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Introduction

Following a Postcolonial Feminist theoretical lenses, the present paper revisits Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982) and Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salome* (2000). Rereading the two narratives aims to investigate how, in their own voices, both authors create counter-narratives, which allow the reader to discover distorted representations. The two women writers are representing a new kind of content in their literary works by including issues, which confront patriarchy and imperialism. The paper as a whole is an attempt to provide answers to the subsequent questions: how does Buchi Emecheta and Julia Alvarez appeal to innovative aesthetic forms, which reflect on the weight of their concerns as women? To which extent do they represent the enormous shift in the role of women, the manner they represent themselves as well the way they are represented regardless of their ethnicity, national identity, race, and skin color. What are the main strategies used by the two authors to interrogate and then transgress "les'idées reçues" and the long and well established "cliché" that women are unable to represent themselves. Moreover, we shall examine how do the two women writers create in their texts as instances of political, economic situations, using discursive strategies, to subvert and question the literary and cultural tradition that has eclipsed, misrepresented or oversimplified ethnic diasporic women's experiences and erased their voices in postcolonial societies. However, before analyzing the two texts, it might be useful to start by a brief overview of the selected theoretical approach.

1. Diasporic Women on the Move: Postcolonial Feminist Re-inscriptions

Our choice of the Postcolonial Feminist perspective in reading the two texts together reveals the divergent ways in which diasporic women writers

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are seeking to transform these representations of African and Caribbean women in literature. By adopting the diasporic novel as a means through which to portray the intricacy and diversity of African and Caribbean women's experience, the two writers create a kind of

> "a resistance to objectification of women in society, in literature, art and culture. It is also the articulation of a critical and an intellectual practice which challenges all patriarchal assumptions and norms. It is also a politics of possible transformation" (Davies, 1994, p. 20).

It is the feminine struggle that this article traces through the analysis of representations of the *subaltern* in the aforementioned novels. We shall highlight the significance of some key concepts such as: Gender roles, Voice and silence, Agency and Subjectivity, and the Rehabilitation of a collective national Memory. The objective is to study how the two authors make them interact to shape new representations of a determined category of people. By re-interpreting of historical facts, the two authors, using Carole Boyce Davies's *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994) prompts similar concerns. Whilst Davies advocates the notion of "*feminist discourse"* as a "*politics of possible transformation*", Buchi Emecheta and Julia Alvarez represent issues within "feminist discourse" to understand the experiences of all women.

In addressing the writing of Buchi Emecheta and Julia Alvarez, there is no need to delineate neither their ethnicity nor their womanhood. Through their fiction, they themselves speak extensively on, and with unerring insight into complex matters such as representation, nation, agency and voice. Particularly, in this work, *representati*on is defined as the artful capacity to speak for oneself in one's own words and in one's own voice, to have the authority to name oneself and the privilege of writing oneself into the national narrative to independently reshape one's own identity. It is a tool for recording culture; an inscription that takes the form of an alternative perspective on the past or present. Therefore, for the underprivileged, minorities, women, and aboriginal peoples, representation is a means of resistance.

Representation, in other words, is the act through which meanings and values are socially shaped and enhanced by the emerging culture. People recognize and decode the world living within via the process of naming it depending on representation. This is what the postcolonial critic Spivak (1988) claims in her controversial essay "Can the Subaltern Speak", she insists that when the subaltern speaks it no longer remains a subaltern … so

subalterns are not people who can be represented by privileged people, they are subjects who should speak for themselves.

In an attempt to resituate postcolonial theory in relation to feminism, Postcolonial theory has inclined to confirm that the term representation denotes a multiplicity of meanings. Women have to carve a presence in the domain of representation advancing their own personal narratives to affect and challenge the established and dominant discourses of patriarchy and segregation. In our efforts to examine the significance of the concept of "Representation" focusing on Gender issues merged with political motifs in the two novels, the two novels are studied as political metaphors of the Nigerian and Dominican situation. The two authors' act of fighting against the canon by means of literature, both written and oral, go back to the colonial eras in the African Diaspora. Francoise Lionett (1995) accurately entraps the function of literature in resistances when she maintains that:

> "Literature, as a discursive practice that encodes and transmits as well as creates ideology, is a mediating force in society: it structures our sense of the world since narrative or stylistic conventions and plot resolutions serve to either sanction and perpetuate cultural myths, or to create new mythologies that allow the writer and the reader to engage in constructive re-writing of their social contexts." (p. 101).

Hence, for the women characters of the texts under discussion, life is a sequence of several forms of challenges to power that seeks to limit their actions, define their tasks, and disempower them. The women in the two texts are not submissive victims of tyranny, but are embroiled in re-working power and undermining dehumanising centres of control.

Emecheta and Alvarez continue in an extended tradition of imagining modes of resistance and disobedience to the established order of patriarchal oppression through presenting narrative accounts and placing them in the field of representation as counter narratives to the previous ones, which are hegemonic in nature. In his "From Orality to Writing: African Women Writers and the (Re) Inscription of Womanhood", Obioha Nnaemeka (1994) recommends that, "studies of the content and form of African oral tradition reveal the centrality of women as subjects […] Women have also frequently been identified as founders of dynasties and civilizations" (1994, p. 138). This centrality, in part, of female subject is enhanced by women's ability to save and re-tell nations' histories in a way that fits their both history and imagination.

In her book *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, the Feminist theorist, Bell Hooks (1989) writes a series of essays that are meant to challenge and disrupt the way in which we view images. While she questions the prevailed images of blackness, at the same time, she calls for their transformation through subversive movements: adoring and celebrating blackness, opposing and challenging the exploitation of the other, producing black subjectivity, and presenting oppositional representations of black people. In her *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, Hooks claims:

> Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is the act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words; that is the expression of our movement from object to subject liberated voice. (hooks, 1989, p. 29).

When applied our two selected texts, terms and notions must be defined especially as scholars use them differently and some expressions have no fixed definition. Moreover, to understand for example representation and women's political activism, we suggest that a background on self and othering is required. Furthermore, a background of agency (of women) is given, including comments on voice and memory, since they are often interconnected.

2. Representing Women Reclaiming Agency

The question of agency arouses when we are anxious with the vital concepts of sovereignty and autonomy that liberal philosophy has been dealing with as a core worry. The question of *agency for whom* is what pushes us to its locus – the subject meant, who hold agency, who "must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 12). Postcolonial writings vary in their approach and comprehension of the term agency, stretching from the early works of anti-colonial researchers such as Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon, then the well-recognized Postcolonial scholars like Gaytri Spivak (1988) and Homi Bhabha (1995). This resistance to regain agency is conceived as *recovery*, predominantly the recovery of one self, in Bhabha's words

> "Our task remains, however, to show how historical agency is transformed through the signifying process; how the historical event is represented in a discourse that is somehow beyond control" (ibid).

Such a recovery brings about political clash and release from colonial control, and the quest for, and acknowledgment of, cultural subjectivity, a transformation that has been methodically underestimated and renounced by the colonizers. More precisely, the Subaltern School, whose project is to render observable the voices, histories, locations, struggles and commitments of the marginalized, has challenged diverse hegemonic ideologies. In Davies (1994) words, this attempt "demands some sort of understanding of culture either as oppositional or as resistance, and further as transformational if we are to recoup any identities beyond the ones imposed". (p. 9)

While recovering of voice and the formulation of counter-narratives allows us to realize resistance and agency, other forms of resistance adopted, particularly by women, as creating new hybrid spaces, imitating the opponent are equally significant. As the oppressive hierarchies of larger structures demarcating and controlling lives of people, power has also been converted as exploited in the subject who practices agency. This is the most central conundrum of agency for women which feminism faces. How to transform the experience of power in women's daily lives from powerless to powerful agents? This is is the focus of the experience of agency for women within the context of war, political activism, and memory.

3. Recovery of Voice and Framing of Counter-Narratives

The multiple subjectivities of Black women writers, which create a variety of possibilities of transformative representations, allow Black women writers to make their voices heard and to speak from an insider/outsider position. The importance of feminine voices, as André Lorde writes is vital to woman's empowerment; she writes: "I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important tome must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood" (Lorde, 1984, p. 40). Speaking contributes to breaking the silences that have suppressed the generations before them bring out our voices to speak loudly our truths and sharing the experiences of people in an attempt of *healing* among other aims. In the same vein, in her essay" Speaking in tongues: Dialogics, Dialectic and the Black Women Writer's Literary Tradition, "Mae Gwendolyn Henderson (2014) states:

> "Through the multiple voices that enunciate her complex subjectivity, the Black woman writer not only speaks familiarly in the discourse of the other(s), but as other, she is in contestorial dialogue with the hegemonic dominant and subdominant or ambiguously (non) hegemonic discourses … to see the other,

> but also to see what the other cannot see, and to use this insight to enrich both our own and the other's understanding" (p. 62).

It can be understood that the two writers under discussion, Buchi Emecheta and Julia Alvarez focus on finding their specific voices and identities through offering new representations in the context of the political activism and war horrific. Though they are quite different in many aspects and belong to different cultures and traditions. Buchi Emecheta is Nigerian; she lives in England and writes in English, with mixed Igbo and Yoruba influences while Julia Alvarez is Dominican; she lives in USA and she linked to Caribbean and Spanish cultures and languages. Nonetheless, they share a commitment to uncover women's voices and defend woman's cause of emancipation through writing texts within unstable political contexts.

4. Through their Eyes: Taking another Look

Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* and Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salome* are two texts that, paired, convincingly reveal the significance of finding new methods of representing national community through writing about two countries, constituting different regions cleaved by colonization. After residing in the metropolitan centers to which they migrated as children, adolescents, or young adults, the female characters of these women writers create look into their own reminiscences and the stories told by their parents, relatives, and friends in order to save and protect a past that seems fated to fade away.

In *Destination Biafra* (1982), Buchi Emecheta recreates the African woman. Her heroine, Debbie Ogedengbe, rises above all the traumas and tragedies of the fratricidal Nigerian Civil War. The most remarkable aspect of this female creation is her sense of freedom, freedom from the harsh, strict realities of Nigeria engulfed in turbulent times. Likewise, *In the Name of Salomé* (2000), Julia Alvarez creates a typical fictional protagonist, Camila Henriquez Ureña, who pledges a whirlwind journey of personal discovery in which she brings back to life the ghost of a woman she never knew, her mother, Salomé Ureña, the acclaimed Dominican political poet, and "la musa de la patria"Politics of Possible Transformation": Representing Self, Representing Nation in African and Caribbean Women's Selected Narratives" (Alvarez, p. 134). By writing a novel about national heroines, Alvarez redefines the writing of fiction as she intends to represent the past otherwise. Such a re-creation is explained in in her novel *In the Time of Butterflies* (1994) where Alvarez describes her writing as creating the illusion of the real life to

> "immerse my readers in an epoch in the life of the Dominican Republic that I believe can only finally […] be redeemed by

> the imagination. A novel is not, after all, a historical document, but a way to travel through the human heart" (Alvarez, p. 324).

For her part, Buchi Emecheta's utopian vision pushes Debbie to have faith in her capability to fulfill her dreams by playing an active role as a subject in all domains even politically. Her perseverance helps Debbie to join the army before the coup. The same role is given for Salome Uruna, in Julia Alvarez's text. She becomes a political figure and a national poet as her poems stimulate the rebellions to fight against the dictatorship. By presenting novels in which the target of the fiction is the subject of narrating national history itself, both *Destination Biafra* and *In the Name of Salome* deal with the question of the intricacy of legislating and cherishing women's uprising. And it is the nature of the narrative proficiency, the manners in which the stories are told, which function as an interpretation on their supposed spaces as women of third world without authorized voice of documented history.

Destination Biafra and *In the Name of Salome* bring new perspectives to bear upon a significant aspect of Nigerian and Dominican history that has been controlled by one segment of society. The two narratives historicize the trauma and scars carried by women and children during the war and genocides, focusing mainly on how the political unsettle is undressed of the glamour which masculinist accounts often endow it with, and how this is seen in all its senselessness and brutality. Just as the warlike fight over wealth and territory, so are accounts of what took place during the conflict being fought over between those who prosecuted it and those who were its victims.

The redefinition of the woman within multiple spaces of transformation has been achieved through the construction of "new feminist myths … geared towards providing women with a wholesome understanding and acceptance of themselves and an awareness of their various life possibilities." (Oku, 1987, p. 233). Buchi Emecheta and Julia Alvarez thus creatively reverse the suffocating-imposed stereotypes by constructing new liberating myths of the woman's reduced representations and capabilities. The two writers create women's consciousness, sharpen their visions and their goals towards greater achievement in spaces of transformation. The new images of women in the two selected works, thus, challenge women to greater self-application and achievement in all areas of endeavor. Certainly, the strong onlooker represents from away on both time and location, differs from the memories of the people lived the incident. Therefore, the two authors take the load as all the writers, particularly, of the third world, to represent the otherness of women. Thus, in the two novels the past is revisited and revised,

although from different time frames and settings. Emecheta and Alvarez are fully aware, as Linda Hutcheon notices, that "the past is not something to be escaped, avoided, or controlled … the past is something with which we must come to terms" (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 58). Emecheta's and Alvarez's reconnections with their ancestors' land and their reconstruction of the lives of dead women is essential due to their position as *other* within their patriarchal traditions and their status as legends and heroines within these societies. The authors revival of their forgotten voices is meant to challenge the established order and to put an end to these women's marginalized status by linking their fictions with history in the reimagining of their nations. They combine the role of the storyteller and historian to recall and re-present their national history through the eyes of women who experienced and contributed to transformation within these societies. Both authors shape their main female characters as subjects endowed with a powerful capacity of thought.

5. Empowering Woman with a Possibility to Speak her Mind

Throughout history, women used to be recognized only in their difference as powerless, silent and submissive. However, they learned to become active in bypassing their status quo. In this changing process Emecheta and Alvarez reveal the ways how women's survival depends on her ability to utilize all political, social, economic tools available to her from both the larger society and within her community. To build a national identity, women should go beyond their subordination to men and abolish the gendered division between public and private spheres. By incorporating women's perspectives and experiences into narratives of national history, the two women writers are not simply adding their voices to existing narratives; they rather demonstrate how gender plays a crucial role in the construction of national identities and collective consciousness. Through their novels, Emecheta and Alvarez challenge and revise the boundaries of imagined communities; they disrupt the gendered hierarchies that underpin them. In so doing, both succeed to subvert the existing narrative, by rethinking the way in which national identity is constructed and defined.

Moreover, by focusing on the voices and experiences of women, Emecheta and Alvarez articulate a vision of national identity that is more inclusive, diverse, and complex. It is an identity that encompasses a range of experiences and perspectives that contribute to the collective consciousness of a nation. In this way, they contribute to the ongoing process of re-imagining and

redefining national identity and collective consciousness in more inclusive and equitable terms.

More significantly, the two women writers place their female narratives within a framework of the Nigerian and Dominican female discourses in order to explore the signal part played by women in healing the traumatized and splintered communities. Through their texts, they break the long-imposed silences and enable Nigerians and Dominicans to confront their dark past and suggest the possibility to revise it. In doing so, they reinforce the necessity for new narratives of healing, hope and recovery. Their fiction makes the case for a restorative use of the past, a coming to terms with Biafran tragedy and Dominican traumas in order to move forward. Hence, Buchi Emecheta's and Julia Alvarez's novels can be linked to the idea of resistance to power. In her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center,* Bell Hooks (1984) claims that:

> "Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives." (p. 26).

In the light of Bell Hook's concept, *Destination Biafra* and In *the Name of Salomé* can be read as revolutionary texts which challenge traditional, male dominated versions of history in Nigeria and the Dominican Republic. Both authors redirect historical and communal balls to the lives of brave and fervent Nigerian and Dominican woman who have, in Bell Hooks words, succeeded "*to recover herself, [she] has to relearn the past, understand her culture and history, affirm her ancestors, add assume responsibility for helping other black folks to decolonize their minds"* (Hooks, 1992, p. 19). The female subject is obliged to comprehend the process of transformation, the shift of their minds from submissive to full recognition of the self. It is this empowering progression that allows woman, to face oppression in its various forms. Creating this space, the two writers let women talk about their experiences as Bell Hooks claims:

> "It is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires" (ibid 24).

Julia Alvarez highlights the challenges faced by Salomé Ureña, a Dominican poet and writer in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, due to her gender and her political views. At the time, it was not common for

women to write political poetry or to openly express their views on social and political issues. Salomé's decision to do so was seen as both unusual and threatening to those in power, who saw her as a potential threat to the status quo because "*she was going to bring down the regime with pen and paper*" (Alvarez, p. 62). The comments made by Salomé's family and friends suggest the limited opportunities available to women at the time, as well as the gender stereotypes that were prevalent in Dominican society. Her aunt Ana's suggestion that "This Herminia is a warrior […]. Herminia is really a man, hiding behind a woman's skirt" (Alvarez, p. 63). This suggestion reflects the belief that women were not capable of participating in political discourse or making significant contributions to society. Despite these challenges, Salomé continues to write and publish her poetry, using her pen as a tool for social and political change. Her work continues to be celebrated today as a testament to the power of women's voices and the importance of challenging gender norms and expectations.

Julia Alvarez highlights the role of Salomé Ureña's poetry in giving voice to the experiences and emotions of women during a time when such expression was not widely accepted. Her poetry was considered to be divisive because it challenged the prevailing patriarchal discourse that sought to silence women's voices. Through her poetry, Salomé conveys not only her own emotions and thoughts but also the experiences of other women. Her daughter, Camila, reflects on her mother's desires, struggles, and motivations. In doing so, she begins to construct her own identity and change her destiny.

Furthermore, Alvarez draws parallels between the lives and experiences of Salomé and Camila, highlighting the ways in which the struggles and triumphs of one generation can inform and inspire the next. Through Camila's exploration of her mother's legacy, she discovers the hidden parts of herself and begins to forge her own path, empowered by the knowledge and inspiring models of those who came before her.

Camila writes that she wanted to find her mother, to draw Salomé next to her,

> "I learned her story. I put it side by side with my own. I wove our two lives together as strong as a rope and with it I pulled myself out of the pit of depression and self-doubt" (Alvarez, p. 335).

In this way, Alvarez's novel celebrates the power of women's voices and the role of storytelling in connecting us to our past and guiding us towards a more just and equitable future

On the other hand, Emecheta is ahead of her time when she gives powerful roles to women as military agents. The female protagonist in *Destination Biafra*, Debbie Ogedemgbe, and her friend, Babs Teteku are active and dedicated. Emecheta makes her central female character an army officer at a moment when women in battle were principally absent. Emecheta's choice transforms the normative discourse that looks at women as merely passive participants in war. Even Debbie confesses that her decision is unconventional, as she accurately describes her choice subversive as she "*would be the first Nigerian woman graduate to join up*…" (Emecheta, p. 57). Debbie recognises that her status will be more difficult by her social position and gender difference. Her reaction to this choice strongly proves her fears but she decides "*to enlist as soon as possible*" (Emecheta, p. 57). Unfortunately, within her society, she is either invisible or seen as a sex subject. The army officer, Abosi, her childhood friend, looks at her more as a sex possession than a potential soldier. "*you would certainly add glamour to our regiment*" (Emecheta, p. 58). Even her British boyfriend, Alan Grey, is not ready to see her as in such a position; he recommends that it is better for her to concentrate on peacemaking rather than doing such a job.

It is important to point out that Emecheta places greater emphasis than Alvarez on the representation of women in battlefields. She makes her characters benefit from the same advantages as her male colleagues. Nonetheless, Debbie's status is denied even as she is entrusted with the task of discouraging Abosi from withdrawing. She is not expected to exploit her intellect and mental power. Momoh asks her to "use her feminine wiles" (Emecheta, p. 118). Her uniform does not prevent her from humiliations that other women endure. On the contrary, at moments, her position makes her face more hostilities. Salihu Lawal, the soldier who guides her to the meeting where she gets her mission, does not consider her as a true soldier; he states "*I'm going to show you that you are nothing but a woman, an ordinary woman*" (Emecheta, p. 175). So, to transform the world outside the self, tactically, women of color–endeavors should be a central constituent of all other emancipation struggles because it challenges the oppressive norms. In Emecheta's novel, women's voices provide testimony of the process of transformation black women go through to become subjects as Hooks asserts:

> "The crisis of black womanhood can only be addressed by the development of resistance struggles that emphasize the importance of decolonizing our minds, developing critical consciousness. Feminist politics can be an integral part of a renewed black liberation struggle. Black women, particularly

> those of us who have chosen radical subjectivity, can move toward revolutionary social change that will address the diversity of our experiences and our needs. Collectively bringing our knowledge, resources, skills, and wisdom to one another, we make the site where radical black female subjectivity can be nurtured and sustained." (Hooks, 1992, p. 60).

Comparatively, the emergence of self-consciousness on gender discrimination is also broached at Alvarez's novel. The author should play a role of an "intellectual awakener" who had a responsibility towards her nation. Her task consists of recording what has been silenced and hidden. Julia Alvarez states that she wishes to contribute for the change, to change people's perceptions of one's own status by re-presenting his/her culture through the private heritage of the motherland. The following passage tells more:

> "In the Dominican Republic I grew up in that oral tradition. My parents were not avid readers. I seldom saw people read. There weren't many books in the house. So as a child the telling of stories was really important, as well as learning to be a good listener. That's why the voice of a character is so important to me. I grew up in a culture that wasn't, in truth, literary, but it certainly had a rich folk culture, a culture full of stories." (Tabor et al, 2000, p. 151).

As a revolutionary act, Salome determines to publish her poem "Quejas" as a type of revolt against oppressive social rules that limit women's freedom while man is privileged. The author expresses such a social gender disparity in a situation when a fifteen-year-old girl is rejected and abandoned because her relatives discover she is pregnant out of marriage. The man who rapes her denies his act and the young woman turns to Salomé's aunt for help. The women handle to resolve the problem but in the eyes of Salomé,

> "[i] t seemed unjust that this young woman's life should be ruined, whereas the rogue man went on with his engagement to a girl from a fine family with no seeming consequences to be paid […] Why was it alright for a man to satisfy his passion, but for a woman to do so was as good as signing her death warrant? There was another revolution to be fought if our patria was to be truly free" (Alvarez, pp. 144–145).

Male-controlled society imposes its oppressive norms upon women, particularly in the case of Salomé Ureña. After her death, her husband and family members sought to create a legend around her. In doing so, they

transform her image to fit their idealized vision of her. They made her look more handsome and gave her a lighter skin tone, which did not accurately reflect her true identity as a mulatto woman. Camila denounces her father's deeds when saying: "*He wanted my mother to look like the legend he was creating*" and adds "*But it was not just Pancho. Everyone in the family—yes, including Mon!—touched up the legend of her mother*" (Alvarez, p. 44). Salomé clarifies the disconnection between her status as the nation's conscious subject and her social inferior position, she claims: "*They don't love me, Ramona, they love la poetisa, if you can even call it love*" (Ibid, p. 92).

Salomé is also aware of the way in which others consider. She knows that her community members ignore her real role she has played; she stands only a legend or a symbol. The self-consciousness is mentioned by Dianna Taylor's when using Michel Foucault's concept on power and resistance within the construction of an identity. She writes

> "Identity is not simply given; rather, it is a product of one's relationships with oneself, others, and the world… Acts of liberation, according to Foucault, release persons from state of domination and, as such, enable them to negotiate relations of power." (Cited in 0rr, 2007, p. 253).

Women must, therefore, change the way they think in order to learn how to create a world without the man's control if they want to surpass the limitations of the image allotted to them. To transcend it, women should think differently and learn how to shape a world without the control of the dominant patriarchal society, which requires acts of liberation that can enable women to negotiate relationships of power and assert their own agency and identity. Salomé's poetry and legacy are acts of liberation because they allowed her to speak her truth and connect with other women to inspire and empower them.

Correspondingly, Emecheta is aware about the rigidity of the rules in her conservative society. She prizes Debbie's decision to change through a conscious transformation by the end of the Biafra war. She learns "Thinking differently" (Emecheta, p. 253), in M. Foucault words, is the act for real emancipation for such silenced category, this liberatory act is displayed in a dialogue when Alan Grey tries to convince her to use her feminine wiles to stop Chijioke Abosi from deploying biological weapons. If she does not succeed, Grey warns her that Momoh and his allies will take their superior armaments into Biafra and crush the uprising. Knowing that Abosi finds Debbie attractive, Alan advises her to get the rebel leader to surrender by

flirting with him. In an angry response, Debbie slaps him for the way he has mistaken in the estimation of African countries asserting

> "I am a woman and a woman of Africa. I am a daughter of Nigeria and if she is in shame, I shall stay and mourn with her in shame. No, I am not ready yet to become the wife of an exploiter of my nation" (Emecheta, p, 258).

She thus begins to assert her independence from her white lover. But because Debbie is portrayed as a representative of Nigerian women, this is a reply that functions symbolically to break the colonial stranglehold on her country. Alan thinks he spoke personally to her, but she recognises the political significance of his command and responded accordingly, reaffirming the connection in this novel between sexual politics and colonization.

To overcome the subordinate status of being a woman, Debbie starts a feminist aggressive campaign, equipped with her academic and family potentialities added to her involvement in the army. Debbie has faith in gender equality and wishes to practice the same right even the privilege to wrestle and kill. Thus, she resolves to" *help the Nigerian army-not as a cook or a nurse, but as a true officer*" (Emecheta, p. 45). Debbie also decides to be manlier than men. To contribute in the process of nation building, she yells orders to the officers with her authoritative voice in a way: "[her] *large eyes sparkled … to make her voice carry any weight she had to yell at the top of her voice until the sinews of her thin neck stood out in relief"* (Emecheta, p. 79). By imposing herself, she transgresses the patriarchal established norms. Her actions stand for that of the prisoners who stares at her with astonishment as to say "*whatever you do, however much you are armed and in command now, you are still a woman*" (Emecheta, p. 79). As a result of this expulsion, Debbie agonises the arrogant officers and exhibits her devotion to war instructions as men even if she is supposed to practice the harshest torments.

For her part, Salome, in Jullia Alvarez, rises to awareness through the conversation with her husband about her personal poems when he confesses "*You're right, Salomé. I sometimes confuse my muse with my wife" to which she answers "I want to be both*" (Alvarez, p. 177). The conflict over personal identity enhances new politics of transformation. In Salomé's case, her identity and image were shaped by her status of a poet, wife, patriot, mother, muse, lover, la poetisa, woman, educator, daughter, sister, and all the countless of roles she occupied and were imposed upon her. Salome does not go through military experiences as those undertaken by Debbie, but by adopting the pseudonym Herminia to defend herself from the unstable governments, Salomé produces poetry that is "*waking up the body politic*" (Alvarez, p. 62). Herminia, Salomé writes:

"to bring down the regime with pen and paper" (Alvarez, p. 62). Locating herself within the Dominican belief of connecting poetry and politics, Salomé views her verses as influential and dissenting. When the Dominican Republic rendered to be a colony of Spain once more during the years between 1861 and 1865, she writes: "*It was a time for poetry, even if it was not the time for liberty*" (Alvarez, p. 55) largely because "*In those days of being a colony again, the newspapers were full of poetry. The Spanish censor let anything in rhymed lines pass, and so every patriot turned into a poet*" (Alvarez, p. 55). When Buenaventura Báez takes power, he begins to banish poets "*for writing poems against the new regime*" (Alvarez, p. 60).

It can be said then that, through the voices of memories in both novels, the lost histories of women silenced by masculine figures represented by father/dictator/husband/brother are rescued to build a bridge from self to other and vice versa. The women characters, in both novels, realize how they can challenge the prevailing authority by using their own stories to reveal the hidden, the private, the prohibited, and the censored feminine voices. For instance, Debbie presents the African new woman in Emecheta's words. Camila rehabilitates her mother's voice. The troubled political history of Nigeria and the Dominican Republic are remembered by these female writers by recalling the hurting past and carrying witness to it. The process of bearing witness to the past has been a vital duty for many female writers as they engage correcting the past at a personal and collective levels. In this way, they contribute to their countries' progress.

6. Women Telling Nation: Between Obligation and Commitment

The genre of historical fiction is an effective literary vehicle for women to critique patriarchal modes of representation. For years, the female nation's literary publications dedicated sections, even entire literary works to the portraying of the historical scenes on their nations. As Françoise Lionnet (1989) states in her book on Caribbean women writers, *Autobiographical Voices Gender, Self-Portraiture*:

> "since history and memory have to be reclaimed either in the absence of hard copy or in full acknowledgment of the ideological distortions that have colored whatever written documents and archival materials do exist, contemporary women writers especially have been interested in re-appropriating the past so as to transform our understanding of ourselves […] it has become imperative to understand and to participate fully in the process of re-vision" (p. 4–5).

That hoped transformation of women's image is obvious in the historic of the two women authors under discussion. I examine the ways in which their texts resemble and sometimes differ, but most importantly are the examination of the ways in which each writer's approach of history revising reveals her own relationship to the nation(s) she seeks to redefine. Two questions inform my reading: What are the connections between the writer and the nation in which she writes? To what extent do these writers reinforce the assumed connection between representations and national commitment? Thus, female narratives construct alternative notions of the nation that defy the rigidity of boundaries around spheres, communities and territories.

In their revisions of the past, Alvarez and Emecheta rewrite the individual and collective histories of the silenced and oppressed women, thus creating a counter-history as an alternative to the official historical records. Both authors engage in a process wherein they rely not only on historical information but also on the workings of memory and the imagination. While Alvarez draws from the real story of Salome Urena and her daughter Camila, a skillful weaving of fact and fiction where a daughter tries to shape her identity out of her mothers' legacy that turns around the Dominican Republic's history. Emecheta bases her novel on the 1971 Nigerian Civil War. Her use of historical materials in *Destination Biafra* permits her to manipulate happenings, situations and characters to represent the intricacies of the past. Such representations are basic in a story depends on the imagination of the author. By displaying Nigeria's and Dominica's historical pasts, Emecheta and Alvarez have inevitably instituted themselves on the past by creating narratives that compete to explain what the past really indicated.

Although, Emecheta and Alvarez were living away from their native lands during the political troubles, they were able to transmit the events in skillful manner, this confirms a speech delivered in Japan in 1966 by Simone de Beauvoir who discussed the relationship between authors' creativity and distance and the ways in which it determines narrative outcome, she affirms:

> "It is necessary to want to reveal the world to others. Consequently, one must attain a certain distance from it. When totally immersed in a situation, you cannot describe it. A soldier in the midst of the fighting cannot describe the battle. But equally, if totally alien to the situation, you cannot write about it either. If somebody were to try to provide an account of a battle without having seen one, the result would be awful." (De Beauvoir (1966) in Diamond 1998, p. 188).

Although these authors write from the diaspora, away from their countries, their texts are representations of their people's realities; both reveal a commitment to the literary bequest of their indigenous cultures. The main themes of their writings prove their concerns with their countries problems. As an illustration, through Camila, Alvarez manifests the intricacy of recognizing accurately how to represent the history, once that past is regained. The novel goes beyond time by connecting the history of the Dominican Republic to the life of Salome. Adopting a wide diversity of subjects, Alvarez depicts political troubles, mutinies, love and family, and shows the pains and plights of woman and her way to achieve self-consciousness. Alvarez transcends the bridge between the past and the present, blending poems and letters to narrate the nations' as through women's stories.

By returning to her nation's archive, Alvarez represents a revised picture of her nation's history, stressing women's emancipation, fleshing out the facts, providing them life, and putting them in the center of her stories. The narrator suggests that "Camila has questions herself as to whether she could possibly have remembered all this. The truth is: she remembers spots. And the rest is the story she has made up to connect those few dim memories so she does not lose her mother completely" (Alvarez, p. 119).

Just as Alvarez resolves imaginatively what is embodied in archive, Emecheta also creates comparable instances of the women stories while talking the same issues of representation. The Nigerian author represents women as subjects attempting to free themselves from patriarchal chains. *Destination Biafra* is an illustration of the way Emecheta creates a historical fiction, which "simply had to be written" (Emecheta, p. vii). In her novel, she selects the recollections of the dead women who are not able to speak anymore. She mentions the namesake of her niece first among her relatives innocently murdered in the war. The memory of her relatives become revived voices, which stand the memory of those of "Ibuza [Emecheta's home town] women and their children who were roasted alive" (Emecheta, p. vi). National characters that are used to convey a sense of cultural identity and a historical heritage. As Alvarez, Emecheta, promotes her women representations as subjects rather than objects in her historical fiction.

Both share their attempt to dig into the past in order to appreciate the present of their nations and peoples through their novels. The two writers have then rescued the female figures of Dominican and Nigerian histories who had long been forced to oblivion. Salome urena, for instance, the

national poetess, her daughter Camila, and Debbie prove the point. Alvarez's fiction as she writes:

> "this book is an effort to understand the great silence from which these two women emerged and into which they have disappeared, leaving us to dream up their stories and take up the burden of their songs" (Alvarez, p. 357).

Historically, these characters existed, though, fictionalized, as Alvarez confirms "*the Salome and Camila you will find in these pages are fictional characters based on historical figures but they are re-created*" (Ibid, p. 357).

Comparatively, Emecheta declares that "*the major characters here are fictional and have been chosen to portray the attitudes of many countries and individuals to the Biafran* war" (Emecheta, p. vii). The events, situations and characters in the novels are grounded firmly in historical frame, but they do far more than simply convey a historical truth about Nigerian and Dominican national troubles. Salome dreams to be a poet, which linked to her country since she longs to "*free la patria with my sharp quill and bottle of ink*". (Alvarez, p. 50). Her novel can be regarded as a political writing as she asserts: "*I was glad. Poetry, my poetry, waking up the body politic*" (Alvarez, p. 62). According to Don Eliseo Grullon – family friend and statesman, "*whoever this Herminia [Salome's pseudo name] was, she was going to bring down the regime with pen and paper*" (Alvarez, p. 62). Through these reactions, Salome realises that her poetry is powerful and liberatory.

The meeting point for the novels is the historical writing of the events by reinforcing the women's involvement in political activism. Alvarez paints a powerful image of a rebellious women that is empowered allegorically by her pen and political poetry. The same role is given to Debbie in *Destination Biafra*. She wears the military uniform that gives her a symbolic new power by hiding all attributes considered feminine. Just as Salome adopts a new weapon to re-write her nation's past, Debbie abandons the comfort and safety of her rich family in order to accomplish a military mission. Using such techniques in re-telling the history of their women and nations, Emecheta's and Alvarez stress the duty of the writer to revise the past events and to correct them from a woman perspective.

For them, a writer should not be neutral to interpret the historical events. The author should rather possess the ability to create and reconstruct moments in history that he/she sees vital to the re-creating of women forgotten voices in their contribution to nation building, which

> "has historically not only offered important ways of recovering self and reclaiming cultural integrity after colonial occupation, but has also remained an important ground for transforming political and economic conditions, forging identity and achieving social justice" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 4).

The interpretation of history is innovative and does not have to consent firmly with historical authenticity. In Emecheta's novel, for instance, the national commitment of women is questioned. By deciding to focus on Civil War, Emecheta deconstructs the patriarchal hypothesises through addressing female agency amidst political troubles. She has revealed that sometimes agency can be suppressed or overt, individual or collective. In each novel, women reveal hidden capacities to confront oppressive conditions. In *Destination Biafra*, women are revealing hitherto hidden capacity to address and successfully overcome challenges. They dig graves to bury the dead and cross Biafra with their children without husbands. Similarly, Salome rises political concerns in a debate with her husband about her personal poems when confesses: "*You're right, Salomé. I sometimes confuse my muse with my wife" to which she answers: "I want to be both*" (Alvarez, p. 177).

Therefore, the traditional image of women as victims, passive, and voiceless is replaced by an alternative model in which the woman becomes rebellious and powerful. Rejecting Alen Grey's proposition of marriage, her white lover, Debbie taunts him "*I didn't mind your being my male concubine, but Africa will never again stoop to being your wife, to meet you on an equal basis, like companions, yes, but never again to be your slave*" (Emecheta, p. 259). Through Debbie's choice, Emecheta suggests the possibility of change and of female freedom and responsibility.

The same desire for change appears in Alvarez's novel. The author tackles, however, larger questions as she explains: what is "la patria," where is "home," and what is it. Alvarez tells stories asserting the power of storytelling and history to establish personal and national identities, just as Debbie, tries to confront the recurrent bias said by males in her Nigerian society that "*there is no place for you here, you know that*" (Emecheta, p. 258). Alvarez's text denounces prejudices by claiming that women's spaces should be re-defined. Radical change appears through active characters like Salome who is a poet, a mother, and transcends that role to be the symbolic mother of la patria, and an effective contributor to the national discourse. Alvarez then creates a spiral of asymptotic lives, firmly binding but never blending the competing identities of Camila, her mother, and their homeland in various combinations. Salome's narrative starts with "*the story of my life starts with the*

Story of my country" (Alvarez, p. 13), instantly charting a parallel course for the progress of both Salome and the Dominican Republic. To guarantee that readers are familiar with the Dominican Republic unbalanced identity "*thirty-one [wars] just in Mama's [Salome's] lifetime*." (Alvarez, p. 110), she introduces the instability both in Salome's own life and in the nation's history. Born six years following the Dominican Republic declares its self-government from Haiti in 1844. Salome comes of age with her nation, both experiencing crises of hope, freedom, personal and cultural identity.

This is also mirrored in Emecheta's protagonist, Debbie Ogedengbe. Debbie herself is brutally raped by soldiers. She is also torn between her respect for Biafra's socialistic ideals and her wish that it stays part of the Nigerian federation, even if the federation itself, as the novel puts apparent, remains subjugated to Great Britain. Equally that Nigeria must be aware of how to free itself from British interfering; therefore, Debbie trains to free herself from Alan Grey. By presenting Debbie as "simply a Nigerian" (Emecheta, p. vii), Emecheta considers her heroine as an idol, someone whose fate is tied inescapably to that of her country and its people. This act gives presuppositions about the mutual link between woman and her nation.

Debbie, an Oxford-educated daughter of affluent Samuel Ogedengbe, returned to Nigeria/Biafra from England to witness and participate in the war. She joins the Nigerian army to assume to gain a powerful sense of responsibility towards her nation. She is confident that she wanted to do something more than child breeding and rearing and being a good passive wife

> "to a man whose ego she must boost all her days, while making sure to submerge every impulse that made her a full human. Before long she would have no image at all, she would be as colorless as her poor mother." (Emecheta, p. 45)

She feels like a strange and Emecheta voices out her heroine's deepest thoughts thus:

> "Yes, she would join the army. If intelligent people and graduates were beginning to join the ranks of the Nigerian Own Queen's Regiment, she intended to be one of them. It would be much more difficult for a woman, she knew, and the daughter of a minister at that, but she was going to fight. She was going to help the Nigerian Army—not as a cook or a nurse, but as a true officer!" (Emecheta, p. 45).

Thinking back to March 18, 1861, Salome, similar to Debbie's convictions, declares

> "I dreamed of setting us free. My shield was my paper and my swords were the words my father was teaching me to wield […] if I got scared I'd chant my brave name over and over to myself, Herminia! Herminia! Herminia! I would free la patria with my sharp quill and bottle of ink" (Alvarez, p. 50).

After questioning the nation and *la paria,* Salome learned from her father that, to achieve her compatriots and get her political messages heard, she must use the medium of poetry, she "was *Sowing seeds of sedition*" (Alvarez, p. 61). Salome's poems as well as Salome herself, therefore, are accountable for the political acts of her country, "she is saying what we all feel and don't have the courage to speak" (Alvarez, p. 61). The novel stresses Salome's coming to terms with the truth that, because of her revolutionary poetry, people are exiled and die.

Emecheta, also answers questions formulated by previous writers about the war but from a different perspective. As an exiled woman writer belonging to a minority, she creates descriptions to explain the causes of the political troubles and the task of women during that war. By using Nigeria's historical past, Emecheta imposes herself on the past by inventing narratives that explain what the past is, what the narratives manifest, and what were the author's hidden intentions. Emecheta, then interrogates the role of British and American governments in the political affairs of Nigeria by mentioning of names like Governor Macdonald and Captain Alan Grey, and their involvement in Nigeria's political landscape, which is strongly criticized in the novel. The Nigerian Civil War is a sad reminder of the historical reality. Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* provides a substitute narrative, which hitherto had been dominated by the male-authored texts, including Elechi Amadi's *Sunset in Biafra* (1973), Cyprian Ekwensi's *Divided We Stand* (1980), Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (1976) among others. Emecheta anchors her Civil War narrative on the platform of feminism. Even it focuses on the psychological trauma of gender-specific suffering, it achieves its success through the artistic presentation facilitated by the nexus between history and fiction.

This utilitarian technique of using Debbie and Salome as daughter and wife sharing domestic responsibilities, puts her fiction head-on as a mirror of that society, and also corresponds what Wellek & Warren (1984) describe in *Theory of Literature*, "*the common approach to the relations of literature and society is the study of works of literature as social documents, as assumed pictures of social reality*" (p. 102).

Correspondingly, in Alvarez's fiction, the author adopts re-telling history as technique to find power in a patriarchal society. This powerful strategy fits Foucault's assertions regarding the power and resistance to oppressive discourses in his *The History of Sexuality*,

> "The object, in short, is to define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality in our part of the world […] to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak." (Foucault, 1978, p. 11).

Both Camila and Debbie resist and struggle to negotiate their location between contradictory sets of discourses related to gender, family, ethnicity, culture, history and nationality. To achieve reconciliation, Emecheta and Alvarez come to terms with "confined women" by placing women in their right historical position, from which they protest and re-claim change in *Destination Biafra* and in *In the Name of Salome*.

Conclusion

The foregoing comparison of the two selected novels reveal that Julia Alvarez and Buchi Emecheta create female characters, which challenge the established order for woman. The female characters in the two narratives struggle against oppressives norms of their patriarchal societies. They do it with bravery and conviction that symbolize their desire for emancipation. They persist and fight against common problems that debilitate their vitality on their ways to make positive transformations to their lives. Their actions and motivations help to liberate women from their reduced identity and their complexes inflicted on them by negative and restrictive female gender constructs of their conservative societies. Their struggle displays an increased women's consciousness, which contributes to shape their own visions to reach their objectives. Alvarez creates a nationally documented and respected poet, Salomé in a very powerful situation. She begins publishing her own poems in a society controlled by the Spanish caste authorities. As an Afro, she struggles to change her subaltern position in a white Spanish upper class. Her gender and racialized exterior look locate her in a space of subordination. Salomé succeeds to transcend her societal obstacles by using poems of la patria to represent not only the strength of written word but also the power of the female consciousness.

The same woman empowerment goes through *Destination Biafra*. Debbie stands as the voice of what Emecheta dreams of. She is the new African woman voice of emancipation and the representation of the new Nigerian woman. Emecheta is conscious of the significance of creating such new image. Debbie is bright and well-educated; she expresses Emecheta's obsession with the suffering of women. She is distinguished by her enthusiastic awareness of the inequalities connected with the female experience. As a concluding statement for our comparison, we deduce that the new representations of female characters in Alvarez's and Emecheta's novels, thus, challenge and deconstruct the patriarchal norms attributed to women. In both narratives, female characters are endowed with self-application and attainments in all areas of their struggles. They are subjects with consciousness. They can attain a new and positive position, which subversively questions the backstage position of their gender by contributing to the emerging of revolts that reappraise the merit of the women and their equitable position beside man in all societal power structures.

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Abstract

The present paper contributes to the current critical debate on women writer's questioning of the past about woman's collaboration in the process of nation-building in fiction. By drawing parallels between women's fiction with emphasis on Buchi Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* and Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salome*, we intend to analyze, from a comparative and feminist perspective the literary transformative representations of female subjectivity in the context of war and national politics. A comparative study of the two narratives investigates the ways in which "Critical Feminist discourse" functions within

contemporary African and Caribbean writings. The intention is to address the inquiry of how to engender and invigorate not barely new political practices but overall, new thoughts, new images, new modes of conceptualization, new theories and models suitable to the intricacy and hitherto underrepresented nature and characteristics of women, the feminine and sexual difference. Such a transformation through fiction can prompt the necessity for women to replace their way in the literary canon, to re-visit their nations' past and look at themselves with different eyes.

Mots-clés

Narratives of transformation, Woman's Voice, Revision of National History-Critique of Norms, Strategies of Subversion, Deconstruction

مستخلص

تساهم هذه المقالة في النقاش النقدي الحالي حول استجواب الكاتبات للماضي فيما يتعلق بتعاون النساء في عملية بناء الأمة في الخيال. من خلال رسم أوجه تشابه بين روايتين أنثويتين، وجهة بيافرا لبوتشي إميشيتا وباسم سالومي لجوليا ألفاريز، قمنا بتحليل التمثيلات الأدبية التحويلية للذاتية الأنثوية في سياق الحرب والسياسة الوطنية. استكشفت دراستنا المقارنة للروايتين كيف يعمل الخطاب النسوي النقدي في الكتابة الأفريقية والكاريبية المعاصرة. تناول الروائيان مسألة كيفية توليد وتنشيط ليس فقط الممارسات السياسية الجديدة، ولكن الأفكار الجديدة عالميًا، والصور الجديدة، وأنماط جديدة من التصور، ونظريات جديدة ونماذج جديدة تتكيف مع تعقيد وطبيعة وخصائص المرأة التي لم يتم تمثيلها حتى الآن، الاختلاف الأنثوي والجنسي. يمكن لمثل هذا التحول من خلال الخيال أن يلهم النساء للتساؤل عن مكانتهن في القانون الأدبي، وإعادة النظر في ماضي أمتهن، والنظر إلى أنفسهن من منظور مختلف.

كلمات مفتاحيّة

روايات التحول، صوت المرأة، مراجعة التاريخ الوطني، نقد القواعد، الاستراتيجيات الهدامة، التفكيك

Résumé

Le présent article contribue au débat critique actuel sur la remise en question par les femmes écrivains du passé par rapport à la collaboration des femmes dans le processus de construction de la nation dans la fiction. En établissant des parallèles entre deux fictions féminines, en particulier *Destination Biafra* de Buchi Emecheta et *In the Name of Salome* de Julia Alvarez, nous avons analysé, d'un point de vue comparatif et féministe, les représentations littéraires transformatrices de la subjectivité féminine dans le contexte de la guerre et de la politique nationale. Notre étude comparative des deux récits a permis d'examiner la manière dont le « discours féministe critique » fonctionne dans les écrits africains et caribéens contemporains. Les deux romancières ont

abordé la question à savoir comment engendrer et revigorer non seulement de nouvelles pratiques politiques, mais globalement de nouvelles pensées, de nouvelles images, de nouveaux modes de conceptualisation, de nouvelles théories et de nouveaux modèles adaptés à la complexité et à la nature et aux caractéristiques jusqu'ici non-représentées des femmes, du féminin et de la différence sexuelle. Une telle transformation par le biais de la fiction peut inciter les femmes à interroger leur place au sein canon littéraire, à revisiter le passé de leur nation et à se regarder d'un œil différent.

Mots-clés

Récits de transformation, voix féminines, révision de l'histoire nationale, critique des normes, stratégies de subversion, déconstruction