Alternative Forms of the Nation in Women's Fiction

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ABSTRACT
The present study explores the construction of the concept of nation in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998) and Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé* (2000). It is my contention that female narratives construct alternative notions of the nation that defy the rigidity of boundaries around spheres, communities and territories, typical of traditional masculinist constructions of national identity. Danticat's novel exposes the violence implied in national identities constructed around racial superiority, exclusion, and the exaltation of powerful leaders. Alvarez's novel places emphasis on the notion of nation as process, the permeability of the public/private limit, and the deterritorialization of national identity.

Keywords: nation, *The Farming of Bones*, *In the Name of Salomé*, female narratives.

RESUMEN
El presente trabajo explora la construcción del concepto de nación en las novelas *The Farming of Bones* (1998) y *In the Name of Salomé* (2000) de Edwidge Danticat y Julia Alvarez respectivamente. Sostengo que las narrativas femeninas construyen nociones alternativas de nación que desafían la rigidez de las fronteras que separan ámbitos, comunidades y territorios, características típicas de las construcciones masculinas de la identidad nacional. La novela de Danticat expone la violencia implícita en la identidad nacional construida en base a la superioridad racial, la exclusión y el enaltecimiento de líderes poderosos. La novela de Alvarez pone énfasis en un concepto de nación como proceso, la permeabilidad del límite entre lo público y lo privado, y la desterritorialización de la identidad nacional.

Palabras clave: nación, *The Farming of Bones*, *In the Name of Salomé*, narrativas femeninas.

Introduction

As from the end of the twentieth century, due to the complexity of global phenomena, the concept of nation as established by modernity has proven unsatisfactory as a framework to explain contemporary experiences, especially experiences of racial, gender or ethnic minorities. The novels object of analysis, Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé* (2000) and Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998), constitute alternative constructions of the nation and national identities that account for other, non-hegemonic experiences of the community, which go beyond the traditional association of nation and territorial borders. Thus, my aim is to explore how fiction can construct alternative forms of the nation, bearing in mind the spatial dimension both in its materiality and its symbolic value, as a possible site of resistance.

My hypothesis in relation to the role of women in constructions of the nation holds that, considering that narratives of a common past and future sustain the notion of the nation, and that concepts of the nation and its narratives are traditionally male and masculine, female narratives construct alternative notions of the nation that defy the rigidity of boundaries around spheres, communities and territories.

Brief summaries of the novels are offered hereby to avoid interrupting the analysis to clarify plot aspects. *In the Name of Salomé* (INOS) recreates the life of Dominican poet Salomé Ureña (1850-1897), which is braided with the life story of her daughter, Salomé Camila Henríquez Ureña

(1894-1973). The structure of the novel is quite interesting, as the stories are told alternatively, Salomé's story in chronological ascending order and Camila's in descending order. The chapters for each story bear the same titles, in Spanish for Salomé and in English for Camila, but in reverse order. Also, the novel contains a prologue (1960), which narrates Camila's departure from the United States to go to Cuba to collaborate in the revolution, and an epilogue (1973) which narrates Camila's return to the Dominican Republic, where she will remain until her death. As regards the plot, Salomé, as a young girl starts to write verse and receives a privileged education. When she is still an adolescent, she starts to publish her patriotic poems in a newspaper that fuel patriotic feelings and revolts against the Spanish, who have taken over the Dominican Republic. She later meets and marries Francisco Herníquez, who is younger than she is, and the couple have three boys. With the help of José María de Hostos, and at his request, Salomé establishes a school for girls. Salomé's health worsens—she suffers from asthma—and some time after Francisco's return from France, where he had an affair with a French woman, she forgives him. Salomé is taken with consumption, yet, she can bear a fourth child, Camila, and dies three years later. Camila's life is then marked by orphanage. Her father remarries her dead mother's nurse within the year, and they have more children together, forming a new family that Camila forces herself not to love. She leads a life of search; she searches for the memory of her mother and for her true call—can she be a writer herself?—as well as her sexual identity, which she can never come to terms with. Migrating to Cuba, the United States, Cuba again and then the Dominican Republic takes its toll, making her always feel alienated. Her friendship with Marion, a former college mate, is the only important and long-lasting relationship she ever has. After retiring from her post in an American university where she teaches Spanish, she can finally hear her true call and decides to leave the comfort offered to her and go instead to help in the Cuban revolution. She takes part in the literacy brigades and there she seems to find the spirit of her mother. Almost blind due to cataracts, she returns to the Dominican Republic thirteen years later to reunite with her youngest half-brother.

Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (FOB) retells the brutal massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic that took place for five days in October 1937, under the command of dictator Rafael Trujillo. This event is narrated from the perspective of Amabelle, a young Haitian woman who was taken in by a Dominican family from Alegría after losing her parents to the currents of Massacre river at an early age. Amabelle does miscellaneous chores in the house where she was taken in as a child. However she seems to have an innate capacity to be a midwife, which was her mother's job. This ability allows her to assist Valencia, the lady of the house and almost a sister to Amabelle in their childhood, during her delivery of her twins. Valencia's husband holds an important position in the military and is extremely loyal to Trujillo. He does not make an effort to hide his scorn for Haitians, or the house hands, or even his own daughter for not being fair-skinned. Amabelle has a lover called Sebastien, a Haitian who works in the sugarcane harvest. They become engaged and decide to leave for Haiti soon, as there are rumors of *campesinos* attacking Haitians. They become separated and suddenly the horror breaks out. Amabelle leaves for the border with Yves, Sebastien's friend, in the hope of finding him there. Once they reach Dajabón, the last Dominican town before the river that separates the Dominican Republic and Haiti in the north they are attacked. Badly hurt, she and Yves finally manage to cross the river to the Haitian side. Amabelle accepts going to Yves' home, but she never ceases to search for Sebastien until, many years later, she finds out that he has died in the Dominican Republic. Twenty years later, she returns Alegría to relive her memories of Sebastien. On her way back to Haiti, she takes a bath in the shallow river and waits for the dawn, suggesting a new beginning for her after this closure.

It seems necessary to refer to Benedict Anderson's widely accepted definition of the nation in order to approach the concept, its limitations and critiques. In *Imagined Communities* (originally published in 1983), he defines the nation as “an imagined political community” (6). It is not a community as such, as there is no face-to-face interaction among all its members. Yet, the individuals perceive or imagine themselves as part of that community. Implicit in the nation are its

limits, which can be territorial or otherwise. As was stated, the traditional notion of the nation, especially when it is associated with rigid borders, territorial or otherwise, has lately come to be widely criticized. Yet, from a post-colonial perspective, the sense of belonging to a nation can be considered productive as a tool to counter imperial powers, which could be the case of Latin American independences in the first half of the nineteenth century and the successive consolidation of their territories. Likewise, Gregory et al. also point to the potentiality of the concept of the nation in relation to the "cases of nations without states, or with states that have been repeatedly undermined by colonialism and neo-colonialism" in which

> imaginative geographies of the nation serve to keep alive hopes of a future national state free from occupation and external control. In all these cases, innumerable geographical representations from official maps to landscape depictions to monumental architecture can be drawn upon to affirm and/or question notions of national identity. (487)

Also in a relatively positive spirit, Ashcroft et al. (1995) quote Franz Fanon when he states that "a national culture is a whole body of efforts made by people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which such people has created itself and keeps itself in existence" (Fanon qtd. in Ashcroft et al. 1995, 151).

Creative power and imagination seem to be of central importance in the construction of the nation. In fact, both Ashcroft et al. and Benedict Anderson point out that the emergence of the novel occurred at the same time as the emergence of the European eighteenth century nation-state. Interestingly, Anderson claims that reading audiences' imaginations were trained through fiction, and, as a result, they could mentally represent this sense of community among people who were in fact unfamiliar to one another. This is because the novel is a device that lends itself to "the representation of simultaneity in 'homogeneous, empty time'" (25), and "the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history" (26). Then, both the nation and the novel share a claim to imagination, and disclosing this consequently exposes the fact that both are constructs. Thus, if we continue the analogy, we can say that through textual destabilization of the traditional novel, the works analyzed in this chapter also destabilize traditional notions of history. It is also important to mention that history, whose consolidation as a scientific discipline occurred simultaneously with the consolidation of European nations, is another force that helped to construct empires as imaginary communities by legitimizing some peoples over others—those "without history"—together with the novel and other narratives, such as travel narratives. It is important, though, to mention that this narrative is not exclusively about a common past. As Yuval-Davis points out, the perception of the members of a nation is also closely linked to an idea of a "common destiny", which "can explain a subjective sense of commitment of people to collectivities and nations, such as in settler societies or in post-colonial states, in which there is no shared myth of common origin" (19). Narrating the nation, in a time unfolding from an ancestral past into a shared future, seems to be necessary in order to give coherence and unity to the heterogeneous experiences of a human group, an action which, at the same time, implicitly establishes boundaries to exclude those that do not partake of this narrative.

I wish now to turn to an important aspect of my hypothesis which has to do with the role of women in the challenging of traditional conceptions of nation. Nira Yuval-Davis (2012) calls attention to the fact that the role of women in discussions of nationhood has been invisibilized and diminished. She holds that "it is women—and not (just?) the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia—who reproduce nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically" (2). A possible explanation for this invisibilization she derives from Carol Pateman's evaluation of the social contract from a feminist perspective and concludes that women and domesticity have been bound to the private sphere, and "[a]s nationalism and nations have usually been discussed as part of the public political sphere, the exclusion of women from that arena has affected their exclusion from that discourse as

well" (2). As regards the role of women in the construction of the nation, they contribute to the cohesion of the community by enacting the function of symbolic border guards (Armstrong qtd. in Yuval-Davis 23), that is to say, they are in charge of identifying members from non-members by embodying the collectivity and reproducing the culture (Yuval-Davis 24). In my view, the result is that women are expected to be the depositaries of the national essence, so to speak, and are thus denied the possibility of change, and condemned to remaining static both in spatial and identitary terms. This bears a close connection to what Doreen Massey refers to as an idealized, nostalgic and impossible return to a place called home, where Woman has kept the cultural values of a community intact (157-173). As I will try to show later, the works under analysis are clear attempts at countering this tendency, and criticize practices that impose representations that idealize an apolitical stasis, favoring dynamism and agency instead.

Joanne P. Sharp, in the same vein as Yuval-Davis, points out in "Gendering Nationhood" (1996) that, even though national identity is key to contemporary subjectivity, its articulation with gender has been largely overlooked. As was mentioned before, the repetition of rituals and symbols produces the naturalization of a national identity. Likewise, the repetition of rituals and symbols also naturalizes gendered identities:

> Like national identity, gendered identity takes on its apparently 'natural' presence through the repeated performance of gender norms. In the performance of identity in everyday life, the two identifications converge. The symbols of nationalism are not gender neutral but in enforcing a national norm, they implicitly or explicitly construct a set of gendered norms. (Sharp 98)

Another contribution that I wish to retrieve from Sharp, which can enlighten the articulation of nation and gender, is the way in which femininity and masculinity are portrayed in national rhetorics. Belonging to a national community is not realized in the same way for men and women. Men—not any men but those who abide by the masculinity norms of heterosexuality and of being head of a heteronormal family—are represented in metonymic relation to the nation, whereas women are represented in a symbolic relation to the nation—for example, let us consider nations regarded as female, such as Britannia. In the figures of speech ascribed to the genders, there is also another issue implied: that of agency. "The nation is embodied within each man and each man embodies the nation", as is exemplified by the anonymous soldier. Conversely, "[i]n the national imaginary, women are mothers of the nation or vulnerable citizens to be protected" (99), and, therefore, what is suggested is that women have the symbolic role of "bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency" (McClintock qtd. in Sharp 99). In relation to this last option, Sharp points out how, regardless of the fact that many women seek to construct national citizenship by risking their own lives in the same way as men, women in action during the first Gulf War, for example, were represented in the media as abandoning their children and as responsible for the breaking of the traditional nuclear family. Succinctly put, then, "[t]he female is a prominent *symbol* of nationalism and honor. But this is a symbol to be protected by masculine agency" (Sharp 100, emphasis in the original). Thus, one can see that there are several ways in which national identity and gender are mutually influenced.

By way of a conclusion on the articulation of nation and gender, it has been proposed that an imagined sense of community can be achieved through creative discursive practices that may involve a story on the origin and future of nation. In re-writing national narratives of the past or otherwise, oppressed groups struggle for representation in the discursive realm. Some authors, however, denounce the invisibilization of women in traditional national narratives, or their misrepresentation in ways that negate them agency in the active construction of the nation. It has also been pointed out that the repetitive practices and rituals that naturalize national identity work in an analogous way to the repetitive practices that naturalize gender identities.

Feminist activists and theorists have for decades sought to destabilize given boundaries between public and private, and even questioned such division, in order to publicize their demands

and make them enter the (public) realm of legitimate discourse, which is, in fact, heterogeneous and multiple. Constructions of and discourses on the nation, which belong to the public sphere, can also be consequently destabilized once the gendered binary pair public/private, associated with the masculine and feminine principles respectively, is denaturalized and open to discussion.

Re-writing the Nation

The question on what the nation is and the construction of national identity is developed in Julia Alvarez's INOS. This text fictionalizes the life of Dominican poet Salomé Ureña and braids her story with her orphaned daughter's, Salomé Camila Henríquez. Thus in this case, the construction of the nation and the re-telling of history are closely linked. I will focus here on spatiality at the national and domestic levels, and I will consider it in its heterogeneity and constructedness.

Salomé's and Camila's stories offer different characterizations and constructions of the nation. Interestingly, in both cases the nation is presented as process and not as a received static notion. This in line with Doreen Massey's criticism of fixed national identities, represented as preexisting any cultural bond. In the case of Salomé, the construction of the nation roughly coincides with the territorial formation of the Dominican Republic in the context of the independence movements from Spain in South America in the nineteenth century, independence from Haiti, and intestine conflicts in relation to the formation of the nation-state. In this fictional reconstruction of Salomé Ureña's life, great emphasis is placed on her public self and her role in the construction of a national identity, as well as on the private sphere and the volatilization of rigid boundaries between the two realms. The binary distinction between public and private is not really dismantled but the possibility of movement for female subjects in these spaces is certainly put forward. Thus, what is actually dismantled is the rigidity of the codification of these two realms into male and female. The focus on Salomé's story then will be on the mutual influence of the public and private spheres, related to education and poetry writing, in the construction of a national identity.

In Salomé's section in INOS, one can clearly see the confinement of women to the space of the house, especially if we take into account that the story revolves around Salomé Ureña's life between 1856 and her death in 1897. The houses she inhabits throughout her life are constructed as spaces of resistance in which the tensions between her roles as poet and educator, and those typically imposed on women of her time are projected. The effect is the constant reelaboration of the pair nation/house and, by extension, of the pair public/private.

Education is one of the forms that the transgression of the boundaries between public and private takes. Since a very early age, Salomé is privileged enough to receive an instruction at home to which most women and few men had access[1]. Girls her age take manners classes with the Bobadilla sisters. There, they are taught to read but not to write. Salomé and her sister Ramona, however, are taught this skill by their mother, who warns them against showing this ability off. The contact that Salomé begins to have with her father at the age of six is through letters in verse, which mean her first steps in poetry writing. It is important to mention that the girls' father is Nicolás Ureña de Mendoza, the Dominican poet, educator and lawyer. It is interesting to mention the material spatiality that is related to the girls' early education. The Bobadilla sisters' house, located in the historical area, is in the Spanish style—tall, stone made and with tiled roofs—as those owned by the people from Spanish descent, whereas the rest of the houses are low, tin roofed and very modest. Such is the aspect of Salome's maternal home. Salomé's mother and aunt own their house, a fact which was frowned upon at the time, since women were not supposed to own property. This house,

[1] The possibility of receiving instruction since an early age into her adult life can be understood from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. In a system of exchange, cultural capital makes reference to the skills, knowledge and advantages that a person has that invest her with status and power. This form of capital and the attitude towards knowledge and education are generally transmitted from generation to generation within the family, which is Salomé's case (Bourdieu n.pag.).

in the afternoon, becomes her aunt's school of catechism. The living-room is then opened to the outside, though only for girls, but still we can see how this later influences Salomé's role as an educator.

When Ramona and Salomé reach adolescence, they are taken out of the Bobadilla sisters' school as their parents perceive they are wasting their time and because the Bobadilla sisters enthusiastically support Spanish rule over the Dominican Republic. National identity in this case is constructed by contrast to the Spanish identity.

Salomé does not interrupt her instruction until her marriage to Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal, who had given her a background in natural sciences, a field to which she had not had access before. Thus, Salomé becomes the privileged depositary of the knowledge that she will later bestow on her female students. The private realm of the mother's home is then permeated by the exterior, in the form of academic knowledge, and this knowledge is one of the assets which will transform Salomé into a public figure. The private sphere becomes a counterspace that defies the traditional conventions of the times as regards what kind of education a subject of the colony and particularly a woman should receive.

Knowledge and education eventually become for her the cornerstones for the construction of a national identity. In her house, Salomé establishes, years later, the first secondary school for girls, which would also train them as teachers, under the guidance of the positivist educator Fernando María de Hostos, who claims, "We are forging the new man but not the new woman. In fact, without one we can't possibly accomplish the other" (Alvarez 176). However, Salomé is reluctant to open the school at first as "[she] felt [her] first duty—after [her] wifely duties, of course—was to [her] writing" (177). The tension between her public role (as teacher and poet) and her private duties as a wife is obvious, but eventually she accepts Hostos' suggestion, after considering the new conflicts in the Dominican Republic.

She decides to focus on teaching when she finds out that General Lilís, the new Dominican dictator, recites her poems, which once fueled independence from Spain, to his troops. Due to the elusive nature of the meaning of nation, the same poems that "encouraged sentiments of progress and freedom" are now used to repress other Dominicans. In Salomé's words,

> I had lost heart in the ability of words to transform us into a patria of brothers and sisters. Hadn't I heard that Lilís himself liked to recite passages of my patriotic poems to his troops before battle?... The last thing our country needed was more poems. We needed schools. We needed to bring up a generation of young people who would think in new ways and stop the cycle of suffering on our island. (Alvarez 187)

Salomé's old home thus becomes a multiple, heterogeneous space where the public lives side by side with the private sphere of domesticity and child minding. In this sense, one can see a circumvention of the dichotomy and an appropriation and inhabitation of an alternative that overcomes the binarism.

As regards the spaces determined by poetry, in the intimacy of her home and the night, fifteen-year-old Salomé begins to write poems. Saddened by the political and social reality of the Dominican Republic, influenced by her humanistic education and gifted with a very sensitive and curious nature, Salomé wonders about what a nation means and mourns the fact that her country is again a Spanish colony as for March 18, 1861. She hopes to liberate her country from this condition: "I dreamed of setting us free. My shield was my paper and my swords were the words my father was teaching me to wield.… I would free la patria with my quill and bottle of ink" (Alvarez 50). A few years later, Salomé, under the pseudonym Herminia, begins to publish in *El Nacional* newspaper poems which cause uproar and inspire protests against the tyranny of Báez. Salomé feels proud and, in spite of her father's prohibition, she continues to write and publish more and more audacious poetry. Her mother, an admirer of Herminia, ignores her real identity until one day she finds the poem "A la patria" under Salomé's mattress. The revolts and social changes that

the population effects inspired by her poems, encourage her to continue writing. Thus, here one can observe the circular flow between the public and the private—from under the mattress, overcoming her father's prohibition, into the public realm and back into the domestic space inspiring Salomé to continue writing poetry, her tool to construct the nation she dreams of.

Once Herminia's identity becomes known, Salomé begins to receive callers—statesmen and other (male) public figures of Santo Domingo—who come for inspiration. These men, in spite of their worldliness, are unable to see the economic difficulties that Salomé's family is undergoing and the great effort that her mother makes in order to please their wishes and be a good hostess. Also, they frequently become very disappointed by Salomé's shyness and inability to entertain, which reveals expectations regarding the feminine skills implied in women's duty to be good hostesses and comfort men. This can be considered a form of resistance on Salomé's part to this imposed exterior presence. The women's humble house becomes the arena where different world views are put in contact, with a violent penetration of the private space by an obtrusive outside. The porosity of the boundaries that separate the public from the private is thus exposed and problematized.

Salomé's poetry becomes the space in which struggles for representation of the national reality, the situation of women, and Salomé's convictions are deployed. Salomé does not seem to allow her role as the muse of the nation to interfere with her obligation to denounce patriarchal oppression over Dominican women. She decides to publish her poem "Quejas", which makes reference to a carnal passion inspired by Francisco Henríquez, who would later become her husband, as a form of rebellion against an unjust social order that punishes women but rewards men for their sexual behavior. This happens when, in her neighborhood, a poor fifteen-year-old girl is rejected by her family when they find out she is pregnant. The baby's father, an older, middle-class man, refuses to acknowledge that such relationship existed, and the girl is forced to turn to Salomé's aunt for help. The women manage to solve the situation 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 144-145).

The poem caused an uproar and even its authenticity was questioned, and when its authenticity was proved many people demanded that all recognitions made to Salomé were withdrawn. She, however, sees in this challenge to patriarchal authority the opportunity to dismantle the perception of her role as an incorporeal muse of the nation that can only inspire lofty feelings of patriotism, and at the same time questions a binary conception of women—virgin/whore—integrating in them multiple forms of existence.

However, Salomé's poetry is later classified by her husband into public, nationalist poems and personal poems, a classification which Salomé tries to resist. Her husband says, in response to an intimate poem she wrote for him, "you must not squander away your talent by singing in a minor key, Salomé. You must think of your future as the bard of our nation … We need anthems to lead us to the morass of our past and into our glorious destiny as the Athens of the Americas" (Alvarez 177). Francisco's position is clearly that of the enlightenment man of reason, who clearly separates national identity from the private sphere, over which he also rules. Salomé's response to this exacerbation of nationalism is "I am a woman as well as a poet" (177). This tension between the topics of her poems, analogous to the tension between being a reasoning public figure and a feeling human being, is maintained all throughout her life. This conflict-filled space inhabited by Salomé represents the dynamism and permanent struggle to defy the boundaries of public and private sphere in the production of an emancipatory and equal nation.

In agreement with Massey, the private space, which is traditionally considered as intimate and connected to privacy, is not presented in INOS as the opposite to the public discourse of the

nation, but as influenced by and influencing it, producing a porous zone. As such, the house is at the same time part of and represents the nation; that is to say, the house is a metonymy as well as a metaphor of the nation.

Camila's life and her search for her mother and the meaning of nation, which span during most of the twentieth century, pose different challenges from the ones Salomé had to face, as they are set in different historical periods, as well as in different spatial locations. Thus, the construction of the nation carried out in Camila's section of the novel differs from Salomé's, even though they seem to converge at the end of Camila's life. As an exile and an orphan since a very early age, her search for a nation where to belong is knitted together with the search for her mother, a motif which draws on the traditional symbol of the nation as a female source of origin. However, the state of orphanage and exile gives the nation and the mother figure an even more elusive quality. Neither the image of the nation nor the mother, then, is perceived as given and unquestionable, but needs to be worked on and reconstructed with great effort on Camila's part. Only after a long process, which certainly involves an inner search, is she able to understand what it is to build a nation and find her mother in this newly acquired and healing knowledge.

The beginning of Camila's life is marked by loss: the death of her mother and the exile caused by her father's political problems at the Dominican Republic. She lived alternatively in the Dominican Republic, Cuba and the United States, where she pursued a quiet academic career until her retirement, after which she returned to Cuba in 1960 to join the Revolution, where she took part of the literacy brigades. Camila's first memory at the age of four is the realization that her mother lives along with her in spite of the fact that she has passed away. This realization occurs when, hiding beneath the floor of the house, in a hole used by her mother and aunt for refuge at turbulent times, she hears her father with desperation calling her by her full name, Salomé Camila. “Salomé Camila, her mother's name and her name, always together! Just as on that last day in the dark bedroom she remembers everybody crying and the pained coughing and her mother raising her head from her pillow to say their special name. 'Here we are,' she calls out” (Alvarez 331). Later, however, as she is growing up, because she misses her mother so much that everything related to her makes her sad, she decides to go by the name of Camila only. It is after her joining to the Cuban Revolution, which meant a new beginning for her well into her sixties, that she decides to recover her first name, because, by working for the Revolution, she has found the presence of her mother and the meaning of nation which she has striven for throughout her life.

> After I realized that she was not coming back, I hated to be reminded of my mother. But still, I longed for her … I tried all kinds of strategies. 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 depression and self-doubt. But no matter what I tried, she was still gone. Until at last I found her in the only place we ever find the dead: among the living. Mamá was alive and well in Cuba, where I struggled with others to build the kind of country she had dreamed of. (Alvarez 335)

Camila's story, which wraps up the novel, presents an alternative and broad definition of nation that exceeds the boundaries of the territory and traditional conceptualizations. Her newly acquired understanding, which she articulates only when she goes back to the Dominican Republic to end her life there, is a representation of what the whole novel does: dismantling notions of the nation as something given and pre-existing the lives of peoples. On the contrary, in the novel, the idea of nation and national identity as continuously under construction is explored. When Camila learns that the Instituto de Señoritas her mother established in 1881 has turned into an authoritarian and almost martial institution, she tells her niece that Salomé would have stared over, as she did all her life when her dreams were thwarted. Camila also retorts to her half-brother, when he claims that the Cuban experiment has failed, “We have to keep trying to create a patria out of the land where we were born. Even when the experiment fails, especially when the experiment fails” (Alvarez 342). This is quite meaningful as Camila was not born in Cuba, but clearly her understanding of

national identity overflows the territorial limits of a country. In my view, Camila's most enlightening words as regards the concept of nation are the following: "There are no answers… It's continuing to struggle to create the country we dream of that makes a patria out of the land under our feet. That much I learned from my mother" (350).

The reproducing role of women in the construction of a nation is also subverted and transformed. Education, another string that binds Camila and Salomé together, takes on the reproducing role instead. The fact that Camila is "childless and motherless,… a bead unstrung from the necklace of the generations" (Alvarez 2) is somehow reversed after her collaboration with Cuba, a new life for her, mostly because it is in the field of education and literacy. In the very last episode of the novel, back in the Dominican Republic, where she returns to await her death, a blind Camila finds herself alone in the cemetery where she has gone to corroborate that the gravestone carved for her actually has her full name. There she meets a boy, who, by his age and the time of the day should have been at school, and asks him to read the gravestone for her, which he cannot do because he is illiterate. The novel closes with the powerful image of Camila teaching the boy how to read in the cemetery. This image captures the essence of the projection into the future that is implied in a nation, the old generation preparing the new ones to be full members of the community.

The fictional re-writing of the life of a historical character and an icon of the national formation of the Dominican Republic, Salomé Ureña, serves in itself as an alternative founding narrative of the nation. What I believe is more valuable and original in INOS, in terms of national imaginary, however, is the weight given to Camila's story. This is because, on the one hand, she is even more marginal than Salomé, not a prominent figure in history or the academia, as were others of Salomé's children. On the other hand, severed from her native land and orphaned at an early age, Camila's story contributes to deterritorialize the concept of the nation and emphasize its nature as continuous process, which are more productive and inclusive founding narratives in current times.

Danticat's FOB constructs notions of the nation which pose their own complexities. Overall, the re-telling of the massacre of Haitians or Dominicans of Haitian descent from the perspective of a young Haitian woman denounces those national identities founded on the rejection and even outright extermination of those who do not share certain cultural or ethnic traits. The extreme forms of nationalism that Amabelle, the protagonist, has to overcome in order to survive are strongly marked by territory and essential conceptions of national identity.

Also, Danticat's novel can be said to question traditional national narratives. On the one hand, this is the re-telling of a historical event that, as it is narrated, demystifies the glory and power of a nation. It exposes unjustified cruelty and abuse in the Dominican Republic's official national history. On the other hand, she also achieves that by doing this re-telling from the perspective of a subject marginal to history and national narrative, a subject that is female, orphan, black, immigrant and poor. The national discourse that results from this is, then, not one of mythical heroism, of victors, although it is not a discourse of agencyless victims either, as Danticat's text seems to reject dichotomous conceptions of the nation. Amabelle and Yves are led by the circumstances to make decisions that are, at times, very extreme. When crossing the Massacre River back to Haiti, Amabelle decides to nearly drown Odette, a woman traveling with them, in order to keep her quiet as she loses her composure when her husband is shot to death. Amabelle makes this terrible decision in order to avoid being seen and murdered by the peasant that shot Odette's husband. Finally, Odette cannot make it and dies on the Haitian side of the river.

FOB also criticizes national mythical discourses that depend on the allure of strong leading figures. In the novel, such would be the case of Rafael Trujillo, admired to the point of blindness by many Dominicans. His figure is recurrently shown in ways that expose his egotism, cruelty and thirst for power, and the way that people approve of him, which partly explains the very existence of such type of rulers. The reproduction of images of the dictator involves choices that exalt or diminish certain traits. The enormous portrait of Trujillo that Valencia paints, at her husband's request, was hanged in a privileged place in the parlor and it "was a vast improvement on many of

the Generalissimo's public photographs" (Danticat 43). For example, it does not show the strands graying hair, as old age is not a trait that corresponds to the myth of national heroes. When Amabelle and others are trying to escape to Haiti, they encounter a religious procession in the mountains. They observe that, along with images of catholic saints, a portrait of Trujillo is also being carried, which is a token of how the non-secular nature of some conceptions of nation are closely connected with forms of extreme nationalism. The transcriptions of fragments of his speeches in the novel are shown to exhort Dominicans to take action against Haitians, depicted as enemies of the nation:

> You are independent, and yours is the responsibility for carrying out justice… Tradition shows as a fatal fact … that under the protection of rivers, the enemies of peace, who are also the enemies of work and prosperity, found an ambush in which they might do their work, keeping the nation in fear and menacing stability. (97)

In answer to this exhortation, poor male *campesinos* throughout the country, take their machetes and kill Haitians, who are a threat to a feminized nation that, as such, needs their protection.

Language is a strong mark of national identity. In the novel, because Haitians speak Kreyòl and Dominicans, Spanish, accent becomes the clear dividing line between "us" and "them". The Spanish word "perejil", for parsley or pèsi in Kreyòl, is difficult to pronounce for Haitians, who cannot roll the *r* sound with ease or articulate the *j* the way that native Spanish speakers do. It thus becomes an established test in order to tell Haitians from Dominicans in case of doubt. (In fact, neither Amabelle nor Yves are actually asked to take the test, but are directly attacked due to their looks.) Yet, all throughout the novel, the mark of language, as well as the marks on the body, are taken as irrefutable proof of not belonging in the community, a community that imagines itself as possessing certain traits, such as a specific language and skin color. Language, it must be said, is also a form of resistance against the mainstream culture, as we readers are told that people of Haitian descent, even when they have been living in the Dominican Republic for generations, still speak Kreyòl among themselves. An important act of rebellion, albeit her last one, in relation to the "perejil" test, is performed by Odette. Her refusal to even try and say the Spanish word and uttering instead the Kreyòl word "pèsi" with her last breath is a last form of resistance against a regime that took everything away from her, including her husband's life. The following are Amabelle's thoughts on this:

> The Generalissimo's mind was surely dark as death, but if he had heard Odette's "pèsi", it might have startled him, not the tears and supplications he would have expected, no shriek from unbound fear, but a provocation, a challenge, a dare. To the devil with your world, your grass, your wind, your water, your air, your words. You ask for perejil, I give you more. (Danticat 203)

An interesting connection is explicitly established in the novel between the pronunciation of "perejil", used, as it has just been explained, to tell Haitians apart, and the medicinal and other uses of the herb: "We used parsley for our food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides. Perhaps the Generalissimo in some larger order was trying to do the same for his country" (Danticat 203). Parsley then acquires a strong symbolic meaning as bodily and ethnic cleansing in the context of two national identities that seem irreconcilable.

But these are not the only ways in which nation is constructed in the novel. Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent that live precariously need to construct alternative notions of the nation in order to build a sense of community. They, because of the loss that marks their lives, due to exile and exploitation or outright orphanage, as is the case of Amabelle, refer to themselves as an orphaned people, as people that do not belong anywhere, as wayfarers (Danticat 56). The case of Amabelle is then paradigmatic, as she lost both her parents in a flooding of the Massacre river and was taken in by a Dominican family, which meant losing her motherland as well. Haitians, thus,

create a sense of community in exile through spatial reference. Establishing where they or their families originally were from, even if they never met back there, constructs a form of collective memory, that is, a pillar for a national or communal identity that evokes a common past and even a promise for the future.

> [I]t was a way of being joined to your old life through the presence of another person. At times, you could sit for a whole evening with such individuals, just listening to their existence unfold, from the house where they were born to the hill were they wanted to be buried. It was their way of returning home, with you as witness or as someone to bring them back to the present, either with a yawn, a plea to be excused, or the skillful intrusion of your own tale. (73)

The novel also shows that a concept of nation that is completely untied from the state can prove dangerous too, if other institutions in which all persons can participate in legitimate ways are not in force (Benhabib 2006, 296-297). People of Haitian descent who are actually born or established permanently in the Dominican Republic, who are called "the non-vwayajè Haitians" (Danticat 68) and who do not generally work in the cane fields, are also expelled because they are never given their "birth papers"; they never acquire their citizenship, Dominican or Haitian, thus becoming completely unprotected. During the massacre, black Dominicans, mistaken for Haitians, are also attacked. Thus, two important issues are exposed here. One is the close and complicated interconnection between citizenship—belonging to a state, and thus being protected by its laws—and nation. Without their citizenship, generation after generation of Haitians are marginalized from the educational system, for example, which deprives them of any right or possibility to improve their situation. A woman tells Amabelle:

> "I pushed my son out of my body here, in this country ... My mother also pushed me out of her body here. Not me, not my son, not one of us has ever seen the other side of the border. Still, they won't put our birth papers in our palms so my son can have knowledge placed into his head by a proper educator in a proper school".
>
> "To them we are always foreigners, even if our granmèmès' granmèmès were born in this country", a man responded in Kreyòl… "This makes it easier for them to push us out when they want to." (69)

The other important issue exposed here is racism as tightly knitted in the construction of a Dominican national identity. Little details all throughout the novel show the construction of a national identity as rejection of the different other, a difference which is also constructed based on the alleged superiority of a community over another. For example, Valencia's daughter, Rosalinda, is rejected by her own father, a general loyal to Trujillo, because she is dark-skinned, a mark that the father himself brings in his blood. Instead, her baby brother, who died soon after birth, seemed to be favored because he was male and fair-skinned. Haitian bodies bear the marks of otherness. Even if "race" is a floating signifier, as Stuart Hall defines it in order to counter—unfounded—biologicist assumptions (Hall "Race: The Floating Signifier"), this community, that perceives itself as having certain physical traits, has assimilated that certain physical signifeds inscribed in the bodies of those considered as non-members of the community correspond to a certain signifier, and acts accordingly.

Conclusions

To sum up, as was proposed in the hypothesis, alternative constructions of nation are presented in the works object of analysis. FOB constructs national identity in terms of loss which is presented as something to lament. Certainly loss in relation to orphanage and the search for a satisfactory notion of nation is present in INOS, mostly in Camila's story. The same as in FOB, the loss of the mother and the loss of the motherland occur almost simultaneously and the search for the one becomes entangled with the search for the other. In Camila's tale the search eventually becomes

both the motive and the outcome, as she builds a conception of the nation which is deterritorialized and based on the process of construction, more than on a common past or fate.

In FOB, racism is exposed in the national rhetoric of the Dominican Republic through the treatment received by Haitians and Dominicans of dark skin. The national identity represented in this case is strongly marked not just by community, by belonging together, but by a constructed difference with and superiority to other human groups.

Language as a cohesive communal element and a mark of national identity is exposed in FOB. Language is important in the construction and criticism of national character. On the one hand, it is a mark of belonging or otherness; it establishes a clear boundary between members and non-members of a community. In the novel, this is epitomized by the pronunciation of the Spanish word "perejil" in the mouth of native Spanish speakers or speakers of Haitian Kreyòl. On the other hand, seen from the opposite perspective, Haitian Kreyòl language is a form of resistance to an oppressive mainstream Dominican culture. It is a language of intimacy and confidence as well as of outright defiance, as is reflected in the case of Odette's last word "pèsi", with no effort to even say it in Spanish.

The influence of public and private domestic space in relation to the construction of national identity is overtly explored in Salomé's tale. Salomé inhabits the tension produced in the contact between these two spheres. Through her writing and her teaching, activities performed in the domestic sphere, she causes effects on the public realm, at the level of the nation. Together with these tensions, she constantly struggles against her husband's typecasting as an ethereal national muse, as she feels an important, non-public aspect of her is being left out. The boundary between public and private for female subjects, although not radically dismantled, is presented as porous and in need to be torn down if social changes are to be effected.

Overall, in INOS, there are two complementary and consecutive notions of nation. In Salomé's tale, nation is necessarily tied to the territorial formation of the Dominican Republic, in the context of nineteenth century. The aim, at the beginning, is the definite independence from Spain, for which the exaltation of a national identity is required. In this respect, Salomé Ureña's poems fulfill an important function in order to fuel this national sentiment that inspires the members of the community to imagine themselves as a nation. Later, with the occurrence of intestine conflicts, the construction of an emancipatory concept of nation requires education as a way to form critical, rational members of the community. In her Utopian pursuit, Salomé faces many difficulties, which years later, Camila capitalizes affectively. In Camila's historical and political context, education is also key in an expanded concept of nation, which focuses on the process and not exclusively on the product, as is established in the analysis. In the construction of nation carried out in FOB, the focus is on the consequences—discrimination, suffering, loss and even death—of essentialist and extreme forms of national identity. For Haitian immigrants and their descendants, other alternative forms of community are found in the spatial reference to place of origin, which also projects the hope of a return, directly or through the stories that others can tell their families.

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