de seres sobrenaturales. Por

⁶ El duende Martinico es un ser travieso, pero no malvado que tiene su origen en historias populares andaluzas y castellanas. La RAE lo define como “duende” o un espíritu fantástico.

eso casi se murió del susto el día en que Angelita, con apenas doce años, se quedó mirando el estante donde él colocaba sus vasijas a secar y susurró con aire de sorpresa:

—¿Qué hace ese enano ahí?

—¿Cuál enano? —repuso su padre, tras echar una rápida ojeada a la repisa. (50)

A su vez Clara hereda el martinico a su hija Ángela. El hijo varón de ésta última, José, es capaz de transmitir al martinico a su esposa Amalia y ella a su vez a su hija Isabel y aunque es un ser que se caracteriza por ser molesto y temperamental al aventar las cosas y hacer desastre, también es un ser que procura cuidar a su ama de turno. Así como los muertos que ven Loló o Delfina, ésta última además del contacto con los muertos posee poderes adivinatorios, la única que con su don sobrenatural es capaz de predecir el “desastre” que sobrevendrá con el comunismo en la isla. Fredasvinda describe a Delfina como chiflada:

Ayer mismo, cuando pasaba el periodiquero gritando algo sobre unos peruanos que se asilaron en la embajada cubana de Lima, ¿qué crees que hizo? Puso cara de esfinge y dijo que este país estaba maldito, que dentro de diez años se pondrá patas arriba y que en treinta años, eso que había sucedido en la embajada cubana de Perú ocurriría aquí en La Habana, pero al revés y multiplicado por miles... (287).

Pero la predicción resulta cierta cuando el arribo de Fidel Castro da un revés económico y la libertad se ve amenazada por la represión, y que es un tema que es constante en Chaviano. En la novela *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre*, según Sonia Behar, “Daína Chaviano presenta una problemática que hasta entonces había permanecido al margen de la literatura cubana de la revolución” (86) en la que lejos de presentar los triunfos de la revolución cubana, la autora que descarta la visión

mesianica y la presenta como un intento fallido de forjar al *Hombre Nuevo*⁷ que además no puede serlo, ya que hay una legado que va más allá de los cambios sociales o migratorios: es la memoria íntima, familiar, que también es la social y perdura a pesar de todo, idea por completo opuesta al Hombre Nuevo y que es, quizá, la resistencia contracastista más evidente de *La isla de los amores infinitos*: los cubanos serán cubanos en cualquier lugar a donde vayan y cargarán consigo los recuerdos, supersticiones y en general la memoria de su tierra. La novela presenta una realidad política y socioeconómica que transitó de la prosperidad de una isla enriquecida por la migración acogida al ser un punto estratégico de conexión entre Europa y América, Occidente y Oriente, hacia la carencia general, la violencia, la arbitrariedad de la justicia así como el hambre y la miseria, que impuso el nuevo régimen. A través de la memoria, Cecilia se reconcilia de alguna manera con La Habana que tuvo que abandonar: Amalia es “el fantasma” que ayuda a Cecilia a reconocer su herencia en varios niveles, desde descubrir que ella también posee el don de hablar con los muertos quizá porque también está “Herida de sombras” (159), hasta descubrir un amor por la música cubana que antes miraba con cierto desdén. El ambiente festivo de “La pequeña Habana” de Miami es el detonante de sus memorias familiares y que la van conectando en la reconfiguración de lo que significa “su identidad” en un país extranjero, pero al mismo tiempo que ya se ha convertido en el suyo.

A través de la memoria intangible de la música de Rita Montaner, Benny Moré y Bola de Nieve, los grandes intérpretes del bolero, Cecilia se aferra a la noción de una comunidad que ha trascendido la frontera, el mismo sentimiento que comparte con otros que han dejado su tierra antes

⁷ Behar explica que desde la perspectiva de Ernesto “Che” Guevara la revolución enfrenta la dificultad es que la sociedad cubana, sobre todo entre los grupos intelectuales, se mantienen ciertas ideas del idealismo burgués en sus consciencias, por lo cual el socialismo es la construcción de un Hombre Nuevo (86).

que ella, como en el caso de Ángela, quien al abandonar España sólo cargó como equipaje la memoria:

Dos décadas es mucho tiempo, sobre todo si uno vive en tierra extraña. La angustia palpitaba en su pecho cuando escuchaba las canciones llegadas de su patria: ‘Si llegan tristes hasta estos mares ¡ay! Los cantares que exhalo aquí, éste es mi pecho que va cautivo porque éste es mi pecho que va cautivo porque no vivo lejos de ti’. Sí, añoraba su tierra, los hablases de su gente, la vida plácida y eterna de la serranía donde no existe un mañana, sino sólo el ayer y el ahora. (146)

La figura de Rita Montaner como uno de los personajes más entrañables de la novela es muy representativo al ser Rita una de las artistas más queridas de su época. La figura de la cantante, quien es mostrada no como “la Única” sino como amiga cercana y quien ayuda a que el amor entre Amalia y Pablo prospere. La artista es también como un símbolo en la novela, pues es su presencia la que ayuda a tener una idea de la importancia de Cuba en las artes de la primera mitad del siglo pasado, al ser ella la cantante y actriz que se codeaba con artistas internacionales de la talla de Pedro Infante. Su muerte por cáncer en la garganta, el 17 de abril de 1958, un año antes de la llegada de Castro al poder, es también, de acuerdo a la novela, la muerte de una forma de interpretar el bolero y, en general, la música cubana que no encuentra reemplazo, todas las demás cantantes después de “la Única” son sólo pálidos intentos.

La música, que Chaviano enfatiza a lo largo de toda la narración al poner en cada capítulo el nombre de un bolero como título, es el contraste de la ruina y de lo fantasmal. La música expresa una amplia gama de sentimientos, esencialmente centrados en el amor y el desamor. El bolero es un género que además goza de una confluencia muy rica de ritmos, tanto de la música considerada culta como la popular. Al mismo tiempo, en los años que transcurre la narración de Amalia, ubicada alrededor de la edad de oro del bolero cubano y su declive (1935-1965), coincide con el final de la

dictadura de Fulgencio Batista y el triunfo de la Revolución Cubana iniciada por Fidel Castro. Señala Ivan Darias Alfonso en “Memories from the past, Melodies from the present” que:

The Cuban Revolution marked a turning point in musical evolution. Many of the talented artist of the 1950s migrated to the United States and continued playing Cuban music there, but many others remained of the island. Coincidentally, cultural production was intense enough to promote and establish different musical movements that become popular not only in Cuba and its diaspora but also in several Latin American countries (Darias 2).

Ese punto de quiebre social, también marca un punto sin retorno de la música y sus mejores representantes, que motivados por la inestabilidad social se ven forzados a desplazarse. Podemos ver que las letras de algunos de los boleros compuestos en esos años están llenas de lirismo y que hay versos que nos pueden comunicar tanto males amorosos, como también el dolor de ver a alguien querido que se marcha; el bolero “Déjame sola” es un buen ejemplo de ello: “Sé que hoy te vas / Y mi última esperanza me abandona/ No volverás / Y siento que mi cielo se desploma”. Así la música, es en parte una radiografía del sentimiento social, como descubre Cecilia al sentirse unida con los boleros que escucha, precisamente porque forman parte de la comunicación íntima con el individuo y, por lo tanto, migran con él. A diferencia de los espacios y los lugares, que son inamovibles, la memoria íntima de los individuos se refleja en las canciones, los dichos, las historias, es decir, en toda la riqueza intangible de las culturas; estas memorias viajan, se mueven y se transforman con quienes las poseen, y al mismo tiempo se fusionan con las costumbres y las memorias de otros grupos que comparten ese “nuevo hogar”, que en la novela es Miami. Esta dinámica de las memorias de la diáspora se van afincando en el nuevo espacio a través del tiempo, pero es el recién llegado el que tiene la conciencia clara de su lugar de procedencia y de necesidad

de identificación, pues como señala James Clifford, la distinción entre diáspora, inmigración, exilio y viaje se da en términos temporales y grupales. Wrimer señala al respecto:

[P]ues el viaje representa el corto plazo, mientras la diáspora abarca generaciones. La inmigración y el exilio son términos medios, que se expresan a largo plazo, pero dentro de una sola vida. En los estudios cubanos, este límite apenas se puede reconocer porque la tercera y la cuarta generación siguen asignándose la categoría de exiliados, en particular en Miami. (18)⁸

Cecilia, que se reconoce como inmigrante y que no sabe si algún día volverá a Cuba, encuentra su vínculo con la isla en Miami a través de la música popular. Insospechadamente, cae en la cuenta de que son los detalles de la cotidianeidad, que no le agradaban, las que más echa de menos:

No quería saber del país que dejaba atrás; pero seguía sintiéndose una forastera en la ciudad que amparaba al mayor número de cubanos en el mundo, después de la habana [...]

Sus ojos regresaron a la pantalla donde un mar suicida se arrojaba contra el malecón habanero, mientras el Benny cantaba [...] Pero la melodía no hizo más que provocarle lo contrario que pregonaba. Buscó refugio en el trago. Pese a su voluntad de olvido, la asaltaban las emociones vergonzosas como aquel vértigo de su corazón ante lo que deseaba despreciar. Era un sentimiento que la aterraba. No se reconocía en esos latidos dolorosos que ahora le provocaba aquel boletó. Se dio cuenta de que empezaba a añorar gestos y decires, incluso ciertas frases que detestara cuando vivía en la isla, toda esa fraseología de barrios marginales que ahora se moría por escuchar

⁸ Vale puntualizar que según Clifford, el exilio hace referencia a la salida de un país por cuestiones políticas, mientras que la inmigración es por cuestiones económicas.

en una ciudad donde abundaban los *hi, sweetie*, o los *excuse me* mezclados con un castellano que, por venir de tantos sitios, no pertenecía a ninguno. (Chaviano 20-21)

Y es que tal vez para Cecilia, la distancia ha funcionado como una trampa de la memoria, como dice Gabriel García Márquez en *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*: “la memoria del corazón elimina los malos recuerdos y magnifica los buenos, y que gracias a este artificio logramos sobrellevar el pasado” (146). Además, lo que afecta a la protagonista es saber que en Estados Unidos ella no deja de ser una extranjera. Por ello, buscará un medio de identificación. Señala Darias que “cultural identities are constructed by exclusions and inclusions in a way that can characterize the diasporic experience. Music creates of attachment by strategies of archeology and incorporation because emigrants review their musical background, searching for melodies of their past and incorporating them into their everyday life” (257). En este sentido, la música funciona como la nueva semilla que cohesiona grupos diaspóricos y ayuda a construir una nueva identificación, gracias a la empatía que genera la música y la carga emocional que puede despertar en las personas.

En resumen, en *La isla de los amores infinitos* podemos observar cómo la autora pone lado a lado elementos intangibles como constructores de la memoria de la comunidad cubana en Miami, al tiempo que observa las ruinas de la Habana como la huella de una antigua prosperidad y que poco a poco se transforman en vestigios del deterioro social en la isla, en una contraposición de memoria y la historia. Las convulsiones sociales, políticas que se tornan violentas e injustas son catalizadores, que en muchos casos motivan los movimientos migratorios y diaspóricos. Dichos grupos que se insertan en un nuevo espacio con diferencias y similitudes, encontrarán una forma de cohesión a través de la música, y de otras herencias intangibles, como las supersticiones. En esta novela, Chaviano busca reflejar el tránsito de una Cuba esplendorosa hacia la decadencia que

“obliga” a los descendientes de quienes creyeron hallar en la isla un “nuevo hogar” a emigrar nuevamente, emprendiendo una gran diáspora de al menos tres generaciones a Miami, principalmente, pero también a otros lugares como México o Europa. Behar afirma que “huir de Cuba implica desencanto por la isla, pero también una actitud de inconformidad y rebelión que el individuo se ve obligado a expresar de una forma u otra” (107). Quienes representan la autoridad de la revolución son al mismo tiempo los enemigos de la libertad y los más celosos vigilantes del orden que han impuesto: una figura degenerada del ideal. En ese desencanto no vemos ningún fervor revolucionario, sino el vacío y la completa desesperanza hacia el futuro en la isla. En el caso de Cecilia, existe una resignación a nunca más volver.

El tema de la diáspora cubana es sin duda de gran complejidad del cual se ha escrito abundantemente y sin duda se seguirá escribiendo. La novela de Daina Chaviano se suma a esta generación de escritores que se han preocupado por reflejar la diáspora cubana desde la vivencia como *Café nostalgia* (1997), de Zoé Valdés, *Los palacios distantes* (2002) de Abilio Estévez y *Todos se van* de Wendy Guerra, entre otros. Lo seductor de *La isla de los amores infinitos* es la amalgama de miradas, un conjunto de tópicos que podrían ser inconexos en contextos distintos, pero que aquí armonizan enriqueciéndose mutuamente bajo los temas de exilio, diáspora y memoria. Cada una de las partes analizadas, el bolero, la ciudad en ruinas y las presencias fantasmales presentes en la novela contribuye a la articulación de una mirada más sobre el proceso en construcción de las nuevas sociedades desde la diáspora cubana.

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**España en los circuitos globales: la migración a países anglosajones en
Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes (1998) de Lucía Etxebarría**

**JUDIT FUENTE-CUESTA
Michigan State University**

RESUMEN

En los últimos años del siglo XX la política exterior española se enfocó en mantener significativas relaciones con las potencias mundiales angloparlantes, especialmente Estados Unidos y Reino Unido. El principal objetivo del gobierno del Partido Popular (1996-2004) en este periodo era que España se distinguiese por ser un país integrado en los ámbitos políticos, económicos y culturales a nivel mundial y que tuviera relevancia internacional. El presente artículo muestra cómo la escritora Lucía Etxebarría legitimaba esta decisión política en su segunda obra publicada: *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (1998); obra representativa de la narrativa literaria y cultural preponderante en esos años. En la novela se presentan dos tipos de migraciones a países angloparlantes. Una migración es física cuando la protagonista emigra cuatro años a Edimburgo, y la otra es cultural al hacer constantes referencias a la cultura anglosajona, principalmente a la música, la literatura, la cultura popular, el cine y la moda. Esta coexistencia de culturas propuesta por la autora permitía imaginar a España dentro de los circuitos de la globalización y la igualaba a las potencias anglosajonas que representaban el capitalismo hegemónico y global.

Palabras clave: *Literatura española, Lucía Etxebarría, globalización, migración, años noventa.*

ABSTRACT

In the last years of the twentieth century, Spanish foreign relations focused on maintaining significant interactions with the English-speaking world powers, especially the United States and the United Kingdom. The main goal of the Popular Party government (1996-2004) in this period was for Spain to distinguish itself as a country with international relevance, integrated in the political, economic and cultural spheres worldwide. This article shows how the writer Lucía Etxebarría legitimized this political decision in her second published work: *Beatriz y los cuerpos los celestes* (1998), a representative work of the literary and cultural narrative prevailing in those years. In the novel there are two types of migrations to English-speaking countries: migration as physical, where the protagonist immigrates four years to Edinburgh; and migration as cultural, which makes constant references to the Anglo-Saxon culture, including music, literature, popular culture, film and fashion. This coexistence of cultures proposed by the author allowed readers to imagine Spain within the circuits of globalization and to equate the nation to the Anglo-Saxon world powers that represented hegemonic and global capitalism.

Keywords: *Spanish literature, Lucía Etxebarría, globalization, migration, nineties.*

La escritora Lucía Etxebarría se convirtió en un referente de la cultura popular de finales de los años noventa y principios de siglo XXI. En esta época España era una nación influenciada por los efectos de la globalización y se vio considerablemente aumentada la comunicación e interdependencia con Estados Unidos y Reino Unido. Tanto con sus novelas como con sus características personales –es una escritora mediática–, Etxebarría representaba al país de manera globalizada y contribuía en el imaginario nacional de manera significativa. El presente artículo muestra cómo la escritora fortalecía la ilusión de globalización en España especialmente en su segunda novela: *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (1998). A través de su protagonista muestra dos tipos de migraciones a países anglosajones; una es física cuando Beatriz viaja a Edimburgo, y la otra migración que presenta es cultural al hacer múltiples referencias a la cultura anglosajona. Como Néstor García Canclini explica, “la globalización es también el horizonte imaginado por sujetos colectivos e individuales, o sea por gobiernos y empresas de los países dependientes, por realizadores de cine y televisión, artistas e intelectuales” (32). La autora exponía una coexistencia de culturas que permitía imaginar a España dentro de los circuitos de globalización e igualarla con las potencias angloparlantes que representaban el capitalismo neoliberal hegemónico y global.

Las primeras novelas de Lucía Etxebarría, entre las que se encuentra *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*, son representativas de una narrativa literaria y cultural preponderante durante los años correspondientes al gobierno del Partido Popular, cuyo principal objetivo era que España se distinguiese por ser un país integrado en los ámbitos políticos, económicos y culturales a nivel mundial y que tuviera relevancia internacional. Mientras los años ochenta destacaron por el interés político de España por Europa, los años noventa lo hicieron por los países anglosajones, principalmente Estados Unidos y Reino Unido. El eslogan turístico ‘Spain is

different' creado en la década de los sesenta para atraer turistas y que presentaba la diferencia como algo positivo, tenía cada vez menos vigencia en un país cuyo objetivo principal era no solo ser parte de Europa, sino ser social y culturalmente lo más parecido a las potencias mundiales de habla inglesa. Lucía Etxebarría legitimaba esta política exterior establecida por el gobierno del Partido Popular al presentar la cultura anglosajona completamente integrada en el ámbito cultural y social español.

Antes de analizar *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* y el rol de Lucía Etxebarría como escritora mediática de finales de los noventa, es importante exponer las características más representativas de este contexto histórico. La primera publicación de Lucía Etxebarría –*La historia de Kurt y Courtney: aguanta esto* (1996)– coincidió con el año en que el Partido Socialista (PSOE) y el entonces presidente Felipe González perdieron las elecciones tras casi catorce años al mando del gobierno. El Partido Popular (PP) con José María Aznar a la cabeza consiguió hacerse con la presidencia tras pactar con los partidos nacionalistas vasco y catalán en 1996; y se mantuvo en la presidencia durante dos legislaturas tras conseguir la mayoría absoluta en las elecciones celebradas el 12 de marzo del 2000. El triunfo del Partido Popular a mediados de los noventa supuso el renacimiento de la derecha y del conservadurismo español, así como el comienzo de la alternancia política post-franco.

Algunas de las decisiones políticas más significativas y que más conciernen en este análisis son las relacionadas con la política exterior y económica. Una de las medidas más importantes en el ámbito económico fue la incorporación de España al euro en 1999, moneda que entró en vigor en 2002. Omar Encarnación explica que “the PP accelerated the policies of economic liberalization, especially privatizations, and European integration championed by the PSOE, with generally positive results. Sound macroeconomic indicators allowed the Aznar

government in 1998 to fulfill the criteria for joining the circle of founding nations of the European Monetary Union (EMU) established by the Maastricht Treaty” (62).¹ Esta conversión de España al euro supuso su homologación con la eurozona y una mayor integración en la Europa neoliberal y en los circuitos económicos globales. Sin embargo, aunque el presidente José María Aznar proclamase el ya famoso ‘España va bien’ desde prácticamente el inicio de su gobierno, el desempleo y la precariedad laboral continuaban inquietando al pueblo español a mediados de los años noventa. José Luis Jiménez y Sara Núñez explican que “el empleo creado era en su mayor parte precario, por la imposición de la flexibilidad laboral, de forma que la disminución del paro fue unida al aumento de la eventualidad en el empleo” (473). Si bien la economía prosperó y se crearon nuevos puestos de trabajo, muchos salarios se estancaron y otros muchos empleos estaban infrarremunerados.

En cuanto a la política exterior, el gobierno de Aznar se enfocó en mantener significativas relaciones con las potencias mundiales angloparlantes. Encarnación declara que “Aznar came into office thinking that Spain’s relations with Washington should be at least as important as those with France and Germany, a view that stood in striking contrast to the strong pro-European policy of Spanish governments in the post-Franco era” (64).² Más adelante, en su segunda legislatura, son reveladoras además las relaciones que el presidente Aznar mantenía con George Bush –presidente estadounidense– y Tony Blair –presidente británico–, especialmente en torno al tema de la Guerra de Irak. John Hooper expone que el presidente del Partido Popular, “[R]ight from the start of his mandate, he had wanted closer links with the United States and made

¹ El PP aceleró las políticas de liberalización económica, especialmente las privatizaciones, y la integración europea defendida por el PSOE, con resultados en general positivos. Los sólidos indicadores macroeconómicos permitieron al gobierno de Aznar en 1998 cumplir los criterios para unirse al círculo de naciones fundadoras de la Unión Monetaria Europea (UEM) establecida en el Tratado de Maastricht.

² Aznar llegó a la presidencia pensando que las relaciones de España con Washington deberían ser al menos tan importantes como las de Francia y Alemania, una visión que contrastaba marcadamente con la fuerte política proeuropea de los gobiernos españoles en la era postfranquista.

considerable progress towards achieving them” (75), así como que “he proudly joined President Bush and Britain’s Prime Minister, Tony Blair, at the summit in the Azores that called for military action without UN backing³” (76). La prensa española de la época llegó a denominarles como ‘El trío de las Azores’ debido a la reunión que los tres mantuvieron en dichas islas en el año 2003. Emmanuel Rodríguez López desvela que “[E]mpeñado en una política de prestigio internacional, Aznar trató de convertir al Estado español en el último vértice del triángulo atlántico en la «lucha contra el terror»” (25). El presidente español apostó por unirse a Washington de manera incondicional; y especialmente a partir del 11-S su visión política internacional estuvo caracterizada por el atlantismo, que establecía un pacto estratégico-militar de Europa Occidental y América del Norte.

Este interés por las potencias angloparlantes no fue solo político ya que la asimilación de la cultura anglosajona fue una tendencia extendida entre artistas jóvenes de los noventa –incluida la escritora Lucía Etxebarria–, que se vieron significativamente influenciados por la globalización. Víctor Lenore en *CT o La Cultura de la Transición*⁴ analiza por qué se puso de moda la música en inglés en la última década del siglo XX y explica que tiene relación con el “espíritu de la época”. En los años noventa, España consigue al fin meter la cabeza en los circuitos de la economía global” (123). Asimismo añade que la Cultura de la Transición dejó fuera de juego a la música que incluía conflictos sociales en sus letras, así como a grupos de origen nacional que “fueron ninguneados durante años porque sus discos reflejaban una España

³ Desde el comienzo de su mandato, quería vínculos más estrechos con los Estados Unidos e hizo considerables progresos para lograrlos. Se unió con orgullo al presidente Bush y al primer ministro británico, Tony Blair, en la cumbre en las Azores que convocó una acción militar sin el respaldo de la ONU.

⁴ La CT o Cultura de la Transición es un término acuñado por Guillem Martínez y hace referencia al que ha sido el paradigma cultural predominante en España durante más de tres décadas y que se caracteriza por evitar la controversia y la confrontación, despolitizando en gran medida el arte y evadiendo exponer cuestiones problemáticas.

poco *fashion, cool* y europea” (116). Desde el inicio de la transición democrática en 1975 la cultura hegemónica se usó como muestra de unidad y cohesión nacional, carente de confrontación o crítica; y eliminaba todo cuanto pudiera considerarse como desestabilizador. Luisa Elena Delgado manifiesta que “[L]a cultura es el mayor activo exportable de España y se entiende además como el principal elemento de cohesión nacional, es lógico que la orientación de esa cultura y su percepción en el exterior sea de interés crucial para el Estado” (150). Así, *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* legitima la política exterior orientada al atlantismo y las relaciones entre España y países anglosajones que predominaron durante las dos legislaturas del Partido Popular. Además, se muestra un atlantismo con carácter neoimperialista⁵ ya que expone una representativa identificación con la potencia europea británica y el imperio hegemónico y global de los Estados Unidos, pero proponiendo un retorno a Madrid al final de la historia, que se presenta como único hogar y destino final de la protagonista de la novela.

Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes está escrita en primera persona y narra de manera no cronológica el presente y el pasado de Beatriz, una joven madrileña de veintidós años y de familia acomodada. Beatriz narra la turbulenta relación que mantiene con su madre desde el inicio de la adolescencia y su relación con su amiga Mónica, de la que lleva años enamorada. A los dieciocho años se enfrenta al rechazo amoroso de Mónica, la relación conflictiva con su madre, el consumo de drogas y la vida nocturna. Tras ser diagnosticada con depresión nerviosa emigra a Edimburgo donde pasará cuatro años estudiando Literatura Inglesa y donde explorará su identidad sexual junto a su novia Cat y su amante Ralph, ambos escoceses. Tras cuatro años residiendo en Edimburgo regresa a Madrid sin apenas despedirse de Cat y decidida a buscar a Mónica, a la que encuentra notablemente desmejorada en una clínica de desintoxicación. Se

⁵ Forma de actuación e ideología política que se basa en dominar a otros países o comunidades mediante el poder político y económico.

reencuentra asimismo con sus padres y se produce una reconciliación con su madre, a quien Beatriz no culpa por considerarla un producto de su tiempo. Cierra así una etapa de su vida y expresa interés en retomar su relación con Cat, aunque quiere que el reencuentro se produzca en Madrid.

La inestabilidad mental y el diagnóstico con depresión nerviosa propicia la migración física a Edimburgo de Beatriz. Es una migración temporal y voluntaria, pero esa huida al norte de Europa se presenta como la solución a sus problemas. Edimburgo le aleja de Mónica y de su madre, y le provee de una buena educación académica al mismo tiempo que le permite explorar y disfrutar de las relaciones amorosas y sexuales; y descubrir la bisexualidad. Lauren Applegate manifiesta que al regresar a Madrid tras estos cuatro años es cuando “she realizes that her obsession with Mónica was built on imagination instead of reality, and when she comes to accept herself for who she is” (40).⁶ La ciudad escocesa se muestra como un lugar necesario para el personaje para crecer y evolucionar; y como Luz Sanfeliu advierte, “tras rebelarse, coquetear con la droga y vivir a fondo la vida nocturna madrileña en décadas anteriores, trata de reconstruirse en Edimburgo una nueva identidad” (138). Su estancia y convivencia en el país británico se presenta como beneficiosa para Beatriz y le provee de un futuro más exitoso tanto en el terreno personal como profesional. Este vínculo con la potencia europea puede interpretarse como una necesidad para el bienestar de España. Así, el presidente Aznar reveló en más de una ocasión que su política exterior servía a “los intereses del Estado”.⁷

Cuando Beatriz regresa de Edimburgo tiene mejor aspecto y la fuerza suficiente para reencontrarse con Mónica y con su madre. La familia de Mónica también podría haberse permitido económicamente enviarla a estudiar fuera de España, pero se queda en Madrid y

⁶ Se da cuenta de que su obsesión con Mónica no era más que imaginación en vez de realidad, y cuando ella se acepta a sí misma tal y como es.

⁷ https://elpais.com/elpais/2003/04/30/actualidad/1051690620_850215.html

termina en una clínica de desintoxicación por su adicción a la heroína. Esta solución a los problemas es elitista ya que tan solo una pequeña parte privilegiada y adinerada de la sociedad española podía permitirse enviar a sus hijos a estudiar al extranjero. La naturalidad con la que la escritora presenta la opción de estudiar fuera sin hacer mención al elevado precio que suponía formarse académicamente en una potencia europea y que sólo una pequeña parte de la población podía costearse, no solo legitimaba la política exterior del Partido Popular transmitiendo la idea de una España integrada en los circuitos globales, sino que también normalizaba a la élite burguesa que José María Aznar generó y consolidó como resultado de su política neoliberal.

Beatriz se adapta fácilmente al país británico y no menciona ninguno de los problemas de adaptación culturales y lingüísticos que suceden habitualmente cuando se emigra a un país extranjero. La novela transmite la idea de que apenas hay diferencias entre España y Reino Unido, y la protagonista incluso declara que “[E]n Madrid y Edimburgo la gente baila la misma música y alucina con las mismas drogas, y busca lo mismo: sexo, amor, razones para aguantar una noche más” (5). Desde esta perspectiva, se presenta a España como una nación globalizada y a la altura de la potencia europea anglosajona. Aunque la personalidad depresiva de Beatriz le hace ver la parte negativa tanto de Madrid como de Edimburgo, si se analiza en profundidad la novela puede observarse el mensaje neoimperialista que transmite. Se describe a Edimburgo como una ciudad fría, lúgubre e inhóspita; y al llegar a Escocia Beatriz afirma “[M]e sentía triste, y pobre. Pobre en espacio, escasa de luz, indigente en calma, desposeída de una atmósfera de intimidad, necesitada de todo aquello que hace del hogar del hombre su castillo” (22). Con frecuencia expresa la nostalgia que siente por Madrid aunque cuando regresa después de haber pasado cuatro años en Edimburgo afirma “vuelvo a la ciudad que odiaba tanto” (20) y añade que es sucia, gris, mal planificada y sin personalidad. Sin embargo, más adelante explica: “[S]iendo

española, ¿por qué me iba a quedar en Escocia?” y, refiriéndose a Edimburgo revela “yo no pertenecía a la ciudad” (48). Al final de la novela y refiriéndose a Madrid, explica: “ésta es mi casa, no aquélla” (337). Se presenta a la capital española como luminosa y viva, que contrasta con la anubarrada y deshabitada Edimburgo. Beatriz tiene la posibilidad de residir en cualquiera de las dos ciudades, pero elige Madrid. Así, la novela no solo presenta a una España a la altura de Reino Unido, sino que es incluso superior. Cuando Beatriz habla sobre Madrid con su amante escocés Ralph, declara: “no quería hacerle un menosprecio a su ciudad, y no quise hacerle saber, puesto que no le conocía, lo maravillosa que era la mía, lo mucho que la echaba de menos” (250). La historia muestra conveniente y beneficioso viajar a Reino Unido y consumir su cultura; pero mientras que la migración cultural mediante referencias a la música, el cine, la moda, etc. anglosajonas se presenta como permanente, la migración física es temporal y hay un retorno a España.

El discurso neoimperialista puede apreciarse también en la relación sentimental que mantiene con la escocesa Cat, a quien describe como iletrada, frágil y lánguida. Akiko Tsuchiya declara en *Women's Narrative and Film in Twentieth-Century Spain: A World of Difference(s)*, que “[H]er relationship with her lover Cat, from the outset, is an enactment of the dominance-submission paradigm⁸” (248). Con frecuencia la compara con Mónica y revela: “[E]chaba de menos el sentido del humor, la astucia y la rapidez verbal de Mónica. En comparación, Cat me parecía solmene y lánguida. Y débil” (59). Desde que iniciase la relación con la escocesa, Beatriz afirma que era “sabedora desde entonces de que me querría más que yo a ella” (31). Tras tres años y medio conviviendo juntas –Beatriz se mudó al apartamento de Cat a las dos semanas de conocerse– la protagonista regresó a Madrid sin ni siquiera despedirse de ella y sin intención de

⁸ Su relación con su amante Cat, desde el principio es una representación del paradigma dominancia-sumisión.

regresar a Edimburgo. Tras la decepción de encontrarse con Mónica en una clínica de desintoxicación considera retomar su relación amorosa con Cat. En palabras de Applegate “at the end of the novel Beatriz finally wants to commit to a lasting relationship with Cat, who is painted as a positive complement⁹” (46). Sin embargo, Beatriz no pretende regresar a Escocia para estar con ella, sino que menciona la posibilidad de que se reúnan en España: “[S]e me ocurre volver a llamarla más tarde, cuando se despierte, invitarla a que venga a Madrid a visitarme. Sugerirle que tome una semana del mes de vacaciones . . . Enviarle un billete de avión a Edimburgo, un ramo de flores, un anillo de oro” (339). Beatriz aspira a comprometerse con Cat de una manera más formal y seria, fortaleciendo así el vínculo entre España y Reino Unido.

Como ya se ha indicado anteriormente, en las novelas de Etxebarria aparece también una migración cultural por las constantes referencias a la cultura anglosajona, que resalta especialmente por la práctica ausencia de alusiones a la nacional. Mark Allison explica en la obra *Contemporary Spanish Cultural Studies* que “the late eighties and the decade of the nineties are marked by something of a deficit in national youth cultures at the expense of imported cultural products” (270).¹⁰ Etxebarria hace continuas referencias a la música, la literatura, la cultura popular, el cine y la moda anglosajonas. Sin olvidar que su primer libro extenso fue *La historia de Kurt y Courtney: aguanta esto* (1996), una biografía novelada de Courtney Love y Kurt Cobain, ambos músicos estadounidenses. En *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* la escritora hace comparaciones de los personajes con la cultura anglosajona. Según Mónica, Beatriz se parece a Betty Boop –dibujo animado estadounidense– y a Beatriz los labios de la madre de Mónica “recordaban a los de Michelle Pfeiffer” (131) –actriz de cine estadounidense–. Mientras que la

⁹ Al final de la novela Beatriz finalmente quiere comprometerse a tener una relación duradera con Cat, quien es descrita como una complemento positivo.

¹⁰ Los últimos años de la década de los ochenta y la década de los noventa están marcados por un déficit en la cultura nacional juvenil a expensas de los productos culturales importados.

madre de Beatriz tiene “un aire a Marlene Dietrich” (36) y Cat “se parecía a Nastassja Kinski” (28), ambas de origen alemán pero que triunfaron en el cine de Estados Unidos. Hay también referencias a personalidades y productos estadounidenses como Demi Moore, Cindy Crawford, Morticia Adams, MTV, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Sonic Youth, Alka Seltzer, Coca-Cola, Nike, 7-Eleven, Levi’s o *Playboy*; a británicos como Kate Moss, The Body Shop, Reebok, Johnie Walker, Primal Scream, Siouxsie and the Banshees o Nina Campbell, y a canadienses como K.D. Lang. Asimismo, la novelista inserta pedazos de la cultura y la lengua anglosajona y los combina en la historia de tal forma que no se percibe algo extraño o ajeno, ubicando a España en los canales de la globalización. Así, Beatriz revela: “[E]n inglés puedo describirlo mejor que en español. *I fancied him*” (261), refiriéndose a los sentimientos que tiene por su nuevo amante escocés Ralph. Exalta así la lengua inglesa, que puede expresar ciertas emociones incluso mejor que la española y que ella es capaz de utilizar sin dificultad. La novela incluye también anglicismos: *lifting*, *modelling*, *peeling*, *squat*, música *jungle*, *trance* y *lounge*; e incluso inserta frases en inglés a lo largo de la historia. Algunos ejemplos son: “No va a hacerte daño. Déjate llevar. *Go with the flow*” (262), o “Todo lo que podría, y no podría, y no podía, dar y recibir. *For all the lovers and sweethearts we’ll never meet*” (305). De esta manera, da además por supuesto que el lector va a entender el inglés aunque España ha tenido, y sigue teniendo, una de los niveles de inglés más bajos de Europa.¹¹

Es importante destacar también que la escritora comienza y termina la novela con dos textos en inglés, es decir, que las referencias a la cultura anglosajona no aparecen solamente dentro de la historia y a través de los personajes. El primer texto son unos versos que pertenecen a Christina Georgina Rosetti, poetisa británica del siglo XIX; el segundo es parte de la canción ‘Celebrate your life’, del grupo británico de música electrónica The Beloved y que pertenece al

¹¹ <http://www.elmundo.es/sociedad/2017/01/12/5877581fe2704e79538b4666.html>

álbum *Conscience* publicado en 1993. Etxebarria incluye con frecuencia textos en inglés en sus novelas escritas en español. Lo novedoso e interesante es que de una manera implícita da por supuesto que el lector conoce perfectamente la cultura anglosajona, haciéndole sentirse parte de los efectos de la globalización. En la obra no se especifica quién es Christina Georgina Rosetti ni *The Beloved*, ni tampoco se traducen los textos. De este modo, la autora está dando por hecho que su público es capaz de entender el inglés y que conoce y consume la música y la literatura que ella menciona. Sin embargo, Etxebarria no escribía solamente para aquellos que eran capaces de entender el inglés, sino que proponía una lectura de masas con un marcado carácter populista y utilizaba un lenguaje ágil y coloquial, muchas veces más cercano al lenguaje audiovisual que al literario. Involucraba así tanto a lectores educados como a otros que no lo eran tanto, haciendo sentir al público general que, aunque probablemente nunca llegaría a formar parte de esa élite instruida y burguesa a la que pertenecían Etxebarria y sus personajes, podían conectar y sentirse parte de ella. De una manera indirecta, esto proveía al lector de las connotaciones positivas y de carácter hegemónico que Estados Unidos y Reino Unido representaban.

No solo las historias de las novelas favorecen que se imagine a España dentro de los circuitos globales, la imagen de la propia escritora también contribuye en este aspecto. Christine Henseler declara que “[S]us textos, traducidos a unas trece lenguas, han tenido un largo seguimiento en Francia, Alemania y en Escocia, donde la Universidad de Aberdeen la honró con un Doctorado Honoris Causa en el 2000. En los Estados Unidos su trabajo ha ganado considerable interés al centrarse los estudiosos en el marketing de su persona” (508). Por otro lado, Pilar Escobias-Lloret manifiesta en *Las representaciones de la mujer en la cultura Hispánica* que en “esta era moderna en que vivimos, era de tecnología y globalización, de

cultura popular y cultura de masas vemos cómo las mujeres de Etxebarria son extrapolables a otros países, contextos y culturas de los post-modernos años 90” (115). Además, es fácil encontrar comparaciones de la escritora con personalidades del mundo anglosajón. Henseler expuso al referirse a la ropa que llevaba al recoger el premio Nadal en 1998 que “se parecía a la de la cantante de pop Madonna personificando a la «chica material» {*material girl*)” (506); mientras que un artículo publicado en el periódico El País ese mismo año la denominaba como la: “Spice Girl de nuestra narrativa más reciente”.¹² Asimismo, su obra y su discurso están repletos de alusiones a textos feministas norteamericanos y europeos. Como Escabias-Lloret advierte, “las diversas y distintas mujeres que aparecen a lo largo de su obra representan algunas de las teorías expuestas por el feminismo europeo y americano, unidas a su propia experiencia como mujer española” (116). El concepto del género como construcción cultural que la estadounidense Judith Butler teorizó a principios de los noventa, aparece con frecuencia en sus obras. Este vínculo personal que Lucía Etxebarria tiene con el mundo anglosajón es muy importante en la manera en que el público le percibe a ella y a sus obras. P.D Marshall afirma “[T]he material reality of the celebrity sign –that is, the actual person who is the core of representation – disappears into a cultural formation of meaning” (57).¹³ Es por ello que no puede desasociarse a la novelista de sus personajes. Etxebarria influye en la visión que el lector tiene de Beatriz y viceversa; especialmente por las características autobiográficas de la novela. En la *Letra Futura* (2000), la autora reveló que la historia surgió a partir de “diferentes historias vividas en mi adolescencia: la relación con una de mis mejores amigas, politoxicómana que se dedicaba a comerciar con drogas para poder financiarse su consumo” (37); a lo que añadió:

¹² Vila-Matas, Enrique, «Compañeros de viaje». *El País* 1 de enero de 1998: 28.
http://elpais.com/diario/1998/01/07/cultura/884127610_850215.html

¹³ La realidad material del signo de la celebridad -es decir, la persona real que es el núcleo de la representación- desaparece en una formación cultural de significado.

“empezaron a invadir mis páginas trasuntos de algunos de los sujetos que yo había conocido durante mis estancias en Edimburgo” (39). Además, ambas han residido en Madrid y Edimburgo, y han estudiado la carrera universitaria de Filología Inglesa lo que las convierte en expertas a nivel académico no solo del idioma inglés, sino que han profundizado en la cultura anglosajona a través de la literatura y la lengua.

La significativa popularidad de Lucía Etxebarria y sus características como escritora mediática son fundamentales también en la legitimización de esta política exterior. Su primera publicación fue una biografía novelada titulada *La historia de Kurt y Courtney: aguanta esto* (1996) –ambos músicos estadounidenses–. Un año después, contando con el apoyo de la reconocida escritora Ana María Matute, saltó a la fama con *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* (1997), su primera novela. A partir de este momento ha publicado trece libros de narrativa, tres de poesía, nueve de ensayo, dos obras de teatro y ha participado en cuatro guiones cinematográficos. Además, ha recibido numerosos y prestigiosos premios literarios. Entre 1998 y 2004 recibió tres de los más importantes premios literarios españoles (el Premio Nadal¹⁴ por *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* en 1998, el Premio Primavera¹⁵ por *De todo lo visible y lo invisible* en 2001 y el Premio Planeta¹⁶ por *Un milagro en equilibrio* en 2004). Juan Senís Fernández declara que “ningún escritor, ninguna escritora de alrededor de cuarenta años . . . puede presumir de haber ganado tantos y tan importantes premios en tan poco tiempo” (213). Este tipo de reconocimientos aportan un valor distintivo a los textos que permite influenciar de manera

¹⁴ El Premio Nadal se entregó por primera vez en 1945 y es el premio literario más antiguo de España. Es otorgado por la editorial Ediciones Destino a la mejor obra inédita y su dotación actual es de 18.000 €.

¹⁵ Premio concedido anualmente desde 1997 por la editorial Espasa y el Ámbito Cultural de El Corte Inglés a una novela inédita en lengua castellana. Fue dotado con 200.000€ hasta 2012, y desde 2013 el ganador recibe €100.000. Lucía Etxebarria recibió treinta millones de pesetas en 2001.

¹⁶ El Premio Planeta lo concede la editorial Planeta a la mejor obra inédita desde 1952. Se trata de un premio literario comercial que otorgó 40.000 pesetas en su primera edición y que ha ido aumentando hasta los 601.000 € en la actualidad.

significativa a los lectores y repercute en la manera en la que se percibe la obra y, al mismo tiempo, la situación histórica, social y política en la que fue escrita. Asimismo, Sally Perret relata en su tesis doctoral¹⁷ que los premios literarios con frecuencia intervienen en la construcción de la identidad nacional. Apunta que “the institutions that sponsor literary awards—public and private alike—are also able to use prize-winning works to promote their own financial and/or political agendas” (3).¹⁸ Los premios son una forma de controlar la cultura por parte del gobierno y de las editoriales, y los galardones entregados a Lucía Etxebarria provenían de las editoriales más influyentes de España: Editorial Planeta, Ediciones Destino y Editorial Espasa. Estas empresas buscan publicar libros comerciales y carentes de controversia. En este sentido, no es sorprendente que *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* legitime las decisiones más representativas del gobierno de la época.

Tras la publicación de su primera novela *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* en 1997 se convirtió en un referente de la cultura popular de la época y se le asocia con la generación literaria surgida a mediados de los años noventa, denominada Generación X o del Kronen, de la que forman parte artistas jóvenes. Esta generación es muy importante porque como Helen Graham y Jo Labanyi manifiestan, la juventud de los noventa se convirtió en “the official image of Spain” (264).¹⁹ Los artistas de la Generación X se caracterizan por la ausencia de referencias al pasado histórico reciente para enfocarse en la cultura anglosajona, la cultura popular y los avances tecnológicos. Asimismo, revolucionaron el panorama cultural del momento al establecer su propio ‘star system’ y al ocupar un lugar privilegiado en los medios de comunicación masivos y el espacio público. José Colmeiro apunta que el fenómeno de la Generación X:

¹⁷ "The National Award in Narrative Literature and the Role of Art in Democratic Spain (1977–2011)."

¹⁸ Las instituciones que patrocinan premios literarios –tanto públicos como privados- también pueden usar trabajos premiados para promover sus propias agendas financieras y/o políticas.

¹⁹ La imagen oficial de España.

echa mano del concepto manido de “generación” favorecido por su larga trayectoria en la historiografía literaria española y su cómoda instalación en el imaginario cultural español, así como por su co-existencia en el mundo anglosajón como “Generation X” a raíz de la publicación de Douglas Coupland *Generation X. Tales from an Accelerated Culture* en 1991. En este caso, se produce la “feliz” coincidencia de la inercia crítica nacional y del mimetismo y dependencia cultural del extranjero, especialmente de la industria del cine, la televisión, la música y la literatura de los Estados Unidos, que son fomentados por la hegemonía cultural producto de la globalización económica (9).

A partir de los años noventa la literatura está enmarcada en una sociedad neoliberalista y consumista que daba más valor a las preferencias del lector individual que a los criterios literarios más tradicionales. Cristina Moreiras Menor explica que en esta época la producción cultural cambió significativamente “en sus formas narrativas, en sus modelos culturales, en su desinterés por el pasado, en su inmersión en la sociedad del consumo y el mercado” (25). De esta manera, y como Henseler declara, el trabajo de Etxebarria “debe ser analizado dentro del ambiente cultural de los noventa y del siglo XXI en el cual la contaminación comercial de la industria editorial se topa con las prácticas simuladas de los medios masivos, y donde ambas se fusionan para presentar la fabricación de los autores contemporáneos” (502). La escritora tenía la capacidad de influir en la sociedad debido a su significativa presencia en los medios de comunicación. Tanto por las historias que narraba en sus novelas como por su propia imagen, los medios de comunicación comenzaron a mostrar gran interés por ella y aparecía con frecuencia en la televisión, la radio, la prensa e internet.

Este carácter mediático le aportó gran visibilidad y presencia en el ámbito social y pronto

se convirtió en una celebridad. Silvia Bermúdez explica en *Women's Narrative and Film in Twentieth-Century Spain* que “controversy surrounding Etxebarria’s complex presence within cultural establishment needs to be understood as a revealing moment of the late-twentieth-century history of the intertwined links between the business of writing, the changes in the Spanish literary market, and the place of women authors within it” (225).²⁰ El mercado literario y la industria cultural de finales de siglo comenzaron a reclamar actividades nunca asociadas antes a escritores como son las entrevistas acerca de su vida privada, firmas de libros, sesiones fotográficas o participaciones en otros medios no vinculados a la cultura como son por ejemplo los programas del corazón. Como Bell-Metereau et al. explican, “the boundaries between movie stars, television stars, models, singers, and other celebrities have become increasingly permeable” (16).²¹ Lucía Etxebarria posee una exitosa carrera literaria y es una de las autoras más destacadas de su época; pero también pertenece a una categoría supraliteraria porque su influencia en los medios de comunicación trasciende sus discursos literarios y la convierte en transmediática. Es una celebridad y por ello su obra impacta de manera representativa en la sociedad española y merece ser estudiada.

Para concluir, el éxito editorial de la novela y la conquista de los medios de comunicación por parte de la Lucía Etxebarria a finales de los noventa prueban el impacto que sus discursos tenían en la población. Las migraciones físicas y culturales expuestas por la escritora en la novela así como su vínculo personal con el mundo anglosajón permitían imaginar a España dentro de los circuitos globales y legitimaba así las decisiones políticas tomadas en el periodo

²⁰La controversia en torno a la compleja presencia de Etxebarria dentro del establecimiento cultural debe entenderse como un momento revelador en la historia de los vínculos entre el oficio de escritor, los cambios en el mercado literario español y el lugar que ocupan las mujeres escritoras a finales del siglo XX.

²¹ Los límites entre estrellas de cine, de televisión, modelos, cantantes y otras celebridades se han vuelto cada vez más permeables.

histórico gobernado por el Partido Popular en relación con el sistema internacional. A través de la coexistencia de la cultura anglosajona con los personajes españoles, ésta se percibe como algo familiar y no ajeno. Igualmente, se ratificaba el atlantismo que el presidente del gobierno José María Aznar propuso para el país durante sus ocho años al mando del gobierno. Esto impactaba en la manera que los lectores de la obra percibían la realidad y les permitía concebir a España a la altura de las potencias mundiales de habla inglesa.

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Redefining Visibility and Historical Boundaries in Migration Narratives: Judith Ortiz Cofer and Gloria Anzaldúa

ALBA RIVERA
Purdue University

ABSTRACT

I use Gloria Anzaldúa's text *Borderlands* to discuss Judith Ortiz Cofer's autobiographical narrative, *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood*. Ortiz Cofer uses a story-telling or oral form of narration, which allows her to create new scenarios within memory, and thus separate her story from more traditional literary genres. I want to propose that the way Ortiz Cofer writes her text serves the purpose of both affirming and rejecting her Puerto Rican identity and Puerto Rican society's expectations for women. Furthermore, I argue that Ortiz Cofer, like Anzaldúa, subscribes to the need for a queer re-telling of the past in order to have a more accurate idea of the impact of women and story telling in the formation of identity for Puerto Rican women. She postulates a side of Puerto Rican culture revolving around female figures, and thus provides a way to re-invent femininity within the context of an Americanized Puerto Rican society. Ortiz Cofer defies the notion of historical memory by fictionalizing the idea of a memoir and creating a text that allows for a subjective reading of the past. She questions the male-centered creation of history by proposing that it is mainly women who have the job to influence learning, education, and gender roles that make up cultural learning.

Keywords: *border, memory, History, culture, transition.*

RESUMEN

Utilizo el texto *Borderlands* de Gloria Anzaldúa para analizar la narración autobiográfica de Judith Ortiz Cofer, *Silent Dancing: A Partial remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood*. Ortiz Cofer escribe su narración en un estilo oral, que le permite re-crear algunas escenas de su vida dentro de la memoria y así separar su historia de los géneros literarios más tradicionales. Quiero proponer que la forma en que Ortiz Cofer escribe su texto tiene el propósito de afirmar y rechazar su identidad puertorriqueña y las expectativas de la sociedad puertorriqueña para las mujeres. Además, argumento que Ortiz Cofer, al igual que Anzaldúa, suscribe la necesidad de narrar de manera diferente el pasado histórico para presentar una visión más específica del papel de las mujeres y la narración de historias en la formación de la identidad de los roles de géneros en la sociedad puertorriqueña. Ella postula un lado de la cultura puertorriqueña que gira en torno a las figuras femeninas, y así proporciona una manera de reinventar la feminidad dentro del contexto de una sociedad puertorriqueña americanizada. Ortiz Cofer desafía la noción de memoria histórica al hacer ficción la memoria y crear un texto que permita una lectura subjetiva del pasado. La autora cuestiona la creación de la historia oficial centrada en la masculinidad al proponer que son principalmente las mujeres las que tienen el trabajo de influir en el aprendizaje, la educación y los roles de género que conforman el aprendizaje cultural.

Palabras clave: *frontera, memoria, Historia, cultura, transición.*

The act of writing down oral narratives can function as an act of affirmation of the individual or of the self as well as a rejection of the oppressive values of a society. Gloria Anzaldúa, for example, dissects the act of writing as a form of resistance in itself in her text *Borderlands*, where she also argues for the reevaluation of immigrant women as a force for social change within their social context. The use of memory and its subjectivity can greatly influence the way that memoirs and autobiographical texts function with regards to fostering a specific feminine community. The creation of a female collective is a goal for Anzaldúa in *Borderlands*, with a particular emphasis on the kinds of border crossing that woman of color face in the process of migration between countries or communities. In this article, I will focus on a Puerto Rican author who discusses the dynamic between being a woman of color and the connection between migration and writing. I utilize Anzaldúa's border theory in order to contextualize Judith Ortiz Cofer's autobiographical text *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* within the discourse of Latina immigrant narratives. Ortiz Cofer approaches the subject of memory through the lens of re-creation of the past by means of story telling. Her writing focuses on a storytelling or oral form of narration, which allows her to create, add or subtract from her story in order to accomplish a purpose of breaching an established border, be it physical or metaphorical. Furthermore, I propose that Ortiz Cofer purposely ends her narrative with an evaluation of the intersection of gender and cultural identity, and the effect it should have on how society evaluates femininity and masculinity within her society's cultural parameters.

Ortiz Cofer organizes her text around an evaluation of culture, particularly, how is culture comprised and understood. Gender and ethnic identity greatly shape her conception of cultural understanding, and the author strongly integrates that into her narrator's journey. Two ways in

which she achieves this are by placing the grandmother (Mamá), and her storytelling as a driving force behind the narrator's development and understanding of gender, *and* by introducing the episode titled "Marina" in the final chapter of her text. In this episode, Ortiz Cofer invites the reader to perceive gender performativity as a construct that allows for flexibility within the established gender norms, as opposed to the rigid structure that she presents as ubiquitous throughout most of her text. Having Mamá as the central figure of her recollections plays a vital role in understanding several things. The first is that she calls attention to the fact that mother-daughter relationships play a central role in the formation of a family culture and the passing down of family history, and suggests how these ideas eventually become what forms society. The second is that she draws a parallel between the lessons that women are teaching other women and the options a woman has, as far as accessing her own agency and sexuality. *Silent Dancing* becomes a critique of the restrictive discourse being propagated, at times, by women and how it affects every aspect of cultural formation, including the man's role in the household. Ortiz Cofer's text juxtaposes this conflict with the setting of immigration and its effect on the formation of cultural values through the example of her family, which acts as a microcosm of Puerto Rican culture.

Ortiz Cofer's creation of Puerto Rican culture revolving around female figures envisions a way to view femininity within the context of an americanized Puerto Rican culture that does not include one cultural expression being swallowed up by the other entirely. As with Anzaldúa's idea of writing, Ortiz Cofer defies the notion of historical memory by altering the idea of a memoir and creating a text that allows for a subjective reading of the past. She defies the male-centered creation of history by proposing that it is mainly women, in fact, who have the job to create learning, education, and gender roles. Ortiz Cofer identifies a division between what

she has learned from her grandmother and from her family's experience of fluctuating between Puerto Rico and the U.S, where she encounters men and women in roles that were different from what she had seen growing up in her own family. Ortiz Cofer's understanding of gender identity revolves on the identification of gender roles in her society and identifying the ways that they may be stretched or enhanced in order to make way for the "other." People like her narrator, who struggles to navigate a dual cultural identity based on the strict gender guidelines set forth for her in her grandmother's lessons on womanhood.

Arguments surrounding gender identity are extensively varied from their terminology to their analysis. With regards to gender conception and feminine cultural construction, one of several important critics is Judith Butler. Butler's gender theory is a prime example of a commonly accepted understanding of gender in socio-academic environments. In *Gender Troubles* she proposes that, "If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed gender" (10). It is relevant to clarify that, in this study, I do not argue that Ortiz Cofer subscribes to the form of gender or queer theory that dismisses binary gender altogether. In fact, I argue that she affirms a binary understanding of gender but attempts to push beyond the established, culturally defined roles, and this way to some degree, agrees with the aspect of gender theory that proposes a performative element to gender identity, and thus to cultural identity formation. With her narrator's journey through her memories of feminine community construction at the foot of other women and her interactions with her friends and neighbors in the U.S., she was forced to acknowledge the possibility of a re-evaluation of her understanding of gender boundaries in order to conceptualize her own self.

In her text, *Silent Dancing*, Ortiz Cofer challenges the idea of historical memory as the only accepted social narrative and construct of identity. Her text is narrated through memories, which are based on her physical oscillation between Puerto Rico and the United States. Approaching Ortiz Cofer's memoir from an academic perspective, the idea of using memory as a historical tool can be problematic. However, Ortiz Cofer is aware of this subjectivity, and her project is constructed inherently as a partial remembrance, indicating her purpose is beyond telling her story and geared more towards investigating something else. Duncan Koerber conducted a study precisely to identify whether it is possible to gain a purely objective view of history or an event in history. He had his students follow a survey to tell their own personal histories and document the challenges they faced in the areas of memory, selectivity, and truth. In his findings, he concluded that, "[p]ersonal narrative can thus accomplish goals of both expressivist and social constructivist pedagogies for the beginning history student: engaging students in writing—and writing history—while exposing them to the discursive production of knowledge" (65). Koerber subscribes to the idea that historians, or people who tell history, can never be truly objective, and that there is true inquisitive value in constructing a more social view of history. Ortiz Cofer's personal story is closely woven with the historical relationship of Puerto Rico and the United States. Therefore, her memoir is a way of teaching history in a more personal way to the Latino/a and American communities. Furthermore, in order to examine Latino/a history more accurately in a modern setting, texts like Anzaldúa's and Ortiz Cofer's function as tools to reevaluate and address the need to address Latina immigrant women's histories in the U.S., and thus redefine their visibility and interaction in contemporary culture. In another study geared towards understanding the importance of modifying the way history is taught, Cinthia Salinas investigates the relevance of personal narratives in the effectiveness of

historical transmission in the classroom in Latino/a communities. She argues that “[i]n order for Latina/o teacher education candidates to recognize other ways of knowing, we advance critical historical inquiry as a pedagogical practice that pays overt attention to issues such as race, immigration, language, culture, phenotype, surname, and others” (266). Pushing forward in this paper, I investigate the elements of Ortiz Cofer’s text that challenge certain aspects of conventionally accepted facets of Latina experiences with migration to and within the U.S.

In Ortiz Cofer’s text, the shock of cultures between Puerto Rican and North American provides the backdrop for her awakening to the need for a revision of the male centered history of her culture. This concept of a growing consciousness resonates with Gloria Anzaldúa’s theory in her text *Borderlands*, and principally in her construction of “The New Mestiza Consciousness.” While Anzaldúa writes her text mainly referring to the Chicana movement the conscious need for a hybrid gender identity, I argue that her argument for feminine visibility can be accessed as well by all women of color, with a clear example in Ortiz Cofer’s memoir.

According to Anzaldúa, women of color should write their stories, in order to reveal their reality to others and to themselves. In the act of writing, women can find a common ground with one another that transcends the space of ethnicity. In an essay titled “A Letter to Third World Women Writers,” Anzaldúa explains, “[w]hy am I compelled to write[...]Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me [...] I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you[...]to discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself to achieve autonomy” (83-84). The act of writing down stories and histories for Anzaldúa serves the purpose, then, to right wrongs and reveal lies. Ortiz Cofer aims for precisely the same thing. She is included in the same

collection of essays as Anzaldúa for her piece titled, “The Myth of the Latin Woman,” in which she states the following:

The transformation, as I see it, has to occur at a much more individual level. My personal goal in my public life is to try to replace the old pervasive stereotypes and myths about Latinas with a much more interesting set of realities. Every time I give a reading, I hope the stories I tell [...] can achieve some universal truth which will get my audience past the particulars of my skin color, my accent, or my clothes. (115)

Both of these women defy not only the patriarchal ideas of their communities, but also pay particular attention to ways that women can help combat them. For both Ortiz Cofer and Anzaldúa, writing and recording their knowledge is a personal process, and it is with this personal process that change can begin to take place on a larger scale.

For Ortiz Cofer, writing down the stories from the oral narratives of her childhood serves a specific purpose, and she pays particular attention to genre and language as she puts them together. In the preface to her text, she describes her purpose in composing it as follows: “I wanted to try to connect myself to the threads of lives that have touched mine and at some point converged into the tapestry that is my memory of childhood” (13). This idea of creating a personal connection with herself and those who had influenced her life resonates in significant ways with Anzaldúa’s defense of writing for women of color. It implies that there is an alternate story to tell about the construction of social relationships. Anzaldúa and Ortiz Cofer both speak to Hispanic communities with strong ties to the United States, which indicates that they are aware of their audience when writing. Their writing is a deliberate performance of authenticity,

self proclaiming the telling of an alternate history, and they interestingly also choose to write in English.

The act of writing down stories constitutes a form of establishing permanence, particularly in a historical context, a way to critique an established way of thinking about a topic or a specific group of people. In a short essay titled “Language as an Instrument of Domination,” Rosario Castellanos interprets the significance of the Spanish language as a force of domination during the conquest of the “New World,” and a way to further stratify class, surpassing the boundaries of ethnicity and gender. She urges her readers to also write, and to consider the act of writing and dominating the written word as a way to create equality:

The meaning of a word is its addressee: the other being who hears it, understands it, and who, when he answers, converts his questioner into a listener and understander, establishing in this way the relationship of dialogue that is only possible between beings who consider themselves and deal with each other as equals. (76-77)

She does not write on behalf of women alone, but she acknowledges the strength of language, and more importantly of the written word, as a means of liberation and mutual understanding. She affirms the power of language as having a dual nature, to either subjugate or to equalize, and exhorts her audience to use it for the latter. This use and interpretation of written language is significant if we understand the way Anzaldúa and Ortiz Cofer use the English language as a recognition and understanding of their audience, and as a desire to insert their narratives, equally into the cultural history of both United States and Hispanic literary traditions. English is the ‘mother tongue’ of ‘neither’; however, it seems that with this choice they desire to bring their stories out of isolation and present them to a broader audience in terms of gender and ethnicity.

Ortiz Cofer chose to write her text in English, I argue, to show the degree of overlapping between Puerto Rican and American cultures. Her text in English will certainly be accessible to American readers, and as her prologue makes clear, she intends to dispel incorrect ideas about Puerto Rican women specifically, specifically, that she should write her story in Spanish. She chooses to write in what Joseph Novakovich and Robert Shapard would call the “stepmother tongue” in their collection of short stories titled *Stories in the Stepmother Tongue*. In this collection, Novakovich and Shapard include authors like Judith Ortiz Cofer and Julia Alvarez in order to demonstrate the different objectives that could be achieved by choosing English as the language of their writing. According to the editors, a stepmother tongue is, “a term that should simply indicate an expanding family” (12). They argue, much like Castellanos in her essay, that language, in this case English, can act as an oppressor or a form of liberation for immigrants in the United States. Ortiz Cofer accepts Spanish and English as languages that have shaped her understanding of herself and her place in society, and chooses to write her memories in English. According to Novakovich and Shapard, “[s]imultaneous knowledge of two languages gives one a kind of stereo-perceptiveness, so that in either language one can benefit from the subliminal and liminal dialogue with the remaining language” (13). In her input to this collection Alvarez acknowledges the importance of Spanish in her English writing. She describes that, “Spanish certainly was the language of storytelling...but in the writing, I want both present, and so I often say, ‘I write my Spanish in English’” (218). Similarly, in order for Ortiz Cofer’s message to be understood by her targeted audience she accepts the differences between her environments, and the impact of her chosen language. Much of her experience of immigration consisted in fluctuating constantly between living in Puerto Rico and living in the United States for extended

periods of time, and attempting to accept and affirm only one culture was impossible to her; and cultural identity would have been inaccessible to her if not for the transience of language.

Ortiz Cofer seems to be conscious of the strength of the written word when she deliberately chooses to compose her autobiographical text both in English and in a manner that allows the freedom of interpretation. She states in her preface that she “wanted the essays to be, not just family history, but also a creative exploration of known territory” (12). The concept of storytelling is what starts off Ortiz Cofer’s desire to study more about how her identity was formed, and translate that into an approachable experience for her readers. Ortiz Cofer organizes her memories into short stories, or what she calls *ensayos*, that contain the history of her family as well as memories that describe her relationship with U.S. immigration as a Puerto Rican woman.

Silent Dancing begins with a young female narrator who presents the reader with a snapshot of her life. Her family moving between Paterson, New Jersey due to her father’s career with the Navy, and the *pueblo* where her mother’s family lived, which is also the setting where Mamá narrated the stories to her children and grandchildren. Ortiz Cofer begins her narratives by telling her readers about a story recounting the life of one of the town “crazies” named *María la Loca*, to which she responds with the following thought:

María la Loca interested me, as did all the eccentrics and “crazies” of our pueblo. Their weirdness was a measuring stick I used in my serious quest for a definition of “normal.” As a Navy brat, shuttling between New Jersey and the pueblo, I was constantly made to feel like an oddball by my peers, who made fun of my two-way accent...being the outsiders had already turned my brother and me into cultural chameleons. (17)

Therefore, her narrative begins with an examination of her idea of “self” and normality. Her ideas about what is normal for Puerto Rican culture will be challenged by her family’s relocation to the United States. Ortiz Cofer will learn about normality for a Puerto Rican woman at the foot of her family’s matriarch and struggle to fit into this image as she faces Puerto Rican stereotypes in the U.S. She also struggles to fit in this mold as she realizes the true intent and result of her grandmother’s stories on the women she is telling them to.

Mamá’s home serves not only as the stage but also the reservoir where women were instructed on how to act around men and what their duties consisted of as wives and mothers. The narrator describes that when the men and boys left for work and play, “Then Mamá’s house belonged only to us women. The aroma of coffee perking in the kitchen, the mesmerizing creaks and groans of rockers, and the women telling their lives in *cuentos* are forever woven into my imagination [...] her voice convincing me of the power of story-telling” (19). The house itself was made up of rooms for all of Mamá’s 8 children, which her husband added as each of them were born. The narrator provides a vivid description of it and how her grandmother could “tell you the history of each room in her *casa*, and thus the genealogy of the family along with it” (23). This woman appears to be central not only to the women’s narratives but even above the position of her husband, who does his part to earn money and builds the house as Mamá specifies, but does not have an active role in any other aspect of the narrative. He is confined to the back room of the house, where he meets his clients for whom he acts as a medium. In fact, the narrator specifically makes a point of noting that it was because the men were always absent that the women were in charge of carrying on real life at home.

Mamá’s storytelling awakens the curiosity about the power of language in Ortiz Cofer’s narrator. Mamá’s stories about women had a strong impact considering that the girls who were

listening understood that they were meant to be cautionary tales. Mamá presented *María la Loca's* story, for instance, as a cautionary tale about what happened to a woman who was not careful enough to protect her body before marriage, and the consequence is that she was left at the altar and became crazy. Maria la Loca's story represented the concept that marriage was the ideal state for a woman, and men only agreed to marriage in order to be able to produce heirs. Mamá's stories served as a vehicle to warn other women to be sure they adhered strictly to the societal norms established, but at her young age, the narrator could not yet understand them this way. Instead, she idealized them for a long time until they became a challenge for her as she became an immigrant and faced a new values system in the U.S. Ortiz Cofer describes the stories in the following way:

It was on these rockers that my mother, her sisters and my grandmother sat on these afternoons of my childhood to tell their stories, teaching each other and my cousin and me what it was like to be a woman, more specifically, a Puerto Rican woman [...] the morality and cautionary tales told by the women in our family for generations: stories that became a part of my subconscious as I grew up in two worlds. (14-15)

In great part, this became the narrator's first form of education. It was important for her to learn her place in society as a Puerto Rican woman. This will be a source of tension later on between the narrator and her mother as the concept of Puerto Rican cultural identity will shift for each generation with the "americanization" of the island. Ortiz Cofer will face the need for change and evolution in her definition of identity, while her mother will struggle to retain the root of hers without changing it in the U.S.

This idea of cultural education is one echoed in Anzaldúa's theory of *Borderlands*. Her text deals with the Mexican-American community and the Chicana movement. However, her exposition of the place of woman is strikingly similar to the options presented to Ortiz Cofer as expressed in her memoir. Anzaldúa writes:

Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them. How many times have I heard mothers and mothers-in-law tell their sons to beat their wives for not obeying them, for being “hociconas” (big mouths) [...] [f]or expecting their husbands to help with the rearing of children and the housework, for wanting to be something other than housewives? [...] [f]or a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as mother. Today some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons. (16-17)

Ortiz Cofer echoes this same claim in *Silent Dancing* as well: “If you did not get married, you became a nun, or you entered ‘la vida’ as a prostitute. Of course there were some professions a woman could practice [...] until you found a man to marry. The worse fate was to end up alone” (141). Both Ortiz Cofer and Anzaldúa highlight the centrality of patriarchy in Latin culture. However, they also denounce women as the ones who carry it out and are responsible for propagating it. It is at this point that Ortiz Cofer recognizes, like Anzaldúa, that if the cultural identity can become hybrid, it must be possible as well that sexuality and gender roles which are a part of it are not necessarily fixed either.

When the narrator is in the third grade, they return to Paterson because her father had returned from his assignment with the navy. She tells of an incident that occurred because she

had forgotten most of her English and did not understand the instructions the teacher had given them. She asked a boy in her class what she needed to do and he lied to make a joke at her expense, for which she was reprimanded by a sharp blow to the head with a book. The narrator tells that:

Startled and hurt, I turned around expecting to find one of the bad boys in my class, but it was Mrs. D. I faced. I remember her angry face, her fingers on my arms pulling me back to my desk, and her voice saying incomprehensible things to me in a hissing tone. Someone finally explained to her that I was new, that I did not speak English...I instinctively understood then that language is the only weapon a child has against the absolute power of adults. I quickly built up an arsenal of words by becoming an insatiable reader of books. (66)

It's precisely this moment where the narrator realizes she must become different from what her mother expects from her. She cannot ignore English and remain expectantly awaiting a return to Puerto Rico if she wants to survive in the U.S. Her mother has done precisely that, which the narrator describes as how "[s]he kept herself 'pure' for her eventual return to the island by denying herself a social life [...] by never learning but the most basic survival English; and by her ability to create an environment in our home that was a comfort to her, but a shock to my senses" (127). Her mother upholds the idea that women belong in the interior space of the home, and combined that with her desire to not put down roots in the U.S., creating a split of sorts between her and her daughter. Language and communication become essential tools for the narrator's survival in straddling two different cultures, and also became the main separating force that placed her in a different category of woman from her mother.

In her essay, “Las voces maternas en *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* de Judith Ortiz Cofer,” Maria Esther Quintana Millamoto delineates precisely this stratification of the mother-daughter relationships in Ortiz Cofer’s text. Each relationship is affected by the introduction of U.S. culture to the Puerto Rican lifestyle. Quintana Millamoto proposes that:

Ortiz Cofer dramatiza en *Silent Dancing* la falta de reconocimiento en los Estados Unidos de la importancia de la lengua materna, y enfatiza el papel devaluado de la madre latina como educadora y transmisora cultural. Describe el impacto que dicha ausencia de respeto y reconocimiento de su lengua y de su cultura, provocó, en su caso, un sentimiento de alienación por ser la única estudiante puertorriqueña en la escuela secundaria privada a la que asistía[...]Esta exclusión la presiona a que domine los códigos de lenguaje y conducta angloamericanos y la motiva a separarse de su madre debido a la otredad que ella representa y que Judith intenta trascender. (125)¹

The narrator, then, feels more deeply the need to belong or at least adapt to U.S. culture, and can no longer ignore its influence when she returns to Puerto Rico later on. Her desire, or Anzaldúa would call it ‘ambition,’ makes her deviate from the model of Puerto Rican woman and this separates her visibly from what she was brought up to understand as her role as ‘woman.’

It should not be understood, nonetheless, that the narrator is devaluating her grandmother’s teaching. Like Anzaldúa, Ortiz Cofer recognizes as restrictive of women’s

¹ Ortiz Cofer emphasizes in her text the United State’s lack of recognition of the importance of the mother’s dialect, and emphasizes the devalued role of the Latina mother as educator and cultural transmitter. She describes the impact that said lack of respect and recognition of her language and culture, caused, in her case, a feeling of alienation for being the only Puerto Rican student in the private secondary school she attended...This exclusion pressures her master the Anglo-American language and behavior codes and motivates her to separate from her mother due to the otherness that she represents and that Judith tries to transcend (125).

potential the failure in the teaching that has occurred by women and for women in her culture. Towards the end of her text, she recognizes the shift within herself; she feels the awakening of a conscience about the reality of her gender and cultural education. She states: “I still relished and memorized Mamá’s *cuENTOS*, but by then I was beginning to recognize the subtext of sexual innuendo, to detect the sarcasm, and to find the hidden clues to their true feelings of frustrations in their marriages and their narrowly circumscribed lives as women in Puerto Rico” (142). She could recognize it and understand that by writing she could change her own situation, and maybe more than that. She did not condemn her grandmother for her teaching, but understood it for what it was. Mamá taught them only what she could from what she learned from her culture and experience.

In her book *Kissing the Mango Tree: Puerto Rican Women Rewriting American Literature*, Carmen Rivera analyzes Ortiz Cofer’s work, including *Silent Dancing*. She dissects how Ortiz Cofer both adopted and rejected the storytelling aspect of her grandmother’s teachings. Rivera writes, “Like the grandmother, Ortiz Cofer uses storytelling to dismantle traditional behavioral paradigms and to invoke a ‘magical’ transformation that empowers women to gain control of their bodies, their minds, their sexuality, their own space, and ultimately their lives” (157). Mamá’s stories were meant to caution women how not to lose the power they had within the patriarchal system that was already established. Ortiz Cofer adopts the oral-narrative writing style as an affirmation of the role of women in preserving and forming culture, but at the same time uses it to urge women to deviate from the established system. Her memoir-style narration provides the freedom to experiment with the past and use her memory as a vehicle for re-evaluating cultural formation, how women view what they have learned and how they have learned it.

The development of narrator's cultural identity in the text is comprised by much more than an ethnic comprehension of her dual composition of Latina immigrant in the U.S. She very much comes to terms with her conception of gender roles and their dissemination in the contrast between her and her mother, which has served as a backdrop for her comparisons throughout the memoir. It is in the final *ensayo* of her text before the epilogue and, in my opinion, the most suggestive of the purpose for the text overall. In this *ensayo* titled "Marina" which I mentioned earlier in this study, the narrator describes a time later in her life, when she has a job of her own, her father is dead and her mother has moved back to her beloved hometown. She describes her relationship with her mother after she has made her choice to leave the island, get educated, married, and become a working mother, and there is a definite divide between the two women. The narrator describes visiting her mother once a year and explains their relationship as she understands it now. She writes: "These yearly pilgrimages to my mother's town where I had been born also, but which I had left at an early age, were for me symbolic of the clash of cultures and generations that she and I represent" (151). It is significant that she would not refer to it as her hometown although she admits to having been born there. She places herself as of there but not from it, thus locating herself outside of the generational and cultural limits of Puerto Rico's culture. It's during one of these visits that the story of Marina is told.

In the second half of the episode, the narrator's mother relates the story of a man named Marino, whose mother raised him as a girl and had him christened as Marina when he was born, unbeknownst to anyone except the maid. This episode is one of Mamá's stories from her childhood that she passed down to her daughters and granddaughters. Mamá describes a setting reminiscent of the connection to the earth and Anzaldúa's female goddesses as she tells of a river where the young, unmarried girls of the town would bathe together, talk, and be completely free

from male intervention: “This was a female place, a pastoral setting where no true *macho* would want to be caught swimming or fishing” (154-55). She describes the river as “crystalline, bordered by thick woods where the most fragrant flowers and herbs could be found” (154). She relates the story in a place outside of the home, a place where women could find a foothold in the real world, still secluded but in the freedom of nature. It was in this place where Marina would join her other female friends, but Mamá made the point to mention that she was shy and modest and never became completely nude amongst the other girls. Her behavior caused the other girls to speculate, with pity, that she was meant for convent life due to her melancholy and modesty. Everything changed when the mayor’s daughter, Kiki, was allowed to join the other girls at the river. Her youthful exuberance was drawn to Marina’s shy demeanor, and the two soon inspired envy amongst the other girls in their closeness. Eventually, they ran away together. Everyone was under the impression they had been kidnapped, until it was revealed in a letter left to Marina’s maid that Marina was in fact a man, and he and Kiki had fallen in love and eloped to be married.

Back in the present, the narrator and her mother have just seen Marino in town with his granddaughter, which prompted her mother to remind her of his story. After observing him and his granddaughter interacting, the narrator asks her mother if she believed he had made a good husband, to which her mother replies:

‘He would know what it takes to make a woman happy’ [...] As I watched the gentle old man and the little girl, I imagined Marina sitting alone on the banks of a river, his heart breaking with pain and wild yearnings, listening to the girls asking questions he could have answered; remaining silent; learning patience, until love would give him the right to reclaim his original body and destiny. Yet

he would never forget the lessons she learned at the *río*—or how to handle fragile things. I looked at my mother and she smiled at me; we now had a new place to begin our search for the meaning of the word woman. (160)

With this quote, Ortiz Cofer ends her text, and up to this point, she has been reworking the understanding of what is permissible for women/men based on the established norms that she was brought up with. Marino's story serves as a visual description that gender does not mean complete separation of men and women in their daily tasks and lives. For the narrator, the idea of a gender identity is something firmly rooted in a cultural understanding of biological sex, but with the possibility to push beyond the boundaries that have been prescribed to each until that point. She finds a way to understand her femininity and decides that language and writing along with storytelling will be her tools in order to empower herself and her generation. She's conscious of the contrast between her mother and herself in the values that they each believe are important. Her mother's traditional view of woman could not function in a society which was becoming more hybridized each day with U.S. influences, even in her small town in Puerto Rico. For instance, what Ortiz Cofer and Anzaldúa have been arguing for in their various texts, that a woman could be both a mother and a worker, as well as outspoken and feminine.

Ortiz Cofer embraces the elements of her female education like her grandmother's stories, and her relationships with other women in her family, but she is also able to embrace the storytelling ritual and use it to communicate something different. She subverts the messages that taught women how to operate within the patriarchal system in which she was raised, and creates a space where gender and sexuality can be questioned. It is at the very end of her text where she proposes this re-evaluation with her story about Marino/a, but throughout all of her memories in this text, she has been slowly chipping away at the image of the traditional Puerto Rican woman.

She takes the reader through a journey of self-awareness, and slowly recognizes the need for a re-structuring of female roles.

Finally, it is important to consider the role of men in the society that Ortiz Cofer and Anzaldúa visualize. Ortiz Cofer depicts men as having the marginal roles in cultural formation, but they still seem to have the control over decisions regarding marriage and children despite the fact that they are absent from the home environment where these things happen most of the time. Carmen Rivera describes this phenomenon as how “[e]ven her father exerts his influence in absentia by constantly sending letters...with detailed instructions for the care and education of his children” (153). Marino’s story serves as an avenue to show how men and women should learn from each other as opposed to functioning in this hierarchical manner. Anzaldúa proposes that there must be a “new breed” of man that emerges as the new mestiza consciousness develops and influences change in women. Ortiz Cofer does not reject her experience as an immigrant; instead she allows it to influence the way she relates to women and shares her experience in order to propose a new way to understand gender in her Puerto Rican culture. Her text reveals the need for a fluidity in the understanding of gender roles in order to create a more productive society, especially in the context of post-colonial imaginaries such as those comprised of the children of Hispanic immigrants growing up in the U.S.

Ortiz Cofer does not propose ways for women to navigate the dual cultural environment in Puerto Rico, nor does she suggest a narrative of assimilation for immigrant women in the US. By concluding her narrative with the story about Marino she seems to be suggesting a different way to understand society, by stating that women have a much more central role in the formation of society and social constructs, such as what constitutes masculinity and femininity. Narratives like hers are short, but they can challenge a discourse that has been widely accepted as

traditional. Alicia Partnoy describes it in the following way, “Some of us are not interested in representing the subaltern, but empowering her, as well as in educating our students and steering them in directions outside of academia and into action so the subaltern is no longer subalternized, deprived of human dignity” (181). The style, genre and language of Ortiz Cofer’s text challenges the official literary tradition, and according to Partnoy allows the embracement of the oral-narrative style as a venue for empowering of the subaltern, both for Anzaldúa and Ortiz Cofer, is represented by women in their respective cultures. Furthermore, I would argue that Ortiz Cofer is suggesting that if women became conscious of the importance of their role in the creation of social constructs and relationships, they could be part of creating a “new” relationship between men and women. The story of Marino/a appears as a suggestive possibility where we can see Anzaldúa’s new mestiza consciousness. There is an optimism for a much more fluid understanding of gender roles and ethnic identity. The epilogue refers again to the ambiguity of historical texts, and suggests to her readers that history and social history are not always “as we remember” (165), so it should be questioned and challenged. She writes female story telling in a forum to be accepted as a way that not only should be considered relevant, but in her opinion, has already been extremely relevant in her culture and its power significant.

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Albany Park Theater Project: Performing Biopolitical Chains and Everyday Resistance of Undocumented Latinxs

STACEY ALEX
The Ohio State University

ABSTRACT

This study examines the theatrical piece *Home/Land*, an Albany Park Theater Project (AFTP) collective creation and ethnographically informed production, for its potential to resist biopolitical national exclusions through counterstorytelling, reclaiming moral arguments, and remaining rooted in the lived experiences of undocumented people. It analyzes AFTP's narrative strategy to offer hope as resistance; hope of survival and hope that the audience will accept their invitation to be part of systemic transformation. It also considers how the curriculum developed by AFTP may be used as a tool to combat the ways that educational institutions stoke fear of racial and cultural "Other".

Keywords: *undocumented, immigration, biopolitics, everyday resistance, counterstorytelling, devised theatre, collective creation*

RESUMEN

Este trabajo examina la obra teatral *Home/Land*, una creación colectiva informada etnográficamente por Albany Park Theater Project (AFTP), por su potencial para resistir exclusiones nacionales y biopolíticas a través del counterstorytelling, la reclamación de argumentos morales, y permanecer enraizado a las experiencias vividas de la gente no documentada. Analiza la estrategia narrativa de AFTP de ofrecer la esperanza como resistencia; la esperanza de sobrevivir y la esperanza de que el público aceptará su invitación para hacerse parte de la transformación sistémica. También considera cómo se puede usar un plan de estudios desarrollado por AFTP para combatir las maneras en que las instituciones educacionales ceban el miedo del "Otro" racial y cultural.

Palabras clave: indocumentados, inmigración, biopolítica, resistencia cotidiana, contra-lecturas, teatro ideado, creación colectiva

Regardless of how effective a theatrical piece is in gaining audience support for undocumented people, it is also important to ask which undocumented people are represented as worthy of such support and protection. For example, focus on the innocence and suffering of undocumented youth often comes at the expense of other undocumented people. Infantilization, even when used by sympathetic parties or advocates for reform, undermines the agency of undocumented people to claim their own subject positions by privileging “ideal” immigrants, such as DREAMers, over the majority. In the face of this infantilization in the media, political discourse, and the paternalistic gaze of some artistic representations, I argue that theatrical works produced in part by undocumented people may potentially counter this strategy by confronting the biopolitical limits that demonize and exclude their subjectivities and by demanding dignity for undocumented lives. This study asks how theatre as a privileged space mediates the stories of undocumented Latinx¹ people to contest biopolitically limited national inclusions by staging deportations, humanizing everyday undocumented resistance, and positioning both undocumented participants and the audience as agents of social change.

In migrant melodrama, Ana Puga demonstrates how a political economy of suffering involves the active trading of migrant suffering as a commodity in publishing/film and as currency for empathy, sympathy, or solidarity, which often encourages this suffering to be perceived as inevitable (228). While recognizing cases of melodrama that move social action, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Puga argues that migrants’ agency is often denied as they are forced into a melodramatic taxonomy of “bad” parents who are punished for their transgression or pitiful victim-heroes who must be forgiven for having prioritized economic opportunity over

¹ I use the term “Latinx” instead of other terms to refer to people of Latin American heritage living in the US (such as Latina/o and Latin@) because it has been taken up by some undocumented activists and academics to resist the limits of binary categories for gender and sexuality and recognize greater fluidity of identities.

family unity (227-36). For this reason, it is crucial to examine work that combats the naturalization of suffering and these divide-and-conquer techniques.

Because deporting all undocumented immigrants in the US is not economically feasible or productive, our current deportation regime is spurred on as a mechanism of control through fear, which creates second class citizens to exploit their labor. Inés Valdez argues in “Punishment, Race, and the Organization of U.S. Immigration Exclusion” that both positive and negative interventions to control immigration are biopolitical because they shape our understanding of race into two groups: those who deserve to have their lives protected, and a racialized, threatening group of immigrants and Latinxs. Valdez asserts that the DREAM Act, although never passed, reinforces the justice of an immigration regime including deportation by dividing undocumented immigrants into worthy and unworthy categories. By portraying undocumented parents as particularly undeserving for having knowingly broken immigration law, opposed to their innocent children, the DREAM Act maintains the myth of meritocracy and legitimizes the exclusion of other immigrants (25).

By extrapolating Jonathon Inda’s arguments about the surveillance and management of migrant women’s bodies, deportation may also be understood as part of a system that biopolitically rationalizes the exclusion of “unworthy” lives to nurture the health of the population. In *Society Must be Defended*, Foucault explains that biopower is a combination of discipline, which controls how individuals behave and become productive workers, and a new technology of power that he terms biopolitics or biopower which collects data on a population to manage the health of an entire population and workforce, not as society, but as man-as-species. In this way, population becomes both a political and biological problem to be regularized (242-47). Biopolitics, “aims to establish a sort of homeostasis, not by training individuals, but by achieving an overall equilibrium that

protects the security of the whole from internal dangers” (249). Whereas sovereign power used to take life to defend itself, State power now makes the population live and lets the unworthy or threatening die (247-78). It is crucial to my analysis here to note that biopolitics is driven by a “regime of truth”, meaning that government abuse of power was formally identified as wickedness is, in present day liberalism, explained as ignorance due to a lack of knowledge (Birth 16-17). The theatrical work examined here endeavors to reclaim a discursive space that can criticize the government’s moral mistakes and responsibilities.

There are a number of theatrical works that expose the biopolitical forces that result in the destruction of undocumented people and their families. For example, MacArthur Foundation Genius-Grant winner Luis Alfaro creates Euripides tale of betrayal and revenge to tell the story of an undocumented mother in “Mojada: A Relocation of Medea”. Another example is Mexican playwright Javier Malpica’s 2006 *Papá está en la Atlántida* (Our Dad Is in Atlantis) which draws on elements from Juan Rulfo’s short story, “No oyes ladrar los perros”. Without directly referring to the violence of the Mexican Revolution and U.S. intervention, they are central in Rulfo’s piece, just as Malpica captures contemporary neoliberal power dynamics between the U.S. and Mexico. The increasing silence of the son in Rulfo and younger brother in Malpica leads the reader to understand that they have died of war wounds and exhaustion trying to find his father by crossing the border, respectively. Both Mexicos, although set nearly one hundred years apart, lack social infrastructure and force their characters to move, in large part due to U.S. economic exploitation. In *Documenting the Undocumented: Latino/a Narratives and Social Justice in the Era of Operation Gatekeeper*, Marta Caminero-Santangelo finds that much of Latinx literature dealing with undocumented immigrants during the Clinton administration focuses on the death and disappearance of border-crossers (2). This study shifts our focus to a story of survival. *Home/Land*

by Albany Park Theater Project (APTP) offers a hopeful narrative; one that demands the audience take action in order for the characters' hope for systemic change to become reality. I choose to examine this production because it counters the neoliberal culture of fear and surveillance by creating a space in which undocumented people themselves may participate in their representation while refusing to buy into the biopolitical dichotomization that divides immigrants into worthy and unworthy categories. It marks the tension between the biopolitical control of the US deportation regime and the agency of the undocumented actors/creators to transform time and space.

The Collective Creation of Albany Park Theater Project

Albany Park Theater Project (APTP) in Chicago strives to remain rooted in lived experiences by inviting undocumented people to give interviews which become the inspiration for their productions. By transcribing and combining these individuals' interviews together with the participation of teen actor-creators, APTP uses collective creation to collaboratively form cohesive performances. Their process demands anonymity because both the undocumented storytellers and teen actors, many who come from families of mixed immigration status, continue to live in their communities. In her introduction to *Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance*, Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva explains that the use of the term “collective creation”, also known as “devised theatre”, depends greatly on the particular sociohistorical context in which it is used. Her working definition, which will be used here is:

The group chooses— or, conversely, a leader within the group proposes— to make theatre using a process that places conscious emphasis on the groupness of that process, on some possible collaborative mode between

members of the group, which is, typically, viewed as being in some manner more collaborative than members of the group have previously experienced. Process is typically of paramount importance; anticipated aesthetic or political outcomes are perceived to derive directly from the proposed mode of interaction. Processual method may well be ideologically driven in so far as— historically, at least— collaborative creation has often constituted a kind of polemic-in-action against prior methodologies that the group has known: an investigation, a reinvigoration, a challenge, an overthrow. The extrinsic and/or oppressive structure, if you will, that the group perceives itself to be challenging through the generation of a new methodology may be aesthetic, institutional, interpersonal, societal, economic, political, ethical, or some admixture thereof. (6-7)

As it was associated with “egalitarian labor distribution, consensual decision making, and sociopolitical revolt”, collective creation rose to prominence as an institutional model through companies such as The Living Theatre, The Agit Prop Street Players, and El Teatro Campesino (2). Although it is popularly understood as emerging from the U.S. in the 1960s, Syssoyeva historicizes collective creation, arguing that it cannot be divorced from a much longer and global history. She finds that collective creation often emerges as a response to previous experience with theatre-making which was perceived as “aesthetically, interpersonally, and/or politically constraining, oppressive, or, in some manner, unethical” (6). For this reason, she suggests that, rather than the manifestation of a singular ideological position, it must be understood as a genre of performance positioned at the intersection of social and aesthetic action. For Syssoyeva, a central question is not whether or not the play existed before all of the participants became involved, but

rather, “What is it that a particular collective perceives as extrinsic to their creative process— what is it that a particular group chooses to contest, change, or reveal through collective praxis?” (6).

In the case of APTP, professional directors, teens, and undocumented community members join to create performances that insist on undocumented immigrants’ right to belong. One example is a 2007 production, *Aquí Estoy*, which featured two plays. The first, *Nine Digits*, is about a young man who realizes he is undocumented when he cannot experience rites of passage such as getting a driver’s license. The second, *Amor de lejos*, deals with the separation of a young working couple. This article will focus on a third production, *Home/Land* because it stages an ICE raid of a family’s home and resistance to deportation. In this way, it contests biopolitical divisions by envisioning a future in which undocumented youth, parents, and single people face common struggles together and remain united.

Since its founding in 1997, the company has worked to foster a “multiethnic, youth theater ensemble that inspires people to envision a more just and beautiful world. We are dedicated to art, to youth, and a vision of social justice” (Albany, Our Mission). When *Home/Land* was performed at the Goodman Theatre in 2013, Resident Artistic Associate Henry Godinez, called attention to the way APTP not only provides a safe space for artistic endeavors but also mentors youth participants through the college application process, making “...a difference on both sides of the stage lights, moving and motivating audiences even as it transforms the lives of its young people” (Godinez). Director and co-founder David Feiner explains APTP provide teens with artistic tools, but that they arrive already having a sense that “there are a different set of possibilities for them in life, different from those they have grown up with or are told exist for them at school or by the media...Albany Park Theater is a place where they can find a home, where they can find dreams that they might be told are fantasies elsewhere and be nurtured and become reality” (). According

to Feiner, and supported by youth testimonials on the company site, APTP offers a safe space in contrast to the violence and poverty of urban America. At the same time, it confronts the root causes of these issues: “On stage, APTP challenges inequality and racism by asking people to bear witness to stories that might otherwise get overlooked or misrepresented” (Albany, Social Justice). Due to this mission and its devising process which draws from community *testimonios*, APTP’s work can also be understood theoretically as collectively practicing counterstorytelling, a pedagogical methodology used by Richard Delgado as “a technique of telling the story of those experiences that are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society) and a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse—the majoritarian story” (Solorzano and Delgado Bernal 327). Counterstorytelling is a powerful tool for transformative change because it resists the totalitarian urge to rely on a single story. For this reason, my analysis of *Home/Land* examines the narrative strategies used by undocumented people and allies so that we may better understand its potential to forge literary and performative resistance and call on their audiences to take action.

Feiner writes that, for *Home/Land*, “We resolved that our play would unflinchingly depict the emotional and physical brutality of this country’s immigration system but also that we would seek out and tell the stories of heroes” (3). Thirty-five teens—many who are undocumented or have undocumented family members— and APTP staff members spent eight months conducting fieldwork with undocumented community members and allies, including activists from Chicago’s second “Coming Out of the Shadows” rally, activist Padre Jose Landaverde of La Misión Señora de Guadalupe, and women “divorced by ICE” because their husbands and the fathers of their children were detained or deported. These people became main characters of *Home/Land* and their interviews informed the script. Feiner says that every interview ended by asking who else APTP

should speak with. By using word of mouth to make contact with ethnographic informants, a strategy often used in smaller social networks to build relationships of trust,² *Home/Land* demonstrates how its ethos is grounded in valuing undocumented immigrants as a crucial source of knowledge and power for social change.

Even before entering the theater or turning the first page, the fragmentation of its title, *Home/Land*, invites audiences to critically examine U.S. exclusions. By dissecting the term into its roots and creating a textual border between them, we are asked to consider how the word “homeland” is both constructed with nativist sentiment and imbued with meaning by our current surveillance state. First, the title disrupts common definitions of the term “homeland” such as Merriam-Webster’s: “native land: Fatherland”, which implies that home may or should be limited to where a person or group of people was born, or through some even more racist perspectives, where their ancestors were born. The title calls attention to the ways migrants construct a feeling of home and belonging across a number of spaces and movements.

Through association with The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the title also works to decenter nationalistic notions about belonging that are often taken for granted. Historically, the U.S. has negotiated ties to immigrants’ home countries that fluidly either incorporate or exclude national and racial groups. DHS is only one recent development in contemporary state rationality described by Foucault as maintaining fear by creating threatening subjects. In a doubling effect, the limitation of government through free market economy has opened up power for a strong police state. In an effort not to govern too much or too little, both legitimize the other and the state’s power to deregulate, incarcerate, and deport in order to protect

² Other examples of Latinx oral history projects that depend on word of mouth to gain access to community members include Elena Foulis’ *Latin@ Stories Across Ohio* and Louis G. Mendoza’s *Conversations Across Our America: Talking About Immigration and the Latinoization of the United States*.

the freedom and health and of the population. In *US Immigration and Its Global Impact*, Erik Camayd-Freixas outlines how Homeland Security shifted its focus from terrorists to working immigrants in order to meet arrest quotas and secure continued funding when terrorists were not as great of a threat as expected after the September 11th attacks (102). In the face of this substitution, *Home/Land* features both Middle Eastern and Latin American undocumented people to highlight their shared racialization and insist on both groups' non-criminal subject positions and potential for solidarity.

The character description in the *Home/Land* script for its 2013 performances at the Goodman Theatre explains how APTP “imagined a family twenty or thirty years in the future looking back on our present moment in history and memorializing the cruelties of a bygone immigration system, while retelling a people’s history of the grassroots resistance that brought humanity to immigration policy in the United States” (236). This conceptualization of the piece as an act of witness developed through the process of devising and extended into its staging. Like social protest theatre such as El Teatro Campesino (Farmworkers’ Theater), the teen APTP actors take on multiple roles throughout the piece. Ensemble members greet the audience as themselves rather than their characters, underscoring the way that, while it is unimportant how the roles are divided, “the performers always carry with them their underlying identity as artists bearing witness to the stories of the people around them...” (236). The video of a 2013 *Home/Land* performance at the Goodman Theatre also accomplishes this by opening with the teens leaving their homes and meeting up in their neighborhoods on their way to the theatre. Rather than erase or ignore the process of mediation necessary for *testimonio*, APTP foregrounds the way that its teen actors represent others’ stories but are also bodily connected to their Chicago communities and shared experiences with social injustices.

APTP invites its audience to imagine a better future for its undocumented immigrant characters. Rather than *naïveté*, the audience is engaged in imagining the steps that must be taken, including their own involvement, to move from the present to this imagined future. One of the primary ways that *Home/Land* accomplishes this temporality and implied urgency for social action is by framing the work with a song. Act One opens and Act Three closes with children in the future, singing their family story that naturalizes migration and describes how they survived the social injustices of our historical present:

When hateful men all filled with fear	Los hombres asustados con el árbol
They tried to tear it from its roots	Trataron de arrancarlo de una vez
The tree held stronger than before	Y el árbol se abrazó mas a la tierra
And soon gave birth to sweeter fruits.	Creciendo y dando frutos de comer
Today the tree stands tall	Y tanto que quizo el árbol a su suelo
It overcame those fearful men	Que los hombres no lo pueden arrancar
And now beneath its gentle shade	Y es hoy bajo la sombra de este árbol
We share its story once again.	que te cuento la historia una vez mas. ³

Key differences in the lyric between the two instances of this song underscore the way that APTP uses counterstorytelling not only to memorialize injustice but spur social transformation. At the start Act One, two younger sisters ask their older brother to tell them the familiar story about the tree. The brother invites them to remember with his retelling, “*Mis niñas, niñas bellas hermanitas/*

³ This quotation reproduces the spelling and accent choices of the original source.

yo no se si saben bien/ El cuento...” (My girls, girls, beautiful sisters/ I don’t know if you know well/ the story...). Whereas at the end of play, the brother involves the audience in sharing the story, “*Amigos, mis hermanos, compañeros,/ yo no se si saben bien/ El cuento*” (Friends, my brothers and sisters, comrades,/I don’t know if you know well/ The story...). By shifting from blood relatives to a wider social network for solidarity, APTP moves beyond the individualizing rhetoric of many journalistic renderings. In this way, it underscores collective cultural trauma and narrative resistance by expanding from the perseverance of a single family to a call the audience to action. It is also important to note that this substitution is not translated by the sisters who sing the English version simultaneously. This may be interpreted as privileging both the social power and responsibility of Spanish-speaking Latinx community members to lead political efforts for comprehensive immigration reform.

While this narrative framework offers hope as resistance, both hope of survival and the transformative potential of couterstorytelling to spur the audience to action, *Home/Land* does not deny the toll that biopolitics takes on its immigrant characters. Luca reenacts a protest at the federal capitol building and explains that he is coming out as undocumented because he cannot allow his mother to disappear. Her work at a windowless plastics factory and death from cancer capture how undocumented lives are rendered unworthy of protection. Also in Act Two, entitled “A Demonic System”, the violence of detention and deportation referred to in the song is staged as an attempt to tear the family apart. The audience, along with characters Josefina Jiménez and her children, witness ICE officers in full tactical gear take away her husband, Ismael, “as if he was a criminal” (259). Symbolizing his dehumanization, Ismael wears only his underclothes and Josefina is unable to retrieve his clothes before he is dragged off. Whistling of the song from the introduction becomes part of the score and gives her and the children the strength to continue. After he returns

home with an ICE ankle monitor, Josefina resists this biopolitical control by offering him a pair of pants which allows the family to survive by covering monitor's deafening beeping noise and follow the rhythm of Ismael's heart.

The stage directions repeatedly refer to the Jiménez family becoming a machine that works at an increasingly tough pace. The mother asks the children to lend their hands so that together they can help their father carry some of the weight as they struggle to survive financially, emotionally, and legally as they fight Ismael's deportation. Josefina explains, "And life kept going" (260). The children are not victimized, but rather support one another in the face of their father's criminalization. She invites the audience to express solidarity with her family's decision to remain in the U.S., even if Ismael is deported:

But we will keep coming back, even if it is as wetbacks, I don't care. We will keep coming again and again. The good thing is that we have a little joy to look forward to. My daughter turns fifteen next month, and mis compañeras here at La Misión are planning a *quinceañera* for her. And I hope you will join us. I would love to have you celebrate with us. (262)

Josefina and Ismael's daughter, Rebecca, and her *quinceañera* becomes a symbol of resistance not only because they represent hope for a more socially just future but because they forge that future by inviting us to the party. As coming-of-age celebrations, *quinceañeras* ask a community to join together and guide youth to take on adult responsibilities. In the context of undocumented community, this entails overcoming barriers to Rebecca's full participation in society; her right to work, drive, vote, and build her own family without fear of deportation. In Act Three, "Small Miracles", the audience is implicated in this collaborative work as Josefina thanks us for coming to the party but

reminds us that more work must be done because, although we celebrate the unity of their family, her husband's case is not yet resolved (291). This giving of thanks asks the audience use our privilege and take action, since *quinceañera* guests contribute both financially and spiritually. We are then immediately reminded that the celebration was made possible by the Women Divorced by ICE, "mil madres" (a thousand mothers). This recognition insists that resistance remain grounded by the experiences of those who directly face oppressions (291). Moreover, the *quinceañera* is directly linked to political action by both the soundtrack and choreography as the cast closes the performance by stomping, hi-fiving, and simulating a celebration of immigration reform as TV screens project news of rallies, leading the audience to imagine themselves as part of a successful movement and history.

The Jiménez family story is not singular, but runs parallel with others, revealing how an entire population has been targeted to legitimize the U.S. nation-state. Another couple, Andres and Adelina are separated when Andres was randomly picked up from a group of workers on the street. Across the glass of a prison window, they simultaneously ask "What's the worst that can happen?" (273). For Andres, the worst outcome is that the police will hand him over to immigration and he will be deported. As he repeats "I'll come back" four times, Adelina reveals their biopolitical reality, "He could die trying to come back to us" (273). While the state no longer principally controls by taking life, it grants some lives worthy of protection and others as unworthy. Similar to the way Jonathan Inda shows how Proposition 187 in California denied prenatal care for pregnant undocumented women, Adelina's character demonstrates how U.S. border security forces migrants into

life-threatening situations: crossing deserts or resorting to locked forms of transportation such as trailers and trains that lead to death if not opened in time⁴.

Dos guaches cruzaron y todo salió bien: Survival as Everyday Resistance

While not dismissing the biopolitical forces resulting in the death of thousands of migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, *Home/Land* is a story of survival. Andres and Adelina's faith in their future together and collective migrant hope are both cemented by another song which Adelina sings both when they first cross to the US as newlyweds and when Andres receives self-deportation orders and will cross again: "Cariño, cariñito mio/ Cuéntame el cuento otra vez/ De como Dos guaches/ cruzaron a pie/ y al final, todo salió bien (Love, my love/ Tell me the story again/ Of how two kids/ crossed on foot/ and in the end, everything turned out well" (249). We learn in the end that Rebecca's *quinceañera*⁵ is also a celebration of Andres' safe return, who Josefina calls, "our 'Manuel'" (291). She refers here to Immanuel, the Hebrew name meaning "God with us", the Messiah, Jesus Christ. After comparing Andres to the Savior, Josefina aligns their cause with that of the Jewish prophet Amos, Buddha, Mohammed, and "the path of Jesus, a fighter and a subversive, who came to the oppressed towns to demand social change" (291). This

⁴ See *Train to Nowhere: Inside an Immigrant Death Investigation* by Colleen Bradford Krantz for a journalistic recounting of how 11 migrant victims was found in Iowa months after their departure from Mexico after teenage coyote workers were too afraid of getting caught to open a railcar upon its arrival in Texas. By comparing the reaction of Iowans and Texans, Krantz captures how the death of migrants has become normalized, and seemingly inevitable near the border where this kind of story occurs frequently.

⁵ See Wamsley and Romo. The *quinceañera* celebration was also used to protest anti-immigrant legislation in Texas. After the passage of the "show me your papers" Senate Bill 4 in Texas, a non-profit group called Jolt Texas helped to organize a group of quinceañeras who danced on the steps of the capitol "to a mashup of Lin-Manuel Miranda's 'Immigrants (We Get The Job Done)' and 'Somos Mas Americanos' by Los Tigres del Norte." They entered the capitol building to talk with legislators and handed paper flowers to those who voted against the bill.

highlights the central role that faith plays in driving social action and combats the biopolitical regime of truth in order to remind audiences of their moral commitments. It also asks the community to build solidarity across ethnic, racial, and religious borders by rejecting the culture of fear forged by the U.S. War on Terror.

Although the script is divided thematically into three acts, there are no blackouts or interruptions in the action, which works to heighten the interconnections between the undocumented characters' shared experiences, whether they are Guatemalan, Mexican, or Palestinian. It also works to expand the meaning of the word "hero", as when director David Feiner said a driving motivation of the piece was to tell the stories of heroes. Several characters, including Ahlam, Luca, and church leaders take direct political action by coming out as undocumented and appealing to the religious convictions of elected officials and ICE officers. Yet, APTP makes it clear that they are not the only heroes involved in this people's history. *Home/Land* also works to recognize the power of discursive and everyday resistance.

One example of resistance to public discourse on immigration comes from the character Marcos, an immigrant caught in a game show called "Who Wants to Be an American?" True to the counterstorytelling methodology described by Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, Act Two opens with this humorous scene and composite characters who represent marginalized and majoritarian perspectives. Marcos argues with the show's host, Bob Whiteman, who manifests racial prejudice and misconceptions about the immigration system, such as the belief that undocumented immigrants receive welfare and do not pay taxes (257-8). Marcos pushes back by listing the reasons people must migrate to survive and questioning the premise of the game, "Maybe the whole idea of borders is morally wrong, Bob. Can we sit down and talk about this? This isn't a game, Bob, this is my life" (258). Marcos resists the contemporary governmentality's regime of

truth described by Foucault by prompting the audience to question the way so-called information drives policy-making. Rather than rely on the premise that government abuse is the result of ignorance, Marcos reclaims the argument that government should be guided by moral authority. Despite his contributions between school, work, and family, Marcos loses the game, revealing how a legal pathway is not possible for the majority of immigrants. Whiteman underscores how the immigration system's construction of 'good' immigrants only fuels its own legitimacy and power to exclude.

In addition to revealing the biopolitical control over undocumented lives, APTP demonstrates the power of everyday resistance. Michael Allen uses the term "everyday disobedience" to refer to undocumented people's banal acts of resistance by being present in the U.S., such as working and driving a car without a license. Allen's theoretical work is useful to this study because it recognizes the value of resistance which does not require extraordinary moral courage, such as the Undocumented and Unafraid movement:

...everyday undocumented disobedience entails the outright avoidance of any publicity in actually breaking, rather than resentfully complying with, the law. Nevertheless, such disobedience can still indirectly offer an invitation to the people to deliberate and reconsider consistent with civil disobedience. At any rate, this follows on the model of 'assisted disobedience' (Brownlee 2012), whereby surrogates, such as sympathetic public officials and citizens, assume the tasks of publicity on behalf of the undocumented...Here, surrogates need not be disobedient themselves, but merely publicize the disobedient acts of others they believe to be justified

in disobeying the law, while having sound reasons for wanting to avoid publicity. (47)

Like Allen⁶, my analysis of *Home/Land* does not dismiss the power of the Undocumented and Unafraid movement, but highlights the power of everyday disobedience, which largely goes unexamined because, by its very nature depends on surrogates to publicize it to maintain the safety of those who exercise it. For this reason, I focus on the characters who resist, not by publically protesting, but by choosing to remain despite their undocumented status. APTP shows how, through work, love, and the hope that audiences will accept their invitation to contribute to systemic change, undocumented people find ways to make their everyday lives meaningful and build systems of support within their families and communities.

While *Home/Land* offers hope and solidarity as useful political tools, it is not clear, however, if all undocumented people are part of the celebration staged at the end of the piece. Is this a completely collective and shared experience? Or, like the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, will some families be reunited only to justify the continued exclusion of new immigrant families? As Foucault warns us, many acts of rebellion simply buy into state forms of control. If the DREAM Act were to pass and continue giving undocumented youth temporary or even permanent rights, what price would other undocumented people have to pay? Would future

⁶ Allen's work uses a global perspective to defend the rights of oppressed groups such as undocumented people in order to reach a common understanding that moves beyond theoretical arguments limited to parts of the world with liberal-democracies. Because my framework relies on Foucauldian theory, which recognizes the way that liberalism enables a doubling of decreased economic regulation and increased power of a police state, it is fitting to incorporate a philosophical argument that does not depend on liberalism.

legislation only reinforce biopolitical division by protecting “worthy” youth in exchange for increased border security and/or new legal strategies to criminalize and deport undocumented workers as they continue to serve state legitimacy as the threatening “Other”?

Albany Park Theatre Intervenes in Educational Contexts

Despite these unanswered questions, APTP pushes back against a culture of fear which is cultivated across a number of institutions, including schools. Nicole Nguyen’s fieldwork for *A Curriculum of Fear: Homeland Security in U.S. Public Schools* describes how students at a specialized Homeland Security high school program near Washington D.C. are trained to work in defense and supporting institutions. According to Nguyen, these students are explicitly taught to say anyone could be a terrorist and that Homeland Security does not discriminate. At the same time, they also engage with rhetoric that instills fear in racial and cultural others, such as that Middle Eastern children are taught to hate America (Nguyen Interview). Of course, this kind of dynamic is reproduced across a variety of U.S. educational institutions, not only those with curricular ties to DHS.

In stark contrast with the use of fear as a central mechanism to drive urban youth into productive members of the surveillance state, APTP depends upon bodily experiences and creative capacity of racialized and minoritized youth as crucial to social transformation. It intervenes in educational contexts by commissioning a curriculum for teachers to use in conjunction with video of the original 2012 production of *Home/Land*. This is the first time APTP developed its own curriculum, perhaps because of the urgent need to contest the widespread absence of educational spaces informed by undocumented experiences. Highlighting the political stakes of the production, the *Home/Land* curriculum asks students to consider if they have any obligation as audience

members and to define their own universe of obligation by asking, “to whom in this world are you obligated and to what degree?” (Chaudhri, Rizzo, and Saposnik 13). In this way, students reflect on personal and societal ethical and moral standards as well as methods of exclusion. Along with the question: “What can I do to recognize and fight injustice?”, the curriculum suggests a culminating activity that allows students to see themselves as agents of social change, such as creating posters to promote social justice, writing letters to elected officials about immigration, or comparing students’ own immigration policy proposals to the Senate Immigration Bill S.744 which failed in 2013 (33).

While the strategies and discussion questions offered are valuable, it is also important to consider its limitations. First, the curriculum is designed by former public teachers working through Facing History and Ourselves, which is a 501(c)(3) charity. Although social action is strongly foregrounded and the authors claim that “By starting with issues of identity, students think about what influences and motivates behavior and decisions by individuals, organizations, and governments” (37), the role and obligations of government are not directly questioned in any of the Big Questions or activities. The closest example is a discussion question on Scene 3, “How do political push-pull factors influence personal decision and public policy?” (9). It is common educational practice to make connections to students’ personal backgrounds but more time and space could be dedicated to critically examining how the U.S. government created migrant illegality by offering a stronger historical context. As with any federally funded non-profit organization, Facing History and Ourselves cannot engage in political campaigning and its curriculum may be, even if unconsciously, guided by the organization’s wish for continued funding.

A second issue is that the Facing History and Ourselves description at the end of the curriculum does not fully recognize the agency of undocumented people. Instead, it seems to set up a polarizing dynamic between victims of oppression and the students/audience and artists as social actors:

Students consider how we can honor those who were treated unjustly or memorialize the victims of injustice. And in the final and perhaps most essential part of the sequence, students choose to participate, recognizing that they too have the power to change the world around them in a positive way, to be upstanders and active participants in their immediate or broader community. (37)

Home/Land also focuses on upstanders, or those who stand up to take action against injustice, and who Allen would say demonstrate extraordinary moral courage. However, Feiner makes it clear from his introduction to the curriculum that APTP is invested in ethnographic fieldwork that includes a diverse group of undocumented people. All of the community members interviewed are a crucial part of this APTP's devising process, including those who engage in everyday resistance rather than direct political action.

APTP's curriculum is a valuable resource and tool, especially as it provides concrete activity examples and support through additional online resources and texts. However, my analysis of *Home/Land* as well as historical contextualization may allow a closer examination of how the participation of undocumented storytellers and actors renders undocumented subjectivities visible and allows access for everyday disobedience to inform our understanding of undocumented experiences and exclusions. Theatrical pieces such as *Home/Land* that are informed by direct input

and feedback from undocumented people hold the potential to push back against infantilizing and melodramatic frameworks that deny the agency of undocumented immigrants while revealing the myth of meritocracy and biopolitical divisions. They may also combat governmentality that aims to legitimize immigration policy in terms of true and false by reinserting moral and ethical responsibilities and asking its audience to be part of systemic change.

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