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Challenging the national border system through love in César Mba A. Abogo's "The thickness of the night" and Lien Carrazana's "An expatriate waitress, anywhere in the world"

El amor transnacional como arma contra el sistema fronterizo estatal en "La espesura de la noche", de César Mba A. Abogo's y "Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)" de Lien Carrazana

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Resumen: Los relatos "En la espesura de la noche" (2010) y "Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)" (2011) retratan la sensación de encarcelamiento que experimentan sus voces narrativas dentro de las rígidas fronteras de Guinea Ecuatorial y Cuba, respectivamente, y cómo superan esta opresión territorial amando a una mujer que habita más allá de sus fronteras nacionales. Teniendo en cuenta que el amor hacia los estados-nación constituye una forma de perpetuar una ideología nacionalista y el reforzamiento de las fronteras nacionales sobre la libre agencia individual (Morrison et al., 2021: 514), este artículo examina cómo, en ambas narrativas, la exaltación de un amor transnacional sobre el de la nación desafía el "discurso único" de este estado-nación, basado en el pensamiento fronterizo binario de adentro/afuera y nosotros/ellos, a favor de la agencia individual y una forma más transnacional de entender el mundo .
Palabras clave: fronteras nacionales; Cuba; Guinea Ecuatorial; amor transnacional

Abstract: The short stories "En la espesura de la noche" (2010) and "Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)" (2011) depict the feeling of imprisonment that first-person narrators

experience within the rigid borders of Equatorial Guinea and Cuba, respectively, and how they overcome this territorial oppression by loving a woman who dwells beyond the national borders they are unable to trespass. Bearing in mind that the love towards nation-states constitutes a way of perpetuating a nationalist ideology and the reinforcement of national borders over individual free agency (Morrison et al., 2021: 514), this article examines how, in both narratives, the exaltation of a transnational love over that of the nation challenges these nation-state's "unique discourse," based on the binary border thinking of inside/outside and us/them, in favor of individual agency and a more transnational way of understanding the world.
Keywords: national borders; Cuba; Equatorial Guinea; transnational love

INTRODUCCIÓN

In her essay "A properly political concept of love: Three approaches in ten pages" (2011), Berlant understands the concept of love as "properly political" and claims that "many kinds of interest are magnetized to the rhythm of convergence we call love" (684). Scholars such as Carey-Ann Morrison inform Berlant's work by asserting that "love is political in that it cannot be extracted from contestatory relations but […] it can also be used explicitly as a political concept" (Morrison et al., 2021: 516). In this light, Sara Ahmed acknowledges her indebtment to the work of feminist and queer scholars like Judith Butler (1993) when stating that "emotions matter to politics," since feelings can attach us to the very conditions of our subordination and "show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds" (12). Both scholars suggest that social norms (such as marriage, the nation, heterosexuality, or family) are the result of repetition, and that the repetition of these norms triggers the materialization of worlds where "boundary, fixity, and surface" are produced (Butler, 9). Along these lines, Ahmed examines "the ways in which love of an individual person, object or place can be transferred to a collective" (qtd. in Morrison et al., 2012: 514). She explores the politics of love and argues that all emotions are key for people when it comes to aligning themselves with an ideal and, consequently, can reinforce national bonds and serve tyrannical national governments to legitimize and nurture their existance. Thus, according to Ahmed "love is narrated as an emotion that energizes the work of such groups; it is out of love that the group seeks to defend the nation against others, whose presence then becomes defined as the origins of hate" (Ahmed, 2004: 122).

The short stories "En la espesura de la noche" (2010) and "Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)" (2011) depict the

feeling of imprisonment that first-person narrators experience within the rigid borders of Equatorial Guinea and Cuba, respectively, and how they overcome this territorial oppression by loving a woman who dwells beyond the national borders they are unable to trespass. The adoration towards a foreign woman contrasts with the negative image of the countries that confine them as result of the mental and physical paralysis the Cuban and Equatorial Guinean governments impose on their citizens.

Basing myself on a political understanding of love, this article examines the interrelation of emotions and politics in the short stories "En la espesura de la noche," by César A. Mba Abogo, included in *La palabra y la memoria: Guinea Ecuatorial 25 años después* (2010), and "Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo," written by Lien Carrazana and published in her website Todo sobre Faithless (2011). The comparative analysis that occupies this article intends to create bonds between Carrazana and Abogo's short stories to bring light to their many similarities and the anti-nationalist message that both convey. Even though this study does not intend to deny constructive forms of love towards the nation and the benefits of nationalism, such as the nourishment of civic engagement and the cohesion of ethno-cultural communities (Brubaker 2004: 7-8), it explores the literary depiction of the nation as a physical and mental constraining entity since, as Brubaker puts it:

> No matter how open and 'joinable' a nation is […] it is always imagined, as Benedict Anderson (1983) observed, as a limited community. It is intrinsically parochial and irredeemably particular. Even the most adamant critics of universalism will surely agree that that those beyond the boundaries of the nation-state have some claim, as fellow human beings, on our moral imagination, our political energy, and even perhaps our economic resources (2004: 6).

More specifically, the analysis of both short stories bears in mind that an exalted love towards the nation-state often constitutes an effective control tool for tyrannical governments. Given that dictatorships aim for a strong nationalist ideology and the reinforcement of national borders over individual free agency (Morrison et al., 2021: 514), the exaltation of a transnational love over that of the nation challenges these nation-state's "unique discourse," based on the binary border thinking of inside/outside and us/them. The romantic bonds that both narrators develop towards foreign women surpass the unconditional and forced love upon which

tyrannical nations base themselves and trigger the spreading of the narrators' imagination beyond territorial boundaries.

Importantly, although both short stories can be regarded as postcolonial texts in that they have been written by authors who are from ex-colonial countries, they avoid the traditional binary thinking in the postcolonial field, based on a division between Europe and its others, colonizer and colonized, the West and the rest, one that, according to some scholars, such as Stephen Slemon, shape a foundational principle in postcolonial criticism that is, at heart, insufficient (1990: 34). On the contrary, the first-person narrators in both narratives do not confront the Spanish metropolis but their own countries' tyrannical governments. This clearly illustrates Homi Bhabha's call to acknowledge the hybridization between Western and non-Western entities and, more recently, the words of Christian Moraru, who highlights some approaches within comparative literature and postcolonialism (Susan Stanford Friedman's new modernist studies, or Spivak's planetary thinking) as challenges to the old colony / metropolis dichotomy (Moraru 2017: 129).

Even though nationalism has been approached by much of postcolonial studies as a significant ally in the process of independence of the former colonies, Daniel P. S. Goh, among many other scholars in the field, understands it as a substitute form of control over imperialism. He states that the inheritance of the colonial state with all its techniques of governmentality "disciplined and molded myriad nationalisms into the familiar nationalism that pits one collective identity against another rather than producing membership in an inclusive cosmopolitan fraternity" (2019: 528).

Although the independence of both Cuba and Equatorial Guinea meant getting rid, to a large extent, of the colonial control that Spain (and the United States, in the case of Cuba) exercised over them, the truth is that both countries have been subject to iron dictatorships since their constitution as independent States. Even though Cuba achieved its independence from Spain in 1898, the Constitution of 1901 contained the notorious Platt Amendment, "allowing the US political, economic and military intervention in Cuban affairs and explicitly attributing a key role to the USA in liberating Cuba from Spain" (Miller 2003: 152). In the Constitution of 1940, molded under the mandate of the Cuban president and dictator Fulgencio Batista, the paternalist US role in the Cuban policies was eliminated and a distinctly nationalist tone was adopted. Later, from the beginning of the Revolutionary stage and the coming to power of Fidel

Castro in 1959, the sense of *cubanidad* (Cubanness) has been kidnapped by Castro and his successors Raúl Castro and Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel with the identification of the Cuban nation and identity with the Revolutionary State (Miller 2003: 150) and, therefore, stripping opponents of this regime of their Cuban identity (Rojas 2006; Staniland 2014).

In the case of Equatorial Guinea, the consecution of its independence in 1968 also meant that colonist oppression was replaced by dictatorial oppression "which would frustrate hopes for an improvement in the socio-economic status of the Equatorial Guineans and their desire for civil rights and freedom" (Ndongo 1977; Nerin 1999). The postcolonial oppression has been the result of two dictatorial regimes based on a fierce persecution of opponents and a strong nationalism that has inherited some of the vices from colonialism. The first dictatorship, established in 1969 and led by Teodoro Obiang Nguema, "expelled non-Guineans from the country and condemned to exile those Guineans who chose to flee" (Aixelà 2013: 67), and the second dictatorial regime of Francisco Macías Nguema from 1979 until now has imposed "centralism based on a clan structure and patronage" that marginalizes some of the ethnic groups in the country (67). In this light, this study focuses on the social tensions which emerge when the national identity is built upon a forced homogeneity and political control by non-legitimate dictatorial interests.

Therefore, this analysis encloses a comparative approach that builds on the ongoing discussions in ACLA (the American Comparative Literature Association) about the comparative literature's duty to transcend national and linguistic boundaries (Saussy, 2017; Thomsen, 2017), within what Jessica Berman calls a "trans" orientation, that is, the need of transdisciplinary scholarship to become "importantly transnational by examining texts outside national or imperial circuits of travel, nonprivileged migrations of people and texts, or trajectories outside the usual metro-centric routes of travel" (Berman 2017, p.106). Some scholars within the field believe that comparatists should support "the members of the profession who […] fit together unaccustomed bodies of work" (Saussy, 2017: 28) and suggest approaching literature as a window that can "reveal specific types of content beyond the literary" (Swacha, "Comparing Structures of Knowledge") while highlighting the need of expanding the scope of literary analysis by considering other disciplines and domains of knowledge at the same level of the literary text. Indeed, the comparative analysis of "En la Espesura de la Noche" and "Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)," intends to bring about

a transnational dialogue that provides revealing and enriching insight by fostering an interdisciplinary study of these two contemporary texts, in that it addresses some larger socio-political questions that contribute to a better understanding of Equatorial Guinea and Cuba's tyrannical governments and its nonporous national borders.

A NEGATIVE DEPICTION OF LA HABANA AND MALABO

In both short stories, national borders act as walls that constrain the narrative voices' imagination and undermine their freedom by preventing them from moving in the pursuit of their beloved ones. The emotions they feel toward these agents on the other side of the boundary expose the rigid territorial borders and the imposition of the national unity promoted by the nation state (Jones, 2012). Abogo's "En la Espesura de la Noche" is full of multiple and explicit references to Malabo as the setting of the story. This allows the reader to set the narrative in Equatorial Guinea, a country where there is still a hostile socio-political atmosphere, enhanced by the second authoritarian regime and which started when the dictator Teodoro Obiang Ngema took office in 1979 (Miampika, 2010: 12-13). International Amnesty has recently published a report pointing at the continuous harassment and detention that the government exerts over the opposition, the reclusion of political activists, and the strong control of the State over the press as the main causes for conceiving Equatorial Guinea as a country under a dictatorship ("Guinea Ecuatorial 2017/2018"). In fact, the scarcity of cultural structures, low enrollment rate, the high presence of illiteracy, and the absence of research centers limit an anti-government cultural and journalistic dynamization in the African country and, although Equatorial Guinea has considerable petroliferous and natural resources, the quality life of many citizens is dreadful (Miampika, 2010: 12-13).

Likewise, in "Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)," Cuba is explicitly alluded to to as the place from where the narrative voice expresses his sorrow. Just like authors and scholars approach the exile of people from Equatorial Guinea, Rafael Rojas (2006) and Emma Staniland (2014) base themselves on the work of exiled Cuban authors such as Herberto Padilla and Cabrera Infante when claiming that the exile has been a recurrent experience in Cuban history since the beginning of the dictatorship in 1959 (Rojas, 2006: 24). Rafael Rojas underlines the tyrannic policies that the Revolutionary government exerts in the island when claiming the existence of an invisible but powerful

dividing line between those Cubans who live inside the island and those who had to leave because of political reasons. He approaches the former type of Cubans as mental exiles, who would like a better life abroad but are not able to trespass the rigid borders of the nation and, the latter type, as Cuban citizens who managed to leave the island, thus remaining spatially exiled (2006: 32). Interestingly, also some Equatorial Guinean writers and scholars, such as Mbomio Bacheng, have approached the totalitarian regime of their country as the seed of similar types of exile: those who remain within the national borders but are "mentally" abroad, and those who left the country and settled themselves somewhere else (2010).

Both narrative voices speak from a tyrannical country and, thus, they can be approached as *exiliados mentales* (mental exiles), as they are individuals who use their imagination to escape from their own national reality without leaving their homeland. To portray these political realities, both narratives adopt the form of a monologue in which a tormented narrative voice expresses his long for a woman they once met but who now lives abroad. In Abogo's story, the narrator's tediousness in Malabo is altered by the email he suddenly receives from Sandra Pujol, an old love, and which also awakens past illusions and hopes. Similarly, Carrazana depicts the narrative voice of a Cuban man missing a woman, referred to as "the waitress," who presumably he met in Cuba some years earlier but left the island to inhabit "anywhere in the world," as the title suggests. The narrative tells that he maintains correspondence with her beloved one through postcards while hoping that she can rescue him from his boring life in La Habana next to his wife.

The dividing lines between national territories can be tackled as a powerful tool when it comes to restricting individual agency (Stanford Friedman, 2007; Jones, 2012). Not only do they limit the movement of things, money, or people, but also constrain the exercise of the intellect, the imagination, and the political action (Agnew, 2008:176). These limitations are even more accused when we talk about tyrannical governments such as the Cuban or the Equatorial Guinean, where freedom of speech is more restricted, and citizens' free agency is limited. In this respect, Edward Said also highlights the confining nature of national borders when claiming that our homes in the secular and contingent world of today are always provisional, and that the displaced individual is aware that those borders that provide safety can also turn into prisons and are often defended above reasoning or necessity. In the same line of thought,

Mitchell establishes a strong link between borders and power relations, understanding borders as the instrument to have the power to keep in or out and to frame the limits of the imagination.

Both narrative voices revolt against this mental and physical limitation when showing their anger toward the tyrannical governments of their countries and by shaping a negative image of the places they live in (Equatorial Guinea and Cuba). In "En la espesura de la noche" (2010) and "Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo" (2011), the portrayal of Malabo and La Habana as decadent, static, and monotonous cities is evident from the beginning. The narrator in Abogo's text refers to Malabo in terms of "a city without air" (93, my translation) where "the music of No One Sleeps goes through walls in the exact same way as yesterday and the day before yesterday" and "the puddle of fecal waters that's in front of [his] house is still there" (93, my translation). This stillness is further reinforced with sentences such as "tonight, as yesterday's night, as tomorrow's night" (92, my translation) or "everything is the same as it was yesterday […], as every day, everything is as it was yesterday" (93, my translation).

The negative representation of Malabo is not only alluded in terms of its monotony, but also in its decadence and precariousness: "the puddle of fecal waters" (92), the fact that "at any time electricity can fail" p.(93), and "the abysmal darkness of Malabo" (93, my translation) are examples of this gloomy representation of the city. Accordingly, the depiction of Malabo's citizens is equally negative, as shown in the following excerpt:

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

> … in my parts of this city people are talking about the weather and criticizing the earthy times that we live, they are saying many things but silencing what they really think, they are thinking about the money, potential ways of getting hold of a roll of notes, trying to get away with it. […] My people think about the money but talk about the weather. The oil wells calm their

> future as simple acquisition ways. Silence turns shoal with the sounding of echoes that trawlers shoot (Abogo 2010: 92-93, my translation).

Malabo's citizens are alluded to as passive people who do nothing to change their conditions, as they are too busy talking about the weather and criticizing, that is, doing simple and monotonous activities that refer to speaking and thinking rather than acting. Sentences such as "they are saying many things but silencing what they really think" or "they are thinking about the money, potential ways of getting hold of a roll of notes" highlight hypocrisy and greediness as rooted qualities in the people from Malabo. In addition, the narrative voice refers to the historic relation between Equatorial Guinea and Spain through the reference to "the oil wells" and "trawlers," both elements evoking an old problematic relation between both countries. The former addresses the discovery of petrol in the African nation in 1996, which although constitutes a huge source of wealth for the country, its benefits remain in the hands of a few (Miampika, 2010). The latter is a boat, originally from Spain, presented as a historical promoter of the stillness and monotony of Malabo. Through this image, the writer seems to be evoking the old Spanish dominance over Equatorial Guinea to suggest that it is still influencing the rigidity of the African country's society.

In a similar fashion, the narrative voice in "Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)" (2011) depicts a tedious and decaying La Habana. The male narrator associates negative elements to the city by depicting it as a hostile and claustrophobic place, as suggested in sentences like "the rain that hits the window" (72, my translation), and "I go outside to breathe some fresh air, as the air that comes in through the window is not enough anymore" (74, my translation). Also, he describes his existence as a "huge boredom" that is "full of television nights, reheated food, beautiful women who fall asleep while watching an Almodóvar's film, sunken in an armchair, reading past news, seeing the pound go up and down, how the Real Madrid football team loses the match, and witnessing how the plants in the garden grow un bearably" (72, my translation). Indeed, the narrative voice seems to be anchored in the past ("reading past news"), invaded by a chronic nostalgic feeling, unable to move on ("sunken in an armchair") and more interested in foreign events, like the performance of the pound or Spanish football, than in his own native Cuba.

THE TRANSNATIONAL LOVER AS A REPRESENTATION OF MENTAL EXILE

Even though in both short stories the narrative voices are anchored in a deterministic connection to Cuba and Equatorial Guinea, and consequently, to the tyrannies that exert control over these countries, they develop their mental exile by fantasizing with women who are on the other side of national borders and who they can reach through emails and postcards. Thus, the Cuban and Equatorial Guinean rigid borders are crossed by reimagining their emotional connection with these external elements. The anxiety this situation causes on the characters is portrayed differently in the stories. The narrative voice's restlessness in "La Espesura de la Noche" (2010) starts when he receives the email from Sandra Pujol after many years of silence: "since I received this damn email, all the thickness of Malabo's nights has fallen on me." (Abogo 92, my translation). This email is described with the epithets such as "damn" and "fucking" along the story, as it destroys "the capsule that protected [him] from [himself] (95, my translation) and that triggers an inner emotional tsunami:

> En las últimas noches he dado vueltas y vueltas en la cama y no sabía si era miedo o desasosiego lo que me invadía, sigo sin saberlo; mientras daba vueltas en la cama como un cuerpo lanzado desde un barco negrero yo veía a Sandra Puyol viéndome dar vueltas y vueltas en la cama y sudando un sudor frío (Abogo 94).
>
> In recent nights I've tossed and turned in bed, without being able to know if I was being invaded by fear or unrest, I still don't know it; while I stayed in bed tossing and turning like a body thrown from a slave ship, I saw Sandra Puyol watching me tossing and turning, and sweating a cold sweat (Abogo 94, my translation).

The repetition of "tossing and turning" highlights the tediousness and grief that the unnamed narrator experiences, while words such as "invaded," "thrown" and "cold sweat" point at the email as an intrusive element in his life and the cause of his despair. The image that compares his body to a "a body thrown from a slave ship" constitutes a compelling simile in which the narrative voice depicts himself as a person who does not have power over himself and who is completely stripped of his free will. Indeed, the email triggers his awakening from the numbness and

isolation the Equatorial Guinean borders have inflicted on him. Sandra Puyol is the reason of his loss of self-control, but also his coming face-to-face with reality, being that who unexpectedly arrives in his life "as a tsunami" (Abogo 95, my translation). Its reception reignites the emotions and saves him from Malabo's tedious reality, as shown in the following excerpt:

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

> Everything looks like yesterday, my eyes shine with fatigue and burden, like every day, everything looks like yesterday, but tonight is different, yesterday night was actually different, the truth is that since I received that damn email my nights and days have been different. […] Sandra Puyol, I feel how oxygen bubbles fizz in my blood (Abogo 2010, p.93, my translation).

Similarly, the unrest that the narrator experiences due to the waitress in Carrazana's "Una camarera: expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo" (2011) is caused by the anxiety that he feels while awaiting her postcards from Europe, referred to as "life fragments" (Carrazana 2011, my translation), which become the only connection between the two, as they are "individuals divided by a bar" (Carrazana 2011, my translation). The bar, which symbolizes the national border, impedes the reunion of both lovers and, to deal with the pain that this division causes, the narrative voice finds refuge in his past and evokes the time where they were together in La Habana:

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

> That is why I always come to this place… this bar in La Habana where we drank beer for the first time some years ago. I sat down by the bar and imagine my waitress serving me a drink (Carrazana 2011, my translation).

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

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

> Oh, my waitress, I search for you, in every table smelling of dark beer, in every slave smile, in a blonde curl that some stranger left between my bed sheets, in every new poem, in every glass of wine, in an oriental look, in a order notebook, in the hands of a waitress in a dodgy restaurant (Carrazana 2011, my translation).

The interjection that opens the sentence remarks his consternation, the disgrace of imagining her in every element of his daily routine. This anxiety comes from the fact that his "encounters" with her are just a product of his imagination. Thus, the dichotomy fantasy / reality becomes the core of the narrator's suffering, since he oscillates from those daydreams caused by his platonic love with the waitress and his real life next to his wife in a tedious La Habana. In this sense, the narrative voice is aware that the bar "does not have his smile or quick hands anymore, hands that now will dance as waves over innocuous wood in some Parisian café" (Carrazana 2011, my translation). Also, as it happens to the narrator in "La Espesura de la Noche" (2010), his restlessness invades his nights: "I wonder why this ethereal woman still affects my dream when her face vanishes without me being able to hold her" (Carrazana 2011, my translation).

Importantly, these fantasies and memories clash with the presence of his wife:

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

> The postcards travel half of the world and end in my hands. I need to turn my eyes away, I don't want my wife to find out my sad hippo tears, caused

> by the soft caresses made of ink that my waitress sends (Carrazana 2011, my translation).

This excerpt encompasses how the narrator stays between two unreconciled worlds, the former represented by the waitress and the latter by his wife. In fact, the latter embodies a monotonous and claustrophobic La Habana, as she is depicted as such by the narrator at several parts in the story. Whereas he thinks of the waitress as the woman he loves as if "any other woman would have never touched [this] body that gets old" (Carrazana 2011, my translation), his wife is interestingly associated to routinary actions such as bringing the tea or saying good night, and she is described as someone who remains in a constant state of lethargy, thus symbolizing the monotony that prevents the narrator from "breathing" and condemns him to long dawns.

It is also worth noticing that both Carrazana and Abogo employ nature, concretely the ocean and the forest, as an omnipresent and powerful image to evoke the narrative voices' struggle, emotions, and perceptions. For instance, the unnamed narrator in "En la Espesura de la Noche" (2010) depicts himself as "a ship with no course among the turbulent waves of this city's darkness" (96, my translation), and his life in Malabo as "an ocean with no shore" (92, my translation). Yet, most of the sea-related images in this short story have a positive connotation, since they address the good effects of receiving Sandra Puyol's email. In addition to the sentences "like a body thrown from a slave ship (94, my translation), "got to my life like a tsunami" (95, my translation), which as stated before, allude to an abrupt awakening as consequence of receiving news from her old lover, the narrator also uses other sea-related images to convey his emotions towards Sandra Puyol's email. He compares it with a paper-made ship that burst into his life in "the abysmal darkness of Malabo" (93, my translation) and awakens his desire of freedom, of crossing the constraining Equatorial Guinan borders: "what should I do now? Should I jump into the sea with this paper-made ship?" (93, my translation). In this sense, the narrative voice remains in a state of anxiety that is evoked through the constant questioning and the need of deciding whether he should stay in the "abysmal darkness" of Malabo or travel abroad. The email, core to the story, is alluded to as "the paper-made ship" in terms of his lack of consistency, and the question "should I jump into the sea with this paper-made ship?" points at the uncertainty the narrator is facing because of his desire of leaving Equatorial Guinea just having an email as

the only incentive. Despite the violence and desperation that the sea-related images transmit, they importantly remark the revealing character of the email, which triggers the inner shake of the narrator and, ultimately, the awareness of his political and geographical entrapment in Malabo.

In "Una camarera: expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo" (2011), after claiming that he knows that the bar does not contain her smile or her quick hands anymore, the narrator compares his lover's smile and hands to the sea waves in terms of their dynamism and intensity. Indeed, he uses words related to nature when he acknowledges how he looks for his lover in "the mouth of dirty sailors who speak about distant lands where women are like pears that fall off the trees" (Carrazana, 2011). Liberty is thus suggested through a natural imagery, such as the sea waves or pear-like women. Both similes work around the comparison of the woman with natural elements, where pears are compared to women in terms of their maturity and experience, and the hands of his lover are compared to waves in terms of their agility. By the deployment of this imagery, not only does the author address a sexual freedom, but also a physical independence that is evoked in the movement of the waves or the separation of the fruit from its tree, where both the wave pulling in the water to the shore and the tree symbolize the absorbing nature of the Cuban nation-state. Likewise, the woman in "En la espesura de la noche" (2010) is associated with natural elements that point at her as a source of liberation. Sandra Pujol is, in fact, depicted as "two blue buttons like the Mediterranean" (94, my translation) while Sandra Pujol's eyes are described as "cat eyes" (94, my translation). These images highlight the beauty and purity in the lover's attributes, who is addressed in a platonic way that, at times, echoes the Renaissance depictions of the midons.

Therefore, the negative picture of Cuba and Equatorial Guinea, as well as that of their inhabitants and governments, differs strikingly from the positive depiction of the beloved ones. Both Sandra Puyol and the waitress are associated to freedom by means of the use of nature, concretely the ocean and the forest, as an omnipresent and powerful theme. Importantly, the imagery of nature related to the women points at them as a source of escapism from their tedious realities and as a vehicle to acquire their independence from political and social constraints. Following this idea, both the ocean and the forest, symbolizing territorial and individual freedom, enhance the union of distanced lands. In this light, the relevance of the transnational adoration the narrators show towards these women lies in the fact that their feelings help them avoid the limitations on their

mobility by causing an inner revolution within them. Ultimately, these transnational romantic bonds encourage their opening to the world beyond geographical borders and ideological entrapment.

In this light, both narratives also contain multiple international references that resist localism and challenge any form of territorial and political constraint. Indeed, in "La espesura de la noche" (2010) Sandra Puyol is conceived to as the narrator's connection to the world:

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

> Sandra Puyol, her name is like a mechanical noise beyond these waves of darkness. She may not be who she was, I am not the one I used to be either, we are like dust, we scatter, we empty ourselves. It is universal. Tibetans know it, we die day after day, and I do not know about the rest, but moi, I do not ask the time for regular reports, but tonight is different, tonight I feel an end-of-the-world fatigue (Abogo, 2010: 92, my translation).

In this excerpt, the narrator fantasizes with being dust to impersonate its intangibility to scatter himself or travel, more easily, across national borders. His lover embodies this goal, based on his ideological and geographical freedom, as she is "universal" and dwells beyond "the waves of darkness." He acknowledges a feeling based on "an end-of-the-world fatigue," which evokes the narrator's awareness of having been swallowed by the darkness of Malabo and his need of reaching other worlds. In addition, the French word "moi" or "the Tibetans" add the internationality that the narrative voice pursues. He combats local immobility by mentioning other global elements in the narrative, such as "the Chinese doctor who lives next to us" (92, my translation), 'sayonara baby" (93), "we turn into climbers in the Sahara" (93), or "sweating cold sweat like the snow in Kurosawa's films" (94).

Global references are also present in "Una camarera: expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo" (2011) and constitute a relevant device to combat territorial limitations, as they raise awareness of a whole different world beyond Cuba's entrapment. The title of the short story already announces the author's intention, as it refers to the depiction of the waitress

as an expatriate to anywhere in the world. In this light, to counterattack the "huge tedium" (Carrazana, 2011) of his existence and to shorten the distance that divides him and the waitress (who is in Europe), the narrator evokes all kind of foreign products, such as "a Greek coaster" (Carrazana 2011, my translation), "a Marx beer" (2011), "an Almodóvar film" (2011), "Real Madrid" (2011), and makes a reference to some European cities such as London, Berlin or Vienna. Also, there is a point in the story where the narrator confesses how envious he is of the waitress because:

> [ella] no sufre como yo si no tengo esas líneas esbeltas que me hablan de calles añejas, de luces hoscas que se hacen remolinos y ventiscas en su cabeza, de paisajes mitológicos, cuencas doradas, pájaros que chocan contra los vidrios de las guardillas de París, murciélagos que delinean los techos de palacios transilvanos.
> Ay, camarera mía, como te busco, […] en los ojos de los perros que caminan de un lado a otro del planeta (Carrazana, 2011).

> [she] does not suffer like me if I do not have those slender lines who tell me about old streets, about sullen lights that become swirls and blizzards in her head, about mythological landscapes, golden watersheds, birds that crash against the glasses of Parisian attics, vats that outline the roofs of Transylvanian palaces.
> Oh, my waitress, how much I search you, […] in the dogs' eyes that walk from one side of the world to the other (Carrazana 2011, my translation).

This envy relies on the fact that she can move, and thus, she defies the territorial fixedness that nation-states impose on their citizens (Jones, 2012). Her depiction as "an ethereal woman" echoes the association of Sandra Puyol with the dust and in terms of their resistance to physical entrapment. Additionally, all the foreign references allude to Europe and carry a positive connotation that is translated into their magnificence and the attractiveness of their exotism. As the narrator in Abogo's story, the waitress symbolizes the narrative voice's desire of transcending boundaries, as he mentions how she is reached through oriental looks, Slavic smiles or black beers that transport him to other worlds. Consequently, her messages allow him to avoid his isolation by connecting with the outside world, as shown in sentences like "how much I search you, […] in the dogs' eyes that walk from one side of the world to the other (Carrazana 2011, my translation), or "postcards travelled half of the world to end in my hands" (Carrazana 2011, my translation). In the same way, she acts as a passport that saves him from

the stillness of La Habana, as the narrator explicitly acknowledges that "the waitress and [him] live in two worlds that never collide, but she escapes from time to time, arrives to save [him] from the huge tedium of [his] existence" (Carrazana 2011, my translation).

CONCLUSION

This comparative study has aimed for a broader and more accurate approach that matches the new mandate in literary studies for a "planetary thinking" (Friedman, 2007: 261), a transdisciplinary and transnational analysis that reveals close connections between two distant texts with a common political message. "En la Espesura de la Noche" and "Una camarera (expatriada a cualquier lugar del mundo)" contain a strong emotional burden, transmitted through the central themes, an emotive lexis and literary figures built upon natural elements. Bearing in mind that the transference of love onto nation-states constitutes "a way of bonding with others in relation to particular ideals and hegemonies" (Morrison et al., 2012: 515), the lack of appreciation towards these nations on behalf of the unnamed narrators, together with their admiration for women on the other side of Cuba and Equatorial Guinea's territorial borders, turn these literary voices into resistant individuals, since they deconstruct an idealized perception of their respective tyrant nations. Fantasizing with Sandra Pujol and the waitress, and thus using their imagination to become "mental exiles," allows them to evade the geographical imposition and fixedness of tyrant nation-states (Jones, 2012: 689), as one of the national borders' main function is to constrain the exercise of the intellect and the imagination (Agnew, 2008: 176). Given that tyrannical regimes base themselves on an unconditional and forced love for the nation, the transnational love that these literary voices experience and a harsh picture of La Habana and Malabo lead them to an act of rebellion that demolishes the "unique discourse" in favor of a more democratic and transnational way of understanding the world.

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