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LITERARY AFRICA:
SPANISH REFLECTIONS OF MOROCCO,
WESTERN SAHARA, AND EQUATORIAL GUINEA IN THE
CONTEMPORARY NOVEL, 1990-2010

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts & Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
Mahan L. Ellison
Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Ana Rueda, Professor of Peninsular Spanish Literature
Lexington, Kentucky

2012
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

LITERARY AFRICA: SPANISH REFLECTIONS OF MOROCCO, WESTERN SAHARA, AND EQUATORIAL GUINEA IN THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL, 1990-2010

This dissertation analyzes the strategies that Spanish and Hispano-African authors employ when writing about Africa in the contemporary novel (1990-2010). Focusing on the former Spanish colonial territories of Morocco, Western Sahara, and Equatorial Guinea, I analyze the post-colonial literary discourse about these regions. This study examines the new ways of conceptualizing Africa that depart from an Orientalist framework as advanced by the novelists Lorenzo Silva, Concha López Sarasúa, Ramón Mayrata, María Dueñas, Fernando Gamboa, Montserrat Abumalham, Javier Reverte, Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa, and Donato Ndongo. Their works are representative of a recent trend in Spanish letters that signals a literary focus on Africa and the African Other.

I examine these contemporary novels within their historical context, specifically engaging with the theoretical ideas of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), to determine to what extent his analysis of Orientalist discourse still holds value for a study of the Spanish novel of thirty years later. In addition, the work of theorists such as Gil Anidjar, Emmanuel Levinas, James C. Scott, Ryszard Kapuściński, Georges Van den Abbeele and Chandra Mohanty contribute to the analyses of specific works. These theorists provide a theoretical framework for my thesis that contemporary Spanish authors are writing Africa in ways that undermine and circumvent the legacy of Orientalist discourse. I seek to highlight the innovative approaches that these authors are taking towards their literary engagement with Africa.

The imaginary that pertains to Africa has served an integral role in the history and creation of modern Spain, and it is illuminating to trace the influences that it continues to exert on Spanish writers. In the last thirty years, Spain's relationship with Africa has dramatically changed through peace treaties, the independence of nations, migratory patterns, tourism, and in other substantial ways. Within this dissertation, I address these changes by focusing on literary representations of political engagement, gender issues, and travel to highlight how Africa is represented in light of these recent developments. As Spanish authors continue to engage with and to write about Africa, this study hopes to

show that Orientalism is no longer a prevalent discourse in the contemporary Spanish novel.

KEYWORDS: Africa, Spain, Orientalism, Otherness, Fiction

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CONTEMPORARY NOVEL, 1990-2010

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12 August, 2012
(Date)

To Ashley.
Thank you for believing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following dissertation would not have been possible without the insight and direction of several people. First and foremost, my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Ana Rueda, has provided support, advice, and guidance at each stage of the research and writing process; her example has inspired me to be a better academic and person. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my Dissertation Committee and outside examiner, respectively: Dr. Susan Larson, Dr. Susan Carvalho, Dr. Diane E. King, and Dr. Jacqueline Couti. They have supported my research, guided my writing, and challenged my thinking in ways that have improved and informed the final project represented here.

I am grateful to the institutions that provided funding for my research. Specifically, the University of Kentucky Graduate School Dissertation Enhancement Award, the Sigma Delta Pi Graduate Research Grant, and the Program for Cultural Cooperation Between Spain's Ministry of Culture and United States' Universities each supported me financially as I traveled to Spain and Morocco in the Summer of 2011 to conduct archival research and interviews with authors. In addition, the American Institute of Maghrib Studies provided funding that allowed me to participate in their Dissertation Workshop. This offered me the opportunity to receive valuable insights from colleagues and scholars in other fields who also focus on Africa in their research.

My wife, Ashley Dickson-Ellison, has been an understanding and sustaining companion throughout this process. She has read manuscripts, listened to ideas, offered suggestions, and patiently endured the stresses and frustrations of being married to a particularly obsessive graduate student. I owe my love for both Africa and literature to my parents, Bob and Janet Ellison, and I am thankful for the education that they gave me

from the days of home schooling in Okuta, Nigeria to encouraging me to study in Spain while in college.

There are also numerous individuals who have specifically contributed to my academic and professional development over the years. I thank Ron Friis at Furman University for his friendship and mentoring that has guided my professional development. Gloria Pajares González is directly responsible for my ability to speak and understand Spanish (especially andalú), and I can therefore forgive her for making up words when I didn't know any better. Also, in addition to my Dissertation Committee, I am grateful for the support and examples of my professors at the University of Kentucky. My classes here have been stimulating, and I aspire to be as capable and effective in my teaching as they have modeled for me. Without a doubt, Brent Sebastian has been a friend and a source of information for all things bureaucratic, and Drs. Yanira Paz, Irene Chico, and Mark Lauersdorf have each helped me to be a more informed and capable educator.

To the many friends, family, and colleagues that have accompanied me in this journey, I offer my most sincere gratitude. There are pieces of you in these pages.

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CHAPTER ONE.
AFRICA, THE FANTASY OF THE POETS

¿Soy yo la que te escribe o eres tú mismo quien finge escribir una carta y luego leerla como proveniente de lejos, obligándome con tu ficción a ser, sin que yo sea?
¿Es esto literatura?
—Montserrat Abumalham (*¿Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?* 33)¹

Yet language has not become entirely impotent. It now possesses new powers, and powers peculiar to it alone.
—Michel Foucault (*The Order of Things* 48)

An objection to *Orientalism* has always been that it provides no alternative to the phenomenon which it criticizes.
—Robert J. C. Young (*White Mythologies* 167)

Africa is not a new subject in Spanish literature, though few authors have described it with as much exalted rhetoric as Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, soldier and chronicler of the first War of Africa (1859-1860). Indeed, his prose is expressed in “poéticas extravagancias”² that accompany his romantic spirit and intense patriotism (Rueda, “Enemigo invisible” 149, 154). His passionate description of Africa makes explicit many of the insidious tropes that permeate Western writings on Africa and the Orient. Upon arriving in Africa for the first time, as a soldier and news correspondent, Alarcón writes:

¹ [Am I the one who writes to you or is it yourself that pretends to write a letter and later reads it as if it came from afar, forcing me with your fiction to be, without me actually existing? / Is this literature?] (Unless otherwise noted, all translation are my own. The majority of the texts that I use have not yet been translated into English.)

² [extravagant poetics]

el Africa guarda en su corazon los caracteres del misterio; la duda y la desesperacion [sic], la eternidad y lo infinito!!

Tal concibo y admiro yo la vasta region [sic] que empieza aquí y termina en el cabo Tormentario; la tierra, cuyos límites eran desconocidos hace cuatrocientos años, á tal punto que los geógrafos la creian [sic] interminable; tierra feroz,... tierra deforme, donde la raza humana se afea y embrutece hasta el extremo [sic] de que los irracionales la superen en inteligencia y hermosura; tierra indomable, en fin, que ha devorado estérilmente la civilización de los Tolomeos, la de Anibal [sic], la de Alejandro, la de Escipion [sic] y la de Cisneros, y que hoy rehusa y desdeña la que el Mediodía de Europa le brinda por Argel y por Marruecos!

Y con todo, Africa es el mas [sic] vasto campo que aun ofrece la tierra á la fantasía de los poetas: [¡]Africa es la inmensidad! (Alarcón 11)³

Alarcón's fevered description is expansive: Africa is infinite and immense, interminable and indomitable, volatile and savage. Africa remains indifferent to the great "civilizing forces" of history and of Europe's current attempts to impose colonial rule. And yet, his poetic extravagances do not stop Alarcón from proclaiming that "*¡Africa, ya eres mia*

³ [Africa guards in her heart the characters of mystery; doubt and desperation, eternity and the infinite!!

That is how I conceive and admire the vast region that begins here and ends on the Cape of Good Hope; the land, whose limits were unknown four hundred years ago, to such a point that the geographers thought it was interminable; fierce land,... deformed land, where the human race becomes ugly and brutish to the extreme that the irrationals surpass it in intelligence and beauty; untamable land, in short, that has sterilely devoured the civilization of the Ptolemies, that of Hannibal, that of Alexander, that of Scipio and of Cisneros, and that today refuses and disdains that which the midday of Europe offers through Algeria and through Morocco!

And with all, Africa is the most vast field that the earth offers to the fantasy of the poets: Africa is the immensity!]

[sic].” (11).⁴ These contradictory expressions frequently accompany one another in Western writings about Africa; Alarcón is not the only author to express such conflicting sentiments. The trope of Africa as a mysterious and dark continent is oft repeated, and yet, in spite of its enigma, Africa is possessed by the Western eye and vulnerable to Western pretensions. These are not new sentiments, either; Alarcón’s exclamation is a paraphrase of the Roman general Scipio Africanus (236-183 BCE), and it is a hubris found in the writings of Domingo Badía—a.k.a. Alí Bey—in the early nineteenth century, in other writers of the first War of Africa such as Rafael del Castillo and Nicasio Landa, and continuing into the twentieth century in works by Giménez Caballero, Víctor Ruiz Albéniz, José Díaz Fernández, and on up to the polemic diatribes of Juan Goytisolo.⁵

Indeed, in recent literary history, Juan Goytisolo stands out as one of the most active, critically acclaimed, and controversial authors writing about Africa. From his explosive *Reivindicación del conde don Julián* (1970) to his informative *Alquibla* documentary series on RTVE (1989, 1993), Goytisolo has engaged with and employed the Maghreb in his literary production. His work actively reconceptualizes the history and relationship of Spain with Northern Africa. Many are the critical studies that have been written about him, and it would be remiss not to mention that he is a pioneer in the counter-Orientalist discourse of Spanish fiction that I analyze here in this dissertation.

Alarcón’s prose, however, often exemplifies the pattern of representation that Edward Said addressed with his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978). In his work, Said identifies and critiques discourses about the Other that served European colonial ends.

Alterity was emphasized in discursive patterns that justified Western/European

⁴ [Africa, now you are mine!]

⁵ Antonio Carrasco González’s work *Historia de la novela colonial hispanoafriicana* (2009) is an extensive examination of many such authors and their works, from Pérez Galdós to more recent writers.

superiority and intervention into (but not limited to) Africa. Just as Africa was written as a vast source of potential knowledge for the West—

llena de misterios para todas las ciencias; para la geografía, que aun no puede determinar sus regiones;... para la geología [sic], que ignora la naturaleza y estructura de su monstruosa constitucion [sic]; para la lingüística... para la botánica... para la zoología [sic]...para la iconología [sic]... para la historia... para la diplomacia... para el arte militar... para todas las ciencias... (Alarcón 10-11)⁶

—so is the African written as savage and impotent to offer resistance to the West’s civilizing impositions. Therefore, the academic and literary representations of Africa and the African become ominous in purpose and effect as they serve “as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 3). Based on an underlying emphasis in alterity, Orientalist discourse, to a certain extent, creates an Other that has less to do with equitable representation of the cultural Other and relies instead on an authorized Western creation that justifies intervention. Within the Orientalist framework, the balance is always tilted in favor of the Western powers as it “depends for its strategy on [a] flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (Said 7). Few authors today are as bombastic as Alarcón, but Orientalist descriptions persist, writing Africa and the African Other in subtle methods that perpetuate Western tropes about its cultural, linguistic, and geographical Others.

⁶ [full of mysteries for all of the sciences; for geography, that still cannot determine its regions;... for geology, that does not know the nature and structure of its monstrous constitution; for linguistics... for botany... for zoology... for iconology... for history... for diplomacy... for the military arts... for all sciences...]

Writing about the Other, speaking for or representing the Other, indeed, even employing the term *Other*, is tricky business. To explain my usage of the term in this work, I offer the following considerations. In his 2008 collection of essays, *The Other*, Ryszard Kapuściński begins with the clarification that

The terms ‘Other’ or ‘Others’ can be understood in all sorts of ways and used in various meanings and contexts, to distinguish gender, for example, or generation, or nationality, or religion and so on. In my case I use these terms mainly to distinguish Europeans, people from the West, whites, from those whom I call ‘Others’—that is, non-Europeans, or non-whites, while fully aware that for the latter, the former are just as much ‘Others’.

(13)

This explanation is rather limited when considering the contemporary realities of transnational immigration and the multicultural populations of many European and Western countries, not to mention the purely exterior, phenotypical markings upon which it depends. However, Emmanuel Levinas’ definition is, while more nuanced in explanation, also an understanding that functions on a physical distinction between separate entities. His Other is one stripped of “cultural signification,” and simply the existential presence of another physical being (*Humanism of the Other* 30). Both interpretations are defined by the exteriority of this Other presence. Levinas’ Other is not necessarily a racial or cultural one, but simply an exterior human presence to one’s self. Since questions of race and difference are both inherent and inevitable in a study such as this one, the American Anthropological Association’s “Statement on ‘Race’” offers the reminder that

attempt[s] to establish lines of division among biological populations [are] both arbitrary and subjective... the idea of ‘race’ has always carried more meanings than mere physical differences; indeed, physical variations in the human species have no meanings except the social ones that humans put on them.

Therefore, ideas of Same and Other, as examined in this project, must be understood as contextually based and subjectively construed, and, more specifically, discursively constructed.

My use and understanding of the term *Other* is based upon literary analysis and depends upon specific textual context for exact definition, but it is ultimately based upon the premise of *difference* or *alterity*: physical, cultural, linguistic, religious, ideological, or other that manifests itself as recognition between two (or more) parties of contradistinction. In the context of this project, Africa and the African are often portrayed as Spain’s Others due the conceptualization of Spain as a European, Catholic, Western totality.⁷ The textual contexts that frame individual analyses of representation of the Other within this work not only draw upon the protagonists’ interactions within plot lines, but examine the very narrative that the author creates to tell the story. Descriptions—adjectives, metaphors, et cetera—and literary devices explicitly and implicitly mark difference. The Other that I examine is also not merely anOther person, but can, in fact, often be a totality or a geography, as evidenced in Alarcón’s excessive description of “Africa... la fantasía de los poetas” (11).⁸ My intent with this project is to uncover the

⁷ This essentialized vision of Spanish identity is one that was extolled during Franco’s dictatorship, but that drew on the conceptualized unification of Spain brought about by Isabel the Catholic’s expulsion of the Moors and the Jews in 1492.

⁸ [Africa... the fantasy of the poets]

dynamics that underlie these textual distinctions of Otherness and to analyze them against the work of Said in *Orientalism* in order to understand the trends that characterize the representation of the African Other in the contemporary Spanish novel.

Said understood the narrative of Occident and Orient as one of cultural contestants (1), and his critique of Orientalist discourse examines the way that writing difference in the West has traditionally been employed to maintain a supposed cultural dominance rather than as an attempt to accurately understand and represent the Other. For Said, Orientalist discourse is a

corporate institution [of the West] for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (3)

As Alarcón brazenly possesses an entire continent moments after setting foot on its shores for the first time, his words reflect a complete disregard for the inhabitants and history of Africa and dismiss its autonomy in light of Western progress. In drawing from the work of Said and the example of Alarcón, this study defines Orientalism as a discursive strategy for maintaining and affirming the superiority—moral, cultural, or other—of the West by denying the humanity, moral or cultural validity, or individual agency of the Other. As Orientalist discourse seeks to perpetuate a hierarchy that privileges the West over any Other, this work examines select representative examples of contemporary Spanish authors who write against this pretentious and ultimately limiting discourse and who set aside assumptions of cultural superiority in their narration.

When writing about an Other, even the best intentions at honesty and equitability can be problematic and hint at underlying concepts or paternalist discourse. Hélène Cixous asserts that

everything throughout the centuries depends on the distinction between the Selfsame, the ownself... and that which limits it:... the 'other'. What is the 'Other'? If it is truly 'other', there is nothing to say; it cannot be theorized. The 'other' escapes me. It is elsewhere, outside: absolutely other. (70)

Her assertion suggests an extreme alterity that defies comprehension or representation, and Said likewise criticizes the West's insistence on speaking for the Orient, just as Flaubert "spoke for and represented" his archetypal Oriental woman (6). It is obvious that Western authors have not refrained from speaking *about* their Others; if that were the case I would not have a project here. However, the style of narrating the Other, when analyzed, can say much about authorial assumptions, conscious or unconscious. Again citing Said: "The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original" (21). When speaking about or attempting to speak for the Other, *what* is said is often only incidental, *how* it is said can be much more revealing. Levinas' statement that "[c]omprehension of the Other is therefore a hermeneutic, an exegesis" should be directed at both the author and the critic (*Humanism of the Other* 31). Both should be aware of the processes of interpretation that undergird writing about any Other—the critic doubly so.

Said, while eminently useful, is not infallible. The prominence and timeliness of *Orientalism* positions him as one of the most polemic and popular critical voices on discourses of West and Orient; the contributions of the insights in his tome are very valuable, but, as with all theories, open to substantial critique. Daniel Varisco's *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (2007) offers one of the most exhaustive critiques of *Orientalism* as he examines the value of Said's work, while also clearly highlighting its limitations, effectively serving as an exhortation to "move beyond the polemicized rhetoric of the binary blame game" (XI). Several of the novelists that I examine here also suggest that Said's binary-based articulation of Same and Other is a limiting paradigm, while others repurpose the dichotomic structure in ways that acknowledge and subvert the power of *Orientalism*. While Varisco's work serves as my primary theoretical contestant to Said, other important detractors include George Landow, Bryan Turner, John MacKenzie, Ibn Warraq, Robert J. C. Young, and Bernard Lewis.⁹ In short, Landow critiques Said's neglect of gender issues; Ibn Warraq criticizes the limits of Said's methods, and Young highlights the "theoretical contradictions and conflicts in Said's text" (180). As I develop my arguments and articulate my analyses in this project, I will return to specific criticisms of *Orientalism* as relevant.

Said's *Orientalism* is immediately limiting for this project as Africa is not usually considered to be a part of "the Orient." Said does suggest similarities—"For imperialists like Balfour, or for anti-imperialists like J. A. Hobson, the Oriental, *like the African*, is a member of a subject race and not exclusively an inhabitant of a geographical area" (emphasis mine, 92)—but at the same time this comparison serves to distinguish the two.

⁹ See, respectively, "Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*," *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism* (1994), *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts* (1995), *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (2007), *White Mythologies* (1990, 2004), and "Orientalism: An Exchange" (1982).

Because they are merely alike implies that they are not a unified conceptualization. The comparison does, however, realign focus on the Other from one of simple geographical difference to one of conceptual (subjective) hierarchical relationship, and in this understanding, what Said writes about Orientalism can be directly applied to the West's writing of Africa also.

As noted in the epigraph to this introduction, Robert Young suggests that Said never offered an alternative to Orientalist discourse. Some of the authors examined in this project do offer alternatives and are writing Africa and the African Other in ways that fall outside (or at least in the interstices) of the harmful dimensions of Orientalist discourse. They have developed discursive strategies that avoid the traps of Orientalism. Encounters with Others are inevitable and to ignore the Other denies their presence—"To render thought or the thinking subject transparent or invisible seems, by contrast, to hide the relentless recognition of the Other" (Spivak 294)—and it is incumbent upon us to analyze and understand the power and potential effects of contemporary popular discourse. We must learn from our mistakes and successes to find space where supposed cultural hierarchies do not stifle marginalized, Other voices.

Therefore, this study would not be complete without a consideration of Other voices that contribute to the current Spanish literary production. The promising rise in recognition of Hispano-African voices is relatively recent. These voices are not completely Other as they choose the colonial, Western language of Spanish for expression and are integrated into Spanish life. These voices represent the hybridity and the growing diversity of contemporary Spain; the Equato-Guinean author Donato Ndongo emphasizes this diversity by suggesting that "[l]a integración no significa que

comamos chorizo, sino que las sociedades que nos acogen sean suficientemente flexibles para comprender algunas de nuestras costumbres” (Aguilar).¹⁰ The Spanish writings of authors such as Ndongu or Montserrat Abumalham contribute to the current discourse of Spanish letters, amplifying the diversity of voices within the contemporary canon. To describe the work of Hispano-African authors as a “minor literature,” as Deleuze and Guattari express it (16),¹¹ limits an appreciation for and understanding of the works. The term “minor literature,” according to Deleuze and Guattari’s definition, does not adequately represent the breadth of theme and topic found within contemporary works by Hispano-African authors. To define the content of African authors writing in Spanish as preoccupied with nothing but the “political,” contrasted with “the individual concern (familial, marital, and so on)” of the so-called major literature (17), restricts the critic from reading these African voices as concerned with the quotidian. It others them even more by establishing these voices as political contestants for the Western reader who receives their work. Deleuze and Guattari’s third characteristic of a minor literature—“that in it everything takes on a collective value” (17)—also essentializes the voice of the author, removing the individual voice and replacing it with a collective Other. That cannot always be the case, and should not be assumed by reader or critic. However, the first characteristic of a minor literature, the “deterritorialization of language” (18), is directly pertinent to this study and will be analyzed specifically in Abumalham’s work.

¹⁰ [Integration does not mean that we eat chorizo, but rather that the societies that take us in are sufficiently flexible to understand some of our customs]

¹¹ In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986), Deleuze and Guattari define a “minor literature” as one that “doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language” (16) and “The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation” (18).

Within a paradigm that privileges West over its Other, the deterritorialization of language can also serve to destabilize any perceived cultural hierarchy.

In discussing the Hispano-African literary voices, it is also important to acknowledge and address the postcolonial question. At the start of the twenty-first century, in certain contexts, “postcolonial” is an outdated term. This statement does not attempt to deny the pernicious and persistent relevance of postcolonial concerns; indeed, Fernando Gamboa’s *Guinea* (2008), Concha López Sarasúa’s *La llamada del almuédano* [*The Call of the Muezzin*] (1990), and María Dueñas’ *El tiempo entre costuras* [*The Time in Between*] (2009)¹² all directly address the Spanish colonial heritage in Africa, but I do not want to suggest that for the contemporary Hispano-African author, their concerns are not limited to postcolonial preoccupations. There are other pressing concerns. Ndongu, for instance, notes that exile is one for his generation; “A nuestra generación nos ha tocado vivir el exilio como a otras les tocó la esclavitud o el colonialismo” (Aguilar).¹³ Likewise, many of the Hispano-Maghrebi authors are choosing fewer political themes and writing narratives that share much in common with their Spanish counterparts. While I do not want to discount the role that postcolonial or subaltern concerns continue to play in the representation of the Other and its concomitant analysis, I also do not want to approach these current Hispano-African authors with a theoretical framework that limits their project to a political exercise.

As examined above, Said’s magnum opus, *Orientalism*, described and criticized a pattern of thought and representation that denied voice and agency to all non-Western

¹² The literal translation for the title is *The Time Between the Seams* or *The Time Between Sewing*. There is an English translation that was published in 2011 and this version chose to translate the title as *The Time in Between: A Novel*.

¹³ [Our generation has to live with exile just as others had to live with slavery or colonialism]

Others. At the threshold of the twenty-first century, it is exigent to examine the residual effect of Said's critique upon Spanish letters. One would hope that the poetic extravagances of Alarcón are a thing of the past. This dissertation begins with this hope, and focuses on two specific elements within the potential range of topics: the nexus of the contemporary Spanish novel and Africa. That is, I do not focus on academic discourse, the media, or diplomatic writings, but rather limit my study to a representative selection of the fictional production of Spanish authors from 1990 to 2010. The authors whose works I specifically analyze include Lorenzo Silva (*El nombre de los nuestros* [*The Name of Ours*], 2008), Concha López Sarasúa (*La llamada del almuédano* [*The Call of the Muezzin*], 1990), Ramón Mayrata (*El imperio desierto* [*The Desert Empire*],¹⁴ 1992), María Dueñas (*El tiempo entre costuras* [*The Time in Between*], 2009), Fernando Gamboa (*Guinea*, 2008), Montserrat Abumalham (*¿Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?* [*Do You Remember Shahrazad?*], 2001), Javier Reverte (*El médico de Ifni* [*The Doctor from Ifni*], 2005), Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa (*Los ojos del Tuareg* [*The Eyes of the Tuareg*], 2005), and Donato Ndongo (*El metro* [*The Metro*], 2007).¹⁵ These authors offer interesting, popular, critically acclaimed, and/or provocative examples of works that engage with the theme of Africa. They each approach the theme from differing angles: the war setting of *El nombre de los nuestros* contrasts directly with immigration story of *El metro*, just as the colonial representation in *La llamada del almuédano* differs from the decolonization process examined in *El imperio desierto*. Likewise, the biographies of authors such as María Dueñas and Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa or Montserrat Abumalham and Donato

¹⁴ The first translation that comes to mind is that of *The Desert Empire*, however, it could also be translated as *The Deserted Empire*. Both options are supported by the narrative.

¹⁵ To date, with the exception of Dueñas' *El tiempo entre costuras*, none of these novels have been translated into English.

Ndongo represent differing literary backgrounds and target audiences. I have made a deliberate attempt to gather a collection of works that is varied in both theme and author in order to effectively carry out the project at hand.¹⁶ At the threshold of the twenty-first century, as these works look to Africa for theme and inspiration, an analysis of these novels can highlight the strategies being used in the literary representation of Africa and the African Other in the contemporary Spanish novel.

Orientalism's focus is broad and can be applied to the literal Orient or almost any non-Western Other. I focus on the geographic region of Africa—and specifically Spain's former colonies in Morocco, Western Sahara, and Equatorial Guinea—to highlight a contemporary selection of Spanish and Hispano-African authors that are writing about Africa and the African in new and critically significant ways. In the colonial context that dominated Spain's interaction with these regions from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, Orientalist discourse prevailed in many writings about the African territories.¹⁷ From the post-colonial vantage point at the threshold of the twenty-first century, I find that contemporary Spanish authors are generally writing about Africa in more equitable and less patronizing methods that warrant analysis, even though others continue to subtly rely on the tired tropes that characterize Orientalist discourse.

But, why Africa?

Spain's geographical proximity to Africa has been the source of a unique relationship between the continent and the country. The complications of this relationship date back to the Moorish invasion in 711 CE followed by coexistence on the Iberian

¹⁶ In the following pages of the introduction and in their respective chapters, I specifically address the individual reasons why these authors and works contribute to the project at hand.

¹⁷ See Carrasco González for an examination of the Orientalist tradition in the Hispano-African colonial novel, especially the section "Exotismo. Orientalismo" (11-14).

peninsula for over seven centuries, the eventual expulsion of the Moors in 1492, the colonial missions and the wars in northern Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Spanish immigration to the African colonies in the twentieth century, and recently the influx of African immigrants into Spain. Africa has left significant architectural, linguistic and cultural impressions on Spain and Spanish culture, impressions that represent centuries of historical encounters and interactions.¹⁸

Throughout its history Spain has attempted to define itself not only against but also through its relationship with Africa. Africa has not, of course, been the only Other upon which Spain has constructed its cultural identity, but it cannot be denied that this particular relationship dates back into the far reaches of Spanish history, long before Spain built its glory on colonial conquest in the Americas. Whether a definition of Spanish culture has come from forcing national identity as being entirely European¹⁹ or through Spain's attempt to recuperate its status as a colonial force after the disastrous results of the Spanish-American War in 1898,²⁰ the idea of Africa has served as an important Other in the Spanish psyche. For almost a century, from the 1860s to the 1950s, Spain conceived of expanding itself across the Mediterranean Sea and up to the Atlas Mountains of North Africa in an ambitious project to create an "España Transfretana" (Cairo 57-58). Indeed, in the 1950s, 90 percent of the population in the

¹⁸ See Flores Morales *África a través del pensamiento español* (1949) for a fascinating collection of Francoist ideology regarding Africa. More contemporary texts that offer considerations of Spain and Africa's long history include *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*, edited by Mann, Glick, and Dodds; Harvey's *Islamic Spain: 1250-1500* (1992), Menocal's *The Ornament of the World* (2002), and O'Shea's *Sea of Faith* (2006).

¹⁹ I refer to the refrain that is most often attributed to Alexandre Dumas that "Africa begins at the Pyrenees," but can also be found repeated by such prominent Spanish voices as the writer and politician Joaquín Costa in "Los intereses de España en Marruecos" (1884) or novelist Carmen Nonell in *Zoco Grande* (1956) (Martin-Márquez 59, 274).

²⁰ As Ángel Ganivet proposes that in Africa lies "el porvenir de España" (Ganivet).

“núcleos urbanos”²¹ of the Spanish Protectorates of Morocco was of Spanish birth and origin (Gozálvez Pérez 75). The tides of immigration and settlement ventures have shifted back and forth over the Mediterranean for the last thirteen hundred years establishing connections and interactions that have profoundly shaped Spanish perceptions of Africa as an Other.

The second half of the twentieth century has only further complicated the relationship and understanding between Spain and differing regions in Africa. Long after it lost possession of its American and Pacific colonies, Spain maintained an official colonial presence in Morocco,²² Western Sahara,²³ and Equatorial Guinea²⁴ up through the late seventies. The disintegration of these former colonies forced Spain to reevaluate its conception of and relationship to Africa. On the political front, new methods of engagement and understanding have needed to be employed. Old concepts of the historical “Other” have had to be reexamined. Traditional processes of political and cultural interaction have had to be reevaluated in the contemporary, globalized twenty-first century. These new political and cultural considerations have found themselves reflected and examined in the recent literary projects from Spain’s contemporary authors.

As of yet, there is no specific work that examines the status of Orientalist discourse in the contemporary Spanish novel. Similar relevant studies have been done in the fields of travel writing, immigration and exile, colonial studies, and literary

²¹ [urban nuclei]

²² Morocco was officially the “Protectorado Español de Marruecos” from 1912 up to 1956, and the territory of Ifni was not returned to Morocco until 1969.

²³ Western Sahara was one of the last colonial possessions of Spain. Known as the “Sáhara Español” from 1884 to 1975, Spain ceded it independence in 1975. However, due to the conflicting political interests between Western Sahara, Morocco, Mauritania, and Spain, the effective independence of the territory was never fully realized. To this day, the United Nations considers Western Sahara to be a non-decolonized territory (Hodges 372).

²⁴ Equatorial Guinea was under direct Spanish control from 1844 to 1968. It became an official Spanish protectorate in 1885 and was given colonial status in 1900.

anthologies. In the field of travel writing, Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) or the volume edited by Eugenia Afinoguénova and Jaume Martí-Olivella, *Spain is (Still) Different* (2008) examine the question of travel and difference. Michael Ugarte's *Africans in Europe: The Culture of Exile and Emigration from Equatorial Guinea to Spain* (2010) and Ana Rueda's *El retorno/el reencuentro: La inmigración en la literatura hispano-marroquí [The Return/The Reencounter: Immigration in Hispano-Moroccan Literature]* (2010) are valuable examinations in the field of immigration and exile. Susan Martin-Márquez's *Disorientations: Spanish Colonialism in Africa and the Performance of Identity* (2008) and Donato Ndong and Mariano L. de Castro Antolín's *España en Guinea: construcción del desencuentro: 1778-1968 [Spain in Guinea: Construction of the Disappointment]* (1998) are important analyses of Spain's colonial efforts in the African continent. And Antonio Carrasco González's *Historia de la novela colonial hispanoafriicana [History of the Hispano-African Colonial Novel]*, (2009), Manuel Gahete, et al's *Calle del Agua: Antología contemporánea de Literatura Hispanomagrebí [Street of Water: Contemporary Anthology of Hispano-Maghrebi Literature]* (2008), and Donato Ndong and Mbaré Ngom's *Literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial – Antología [Literature from Equatorial Guinea – Anthology]* (2000) have each focused critical attention on recent Spanish works from Hispano-African authors through anthologies and critical reflections. These critics have contributed to an analysis of the West's encounters with Africa and the use of Orientalist stereotypes as well as the overcoming of the same. This study will draw on these critics as I contribute to their work through a consideration of both Spanish and African authors,

and of novels that focus on each of the regions where Spain maintained a significant colonial presence.

As I engage with the theoretical work of Edward Said, specifically *Orientalism* (1978), to determine whether (or not) his proposed Orientalist theories still hold value for a study of the contemporary Spanish novel of thirty years later, I will also rely on works by Daniel Varisco (*Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid*, 2007), Emmanuel Levinas (*Humanism of the Other*, 1972), Gil Anidjar (*The Jew, The Arab: A History of the Enemy*, 2003), Fatema Mernissi (*Scheherezade Goes West*, 2001), James C. Scott (*Seeing Like a State*, 1998), Louis Althusser (*Philosophy of the Encounter*, 2006), and Georges Van den Abbeele (*Travel as Metaphor: From Montaigne to Rousseau*, 1992), among others. These texts will serve to elucidate themes of political interaction, gender, and travel between Spain and Africa as represented in the novels. These theorists will contribute to a theoretical framework that posits the contemporary novels of Silva, López Sarasúa, Mayrata, Dueñas, Gamboa, Abumalham, Reverte, Vázquez-Figueroa, and Ndongu in their historical, cultural and theoretical context, thereby illuminating the underlying dynamics that structure their works.

The imaginary that pertains to Africa has served such a vital role in the history and creation of modern Spain that it is revealing to examine the influences that it continues to exert on Spanish writers. Such an analysis can reveal the enduring power of the Orientalist legacy, and also the strategies that contemporary authors employ to avoid traditional literary tropes. In the last thirty years, Spain's political relationships with Africa have changed dramatically, as they have shifted from Spain's paternalistic colonial governance to differing levels of autonomy and independence. While contemporary

authors seek to engage with this change, it is imperative to examine their work to evaluate the current status of the literary relationship between Spain and its historical Other so that we can understand the patterns of representation that continue to be employed in contemporary works. Also, while the novels under consideration are receiving growing critical attention, this work aspires to contribute to this recent critical attention towards Spain's historical involvement with Africa by considering the status of Orientalism in their novels. These authors have made significant contributions to the contemporary literary landscape in Spain and it is imperative that the way Africa figures in their novelistic corpus be critically analyzed.

This project will engage with a variety of questions as it seeks to analyze the fate of Orientalism in contemporary Spanish fiction around three distinct but interrelated topics: (a) the political dimension, (b) gender issues, and (c) travel. The political interactions between Spain and Africa offer the opportunity to examine questions such as "How does war affect the representation of the Other?" and "How are Spanish authors re-writing historic encounters between Spain and Africa such as colonialism?" Issues of gender raise the questions of "Is Africa still a virgin land to be explored?" or "How has the representation of the erotic African Other changed?" And finally, an analysis of archetypes of travel can illuminate whether or not the North African nomad is still a romantic enigma in the popular imaginary, or how affluence affects mobility and representation in portrayals of the tourist or the immigrant. These questions, and others like them, have structured my personal approach to these novels as I have read, enjoyed, and analyzed their narratives. As I selected specific texts, I also asked myself whether these novels held literary value, or whether they instead contributed to the project due to

their own ambitious commercial or humanistic goals. Ultimately, I have sought to evaluate the extent to which Saidian Orientalism persists in Spanish literature, and my findings suggest a waning of influence, but also a stubborn persistence of the same.

What follows is an outline of my chapter distribution and the specific issues that I seek to address:

Chapter Two: “The Vision of the Other: War, Diplomacy, and Decolonization” examines historic and contemporary engagement with and representation of the Other in a variety of encounters: war, diplomacy, and colonial motivations for interaction as portrayed in the novels of Lorenzo Silva, Concha López Sarasúa, and Ramón Mayrata. My analysis of Silva’s *El nombre de los nuestros* examines the distinction between a cultural Other and the enemy combatant, and how Silva redraws lines of alterity along social class instead of cultural difference. López Sarasúa’s *La llamada del almuédano* offers a view of Spanish immigration to the Moroccan Protectorate during the mid-twentieth century. This novel reconceptualizes ideas of the geographical fatherland, re-ordering the preferential hierarchy for the European peninsula. Mayrata’s *El imperio desierto* takes up the issue of the decolonization of Western Sahara and the West’s patronizing attempts to speak and decide for its African Other.

Chapter Three: “The Other as Mirage: Gendered and Eroticized Portrayals of the Other” focuses on the use of gender and eroticized portrayals of the Other and how such depictions reflect the shifting stereotypes and motives that inspire them. Dueñas’ *El tiempo entre costuras* employs colonial Morocco as a backdrop to a young woman’s maturation and liberation, conferring upon Africa qualities of possibility that are unavailable in the West. Gamboa’s *Guinea* creates a phantomatic, erotic African male who

seduces a Spanish NGO worker in Equatorial Guinea, questioning the way that the West imagines its African Other. And Abumalham's epistolary novel *¿Te acuerdas de Shahrzad?* invokes the literary, Oriental archetype of Shahrzad, while simultaneously deterritorializing the novel and invocation.

Finally, Chapter Four: "The Tourist, The Nomad, and the Immigrant: Travel and the Encounter with the Other" examines the use of travel in the novel on Africa, and specifically the representations of the archetypal figures of the tourist, the nomad, and the immigrant. The protagonist of Reverte's *El médico de Ifni* is an affluent, Spanish tourist who becomes obsessed with finding the truth about her father who died as a renegade in the Saharawi independence movement while Vázquez-Figueroa's *Los ojos del Tuareg* focuses on the lives of a small family of Tuareg nomads that must confront the Western rally car drivers that disrupt their lifestyle. Ndongu's *El metro* offers the story of a Cameroonian who immigrates north across Africa to finally arrive in Spain. The use of each of these traveling archetypes opens for analysis distinct social and cultural representations of difference.

An analysis of these themes will articulate my thesis: contemporary Spanish authors are generally approaching Spain's former colonial enclaves in Africa (Morocco, Western Sahara and Equatorial Guinea) with a novel understanding of their historical neighbor that is significantly more impartial in its attempt to portray a cultural and historical equal—a portrayal that consciously challenges historical inaccuracies and stereotypes that preference a cultural high ground to the Iberian peninsula. Throughout the study, as I move from war and peace to gender issues and to the displacement of travel, I will return to the central concern of whether contemporary Spanish authors are

perpetuating Orientalist tendencies or if they have been able to move beyond Orientalism in their treatment of the Other.

These authors represent a diverse selection of voices in contemporary Spanish literary production. María Dueñas, Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa, Lorenzo Silva, and Javier Reverte are all best-selling authors. Donato Ndongo, Lorenzo Silva, and Concha López Sarasúa have each received substantial critical attention from academia, and the work of each of these authors merits further analysis. María Dueñas and Montserrat Abumalham are both university professors in Spain and their works examined here are their first published works of fiction; Donato Ndongo is a prominent academic who regularly speaks and teaches at institutions throughout Europe and the U.S. Ndongo also represents one of the most prominent Hispano-African voices writing today as an exiled Equato-Guinean author. Abumalham is also a significant voice in recent Hispano-Moroccan literary production, and she, Dueñas, and López Sarasúa all contribute a feminine authorial voice to this project.

It was not an easy process to choose a limited selection of authors and novels for this work. As such, this dissertation does not pretend to be an exhaustive examination of all relevant authors or literary works. This project does hope to highlight some trends within the contemporary Spanish literary landscape, and the authors included here should serve as a useful representative selection for such an ambition. The interest that Spanish authors have in returning to the theme of Africa must be noted. The recent literary output is staggering. Javier Reverte alone has published a trilogy of travel writings on Africa, retracing the explorations of the titans of Western exploration in Africa such as Stanley Livingstone and Mungo Park (*Caminos perdidos de África* [*Lost Trails of Africa*], 2004,

Vagabundo en África [*Vagabond in Africa*], 2005, and *El sueño de África* [*The Dream of Africa*], 2007), as well as novels on Africa (*El médico de Ifni*, 2005 and the recent *La canción de Mbama* [*The Song of Mbama*], 2011) and a collection of poetry titled *Poemas africanos* [*African Poems*] (2011). Vázquez-Figuera has repeatedly turned to Africa for inspiration in his novels such as *África llora* [*Africa Cries*] (2004), *Tuareg* (1980) or *Arena y viento* [*Sand and Wind*] (1953), as has Lorenzo Silva in *El nombre de los nuestros* (2008)—considered in this study—and *Carta blanca* [*Blank Check/Carte Blanche*] (2004), as well as his non-fictional travel narrative, *Del Rif al Yebala. Viaje al sueño y la pesadilla de Marruecos* [*From Rif to Yebala. Voyage to the Dream and Nightmare of Morocco*] (2001). Ramón Mayrata has also compiled an anthology of *Relatos del Sáhara* [*Tales of the Sahara*] (2001) and written a fictionalized account of Domingo Badía's eighteenth-century travels through the Maghreb in *Alí Bey El Abasí: Un cristiano en La Meca* [*Ali Bey the Abassid: A Christian in Mecca*] (1995).

In addition to the works by authors considered in this study, there are a number of other Spanish authors employing and including Africa in their works. Lourdes Ortíz (*Fátima de los naufragios* [*Fatima of the Shipwrecked*], 1998), Ignacio Martínez de Pisón (*Una guerra africana* [*An African War*], 2008), Luis Leante (*Mira si yo te querré* [*See How Much I Love You*], 2007), Jesús Torbado (*Imperio de arena* [*Empire of Sand*], 1998), and Bernardo Atxaga (*Siete casas en Francia* [*Seven Houses in France*], 2009) represent just a few of the authors that form a part of this focus on Africa and African themes in contemporary Spanish literature. This renewed interest is significant, and this study attempts to identify general trends in representative recent works. Questions of whether this is a commercially motivated trend or whether it is a reflection of recent

immigration and political realities are largely speculative ones, but what is directly available for analysis is this question: how are these authors representing Africa and their African Other? This essential question serves as the foundation for this work, and, while I will let the chapters speak for themselves, I find that some representations move beyond the limitations of Orientalism, while others continue in its damaging tradition.

If I were unencumbered by the sometimes arbitrary limitations that go into the preparation of a dissertation, limitations of genre, length, time, and—of course—a manageable project, then there is a long list of other potential subjects within the topic of Africa awaiting further examination and analysis. The preceding paragraph and the following two paragraphs show that there are many recent works of fiction by Spanish authors that deal with Africa. Fortunately, the topic of Africa appears to be growing in popularity and interest from both the Spanish reading public and from the current crop of authors. It is not limited to Spanish production either. The emergence of Spanish/Catalan authors such as Najat El Hachmi and her groundbreaking *Jo també sóc catalana* [*I Too Am Catalan*] (2004) represents an exciting new frontier for Spanish literature.

The canon of literature by Equatorial Guinean authors is also growing quickly, and receiving significant critical attention. Donato Ndongo's novels *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* [*Shadows of Your Black Memory*] (1987), *Los poderes de la tempestad* [*The Powers of the Tempest*] (1997), and *El metro* (2007) have all been well received, and *Tinieblas* has recently been translated into English by Michael Ugarte (*Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 2007). While Ndongo is perhaps the best known name, poet, dramatist, and novelist Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel (*Arde el monte de noche* [*The Mountain Burns at Night*], 2009, *Áwala cu sangui* [*Awala With Blood*], 2000) is also a well-

respected literary voice from the sub-saharan country. María Nsue Angüe's 1985 *Ekomo* represents one of the most foundational and important novels in Spanish from Equatorial Guinea, and she has also received more attention in recent years.²⁵ There has also been the recent publication of works by Guillermina Mekuy (*El llanto de la perra* [*The Cry of the Bitch*], 2005, *Las tres vírgenes de Santo Tomás* [*The Three Virgins of Saint Thomas*], 2008, *Tres almas para un corazón* [*Three Souls for a Heart*], 2011), and Victoria Evita Ika (*Mokámbo: Aromas de Libertad* [*Mokambo: Aromas of Liberty*], 2010).²⁶ Donato Ndongu and Mbaré Ngom's anthology of Equato-Guinean works compiles many of the representative poets, dramatists, and novelists of recent Guinean history.

Western Sahara's contributions to the Spanish literary field are small, yet growing. Most significant among them is perhaps the work of the poet and activist Bahia Mahmud Awah who recently published his memoir/novel *La maestra que me enseñó en una tabla de madera* [*The Teacher that Taught Me on a Wooden Tablet*] (2011). There is also a small yet active group of Saharawi poets and writers living in Madrid that are drawing attention to the political issues that face the Saharawi populace as they continue to hope for an eventual return to the territory that is currently occupied by Morocco. The group *Generación de la amistad saharawi* [Generation of Saharawi Friendship] is comprised of many of these Saharawi poets and has worked to publish and disseminate their poetry. Some anthologies include *Versos refugiados* [*Sheltered Verses/Refugee Verses*] (2007), edited by Bahia Awah, *La primavera saharawi: Escritores saharauis con Gdeim Izik* [*The Saharawi Spring: Saharawi Writers with Gdeim Izik*] (2012), and *La*

²⁵ See the recent articles by Lawo-Sukam, López Rodríguez, and Odartey-Wellington, among others.

²⁶ Victoria Evita Ika is the daughter of Leoncio Ika, credited with writing the first Hispano-Guinean novel, *Cuando los combes luchaban: Novela de costumbres de la Guinea Española* [*When the Kombes Fought: Novel of the Customs of Spanish Guinea*], in 1953.

fuelle de Saguia: Antología de relatos saharauis [*The Fountain of Saguia: Anthology of Saharawi Tales*] (2009). The primary generic focus of these authors is poetry, with an emphasis also on maintaining traditional Saharawi oral stories, but the past few years have offered much hope for a growth in production of literature in Spanish by Saharawi authors.

And despite a declining rate in the use of Spanish within Morocco (Boutakka), there is, perhaps surprisingly, a growing number of works by Moroccan authors in Spanish. There even exists an *Asociación de escritores marroquíes en lengua española* [Association of Moroccan Writers in the Spanish Language], and Manuel Gahete and Abdellatif Limami, along with other members of this association, recently published an anthology of works by Moroccan authors in Spanish, titled *Calle del agua: Antología contemporánea de literatura hispanomagrebí* (2008). Ahmed Daoudi (*El diablo de Yudis* [*The Devil of Yudis*], 1994), Larbi el-Harti (*Después de Tánger* [*After Tangier*], 2003), Mohamed Akalay (*Entre Tánger y Larache* [*Between Tangier and Larache*], 2006), Mohamed Bouissef Rekab (*La señora* [*The Woman*], 2006), and Montserrat Abumalham (*¿Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?*, 2001) all represent significant voices contributing to a near renaissance of publications in Spanish by Moroccan authors. Rueda's work *El retorno/el reencuentro: La inmigración en la literatura hispano-marroquí* also compiles an important collection of works by Hispano-Moroccan authors, including selections from Ahmed Daoudi, Abderrahmán El Fathi, Najat El Hachmi, and Mohamed Lemrini El-Ouahhabi.²⁷

²⁷ Rueda's study also includes several Spanish authors who take up the theme of immigration between Spain and the Maghreb, including Lourdes Ortíz, Elena Santiago, and others.

The novels that I propose to study come from authors that are garnering a substantial readership but that largely await critical attention. Their works dealing with Africa reflect a return to themes that Spanish authors have entertained for centuries; however their position at the threshold of the twenty-first century demands critical evaluation of their treatment of such themes as they approach Africa as a literary topic from a post-colonial perspective. My investigation incorporates a combination of critical perspectives, outlined above, that contribute to an understanding of how contemporary Spanish authors approach Africa in ways that either perpetuate or surpass historical Orientalist discourses. By analyzing the status and fate of the Orientalist discourse as found in fictional works by contemporary Spanish authors, this work will contribute to the other studies already mentioned that have dealt with similar issues.

My examination of the Orientalist discourse in the novel is aligned with a renewed critical interest in this theoretical field but, as of yet, there have been few specific works that examines the fate of Orientalism in the contemporary Spanish novel.²⁸ Additionally, the majority of critical studies examining Spain's relationship with Africa have heavily focused on Spain and Morocco's interactions and, while important, such focuses have largely ignored Spain's historical and literary relationships with the present day Western Sahara and Equatorial Guinea. By including a focus on these countries alongside Morocco, this study attempts to avoid the trap of taking Morocco as an emblem for the entire continent, and strives to offer a more encompassing view of Spain's former colonies in Africa, which include: Morocco, the territory of Ifni in present-day Morocco, Spanish Sahara and Equatorial Guinea – the only sub-Saharan country in Africa where

²⁸ Susan Martin-Márquez's *Disorientations: Spanish Colonialism in Africa and the Performance of Identity* (2008) and Carmen Sotomayor's *Una lectura orientalista de Juan Goytisolo* (1990) are two works that do address questions of Orientalism in Spanish literary discourse.

Spanish is still an official language. Spain's involvement with Africa was not limited to Morocco, and therefore this study attempts to address and analyze Spanish literary reflections from each African territory that experienced a significant Spanish colonial presence. Through my work, I hope to bring attention to shifts of representation in the contemporary Spanish novel that will demonstrate the critical value of these novels while drawing attention to the contributions these authors have made to the Spanish literary field and more specifically how, in many instances, they have contributed to overturning and reevaluating long-held Orientalist stereotypes.

CHAPTER TWO.

THE VISION OF THE OTHER: WAR, DIPLOMACY, AND DECOLONIZATION

Beginning in 1956, the Spanish African Empire slowly began to dismantle. Spain and France recognized Moroccan independence and returned their protectorates in 1956 (minus the enclaves of Ceuta, Melilla, and Ifni); Equatorial Guinea was granted independence in 1968; Ifni was returned to Morocco in 1969, and Spain withdrew from the Spanish Sahara in 1975. In the few decades between the Spanish Civil War and the relinquishment of the colonies, there was significant emigration from Spain to Africa.²⁹ A census of the Spanish Sahara shows that in 1950 there were 1,320 Europeans in the colony. By 1974 that number had risen to 20,126. In Equatorial Guinea the European population grew from 3,937 in 1950 to 9,137 in 1966. The Spanish Protectorate of Morocco experienced the highest European population; between 1935 and 1955 the expatriate population doubled from 44,379 to 90,939 (Gozálvez Pérez). From the very end of the nineteenth century, with the loss of the American colonies, Spain's renewed focus on Africa brought about almost seventy-five years of intense interaction with and colonization of the Spanish African territories. These seventy-five years represent, perhaps, the most sustained and frenetic period of Spanish interest in the African continent.

At the threshold of the twenty-first century, multiple Spanish authors are returning to these historical encounters that dominated much of the twentieth century, revisiting Spain's interaction with Africa. There have been a number of books in recent years that employ as a theme the fighting in Morocco, the colonies of Sidi Ifni, Spanish Sahara or

²⁹ I use "emigration" here to specifically emphasize the movement of Spaniards *to* the African colonies.

the Moroccan Protectorate, and also the Spanish abandonment of the Saharan territory.³⁰

These works offer a valuable opportunity to examine the contemporary Spanish imaginary of Spanish-African interaction in the twentieth century. Among the contemporary novels looking back on recent history are Lorenzo Silva's *El nombre de los nuestros* (2008) and *Carta blanca* (2004), Concha López Sarasúa's *La llamada del almuédano* (1990), Ramón Mayrata's *El imperio desierto* (2008) and *Alí Bey El Abasí: Un cristiano en La Meca* (1995), Luis Leante's *Mira si yo te querré* (2007), Jesús Torbado's *El imperio de arena* (1998), Ignacio Martínez de Pisón's *Una guerra africana* (2000), and María Dueñas's best selling *El tiempo entre costuras* (2009), not to mention Javier Reverte's *El médico de Ifni* which is examined in Chapter Four.

The themes vary: Silva's novels deal primarily with the second Moroccan War³¹ as does Martínez de Pisón's — their literary products paralleling Ramón Sender's *Imán* (1930) and José Díaz Fernández's *El blocao*³² (1928). Ramón Mayrata, Javier Reverte, and Luis Leante focus on the Spanish Sahara while Concha López Sarasúa, Jesús Torbado, and María Dueñas employ Spanish emigration to the Moroccan territory as their backdrops. What links these authors together is their mining of the recent historical past for what it can offer to a fictional narrative, effectively creating a (re)imagination of the intercultural encounter brought about through war, colonization, and/or politics.

³⁰ This focus is aligned with a recent interest in the Spanish Civil War within Spanish letters also. Indeed, Lorenzo Silva's novel *Carta blanca* (2005) opens in the fighting of the second War of Africa and closes with the fighting of the Spanish Civil War. Other novels focusing on the Spanish Civil War include Javier Cercas' *Soldados de Salamina* (2001), Antonio Muñoz Molina's *La noche de los tiempos* (2009), or Dulce Chacón's *La voz dormida* (2002). Novels such as Silva's *Carta blanca* or Dueñas' *El tiempo entre costuras* emphasize how the question of the Moroccan Colonies and the Spanish Civil War are essentially intertwined realities.

³¹ Also referred to as the Rif War and notable for the Disaster of Annual on July 22, 1921. See Leguineche.

³² A *blocao* was a small fortified structure used by Spanish troops in the Moroccan wars. It is a prominent feature of works by Sender, Díaz Fernández, Silva and others, and the isolation and vulnerability of the soldiers stationed at the *blocao* is a recurrent theme.

This chapter examines these contemporary representations of Spain's political and bellicose interactions with Africa from the last century. I assume the reader's familiarity with Spain's historical Moorish roots — specifically the 711 to 1492 period of Moorish/Christian coexistence on the Iberian Peninsula — focusing instead on the, at times, frenetic interest Spain held for Africa throughout much of the twentieth century.³³ After the losses of the Spanish American War, Africa gained political interest for Spain as a continent that promised to renew the colonial prestige that was recently lost in the Americas and the Pacific. In the period immediately following this defeat, Spain reevaluated its relationship with Africa and redoubled its focus and efforts on the continent. Even though Spain had amplified its territories of Ceuta, Melilla, Tétouan, and Sidi Ifni following the first War of Africa (1859-1860), Spain's loss of Cuba and the Philippines in the Spanish-American War in 1898 caused Spain to turn its focus southward across the straits. Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, Spain rapidly began the expansion of its African empire;³⁴ however, in less than seventy years Spain would also experience the ultimate disintegration of that hope-for African empire. This period of time represents an intense era of interaction and change between Spain and

³³ It cannot be denied that Africa was the object of Europe's fevered attention in the nineteenth century as well. The period referred to as the "Scramble for Africa" (roughly mid-nineteenth century to early twentieth century) represented the European nations' efforts to divide up the African continent and to consolidate colonial power. Spain came somewhat late to this "scramble," but did participate, most notably waging the first War of Africa in 1859-1860. Since contemporary authors have focused instead on Spain-Africa interactions in the twentieth century, I do not include a significant focus on this time period. One notable novelistic exception to this trend is Bernardo Atxaga's *Siete casas en Francia* (2009) that takes place in the nineteenth century Belgian Congo. For information on the Scramble for Africa, see Chamberlain.

³⁴ Up to this point, Spain had largely ignored its African colonies. Fernando Pó Island (now Bioko) in Equatorial Guinea, had been under Spanish control since 1770 and Sidi Ifni had been a Spanish enclave since 1476, called Santa Cruz de la Mar Pequeña, but, compared to the American colonies, little national interest had been placed on the African territories. See Ndongo's *España en Guinea* and García Figueras's *Santa Cruz de Mar Pequeña-Ifni-Sáhara* for more information about the history of these territories.

Africa.³⁵ It defined their relationship through the twentieth century and continues to influence their engagement into the twenty-first century as Spain currently deals with the influx of African immigrants into the Peninsula or the failure to reach a resolution on the status of the former Spanish Sahara.

The rich and abundant writings on Africa from the early nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century chart an evolution in the portrayal of the cultures of North Africa, cultures that are clearly distinct from the Iberian ones. From Domingo Badía (pseud. Ali Bey al-Abbasi), Benito Pérez Galdós and Gaspar Núñez de Arce to Ramón J. Sender, José Díaz Fernández, Isaac Muñoz, Ernesto Giménez Caballero and Tomás Borrás and up to Javier Reverte, Ramón Mayrata, Jesús Torbado and the other authors listed above, Africa has been portrayed through the eyes of Westerners, often revealing deep-seated cultural stereotypes that divulge cultural superiority or outright colonizing intentions or, conversely, using Africa as an esperpentic lens through which to criticize Spain.³⁶

In this chapter, I focus on three contemporary novels that approach the theme of Africa specifically within the contexts of war, colonialism and decolonialism, and diplomacy as I examine how the context of engagement affects the representation of the Other. To this end, I have chosen to analyze Lorenzo Silva's *El nombre de los nuestros* (2008) for its treatment of the second Moroccan War and the Disaster of Annual, Concha

³⁵ It must be noted that this interaction was often secretive and even silent. Spain allowed little to no information about Western Sahara to appear in the press during its rule of the territory (Hodges 135, 146).

³⁶ The "esperpentic lens" is drawn from Ramón del Valle-Inclán's avant-garde play *Lucas de Bohemia* (1920). The *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* defines "Esperpento" as a "Género literario creado por Ramón del Valle-Inclán, escritor español de la generación del 98, en el que se deforma la realidad, recargando sus rasgos grotescos, sometiéndolo a una elaboración muy personal del lenguaje coloquial y desgarrado" [Literary genre created by Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Spanish writer of the Generation of '98, in which reality is distorted, emphasizing the grotesque characteristics, and undergoing a very personal elaboration of colloquial and fractured language]. The "esperpentic lens" often serves to create a hyperbolic representation of a contemporary reality for the purpose of critique.

López Sarasúa's *La llamada del almuédano* (1990) for its viewpoint on the civilian Spanish emigration to the Moroccan Protectorate, and Ramón Mayrata's *El imperio desierto* (1992) for its focus on the Spanish withdrawal from the Saharan territory. Not only have these writers received acclaim for their works, but these three novels serve as valuable texts because they are narratives that reflect significant historical interactions between Spain and Africa in the past century. Spain fought for territory in Morocco, maintained a significant colonial presence, and lost its territories all within the boundaries of the century. An examination of these novels will consider how these interactions continue to resonate in contemporary Spanish literature.

It is worth noting that Equatorial Guinea is only tangentially and not explicitly a part of the analysis of this chapter; these works by Silva, López Sarasúa, and Mayrata focus exclusively on the North African territories. In approaching the broader themes of war, political engagement, and civilian emigration, the novels that most thoroughly develop these encounters center around the Maghreb, reflecting Spain's intense focus on North Africa, often at the expense of their West African colony. Many of the conclusions that I reach in my analysis of these novels can be transposed also to Equatorial Guinea, and, where appropriate, I will highlight such possible comparisons. I have found the recent novels about Equatorial Guinea – by authors such as Donato Ndongo, Tomás Ávila Laurel, Fernando Gamboa, Victoria Evita Ika, and Guillermina Mekuy, among others – to fit more appropriately in other chapters within this dissertation.

Specific to this chapter is my analysis of how methods of engagement with the Other affect literary representation. Does a war novel reflect the African Other in distinct ways from a novel about the quotidian realities of the civilian in the protectorate? What

implications do methods of engagement have for maintaining or overcoming Orientalist stereotypes? This chapter will serve to support the thesis of this dissertation, that contemporary authors are writing Africa and the African Others through methods that avoid the pitfalls of historic, Orientalist discourse. The return to the past for literary inspiration highlights their engagement with the historical realities and the attempt to represent these realities within contemporary narration.

As I examine the themes of war, colonization, and diplomacy, I will highlight and analyze the efforts that Silva, López Sarasúa, and Mayrata make to present their African Other in ways that undermine traditions of Western cultural hegemony. Silva's treatment of the Rif War (1911-1927) redraws lines of Same and Other along class distinctions rather than cultural ones; López Sarasúa's novel reconceptualizes the idea of the *patria* and national belonging, decentering Western primacy, and Mayrata's work highlights how the West disenfranchised the indigenous Saharawi population while his narration attempts to recognize and value the cultural Otherness of the Saharawi. Each of these novels contributes a unique viewpoint as I will examine the dynamics of aggressive interaction, peaceful coexistence, and the intense yet (somewhat) peaceful negotiations of diplomacy and how these authors narrate the Other within these contexts. These representations are especially significant in the settings of war or diplomacy where distinctions of Same and Other and their confrontation are an essential element of the interaction. In these cases, Silva and Mayrata's efforts to redefine lines of affiliation and to represent the opposing Other equitably counter facile demarcations of Same and Other inherent in the nature of the confrontations.

In Silva's *El nombre de los nuestros* militant conflict characterizes the encounter between the West and its African Other; in Sarasúa López's *La llamada del almuédano*, the colonial paradigm is examined in its waning, while *El imperio desierto* develops over the final months of the Spanish presence in the Saharan territory, as the protagonists work to navigate the bureaucracy and diplomacy that will establish a national sovereignty for the Saharawi. Together, these three engagements will offer considerations of the most emblematic of the encounters between cultures. These encounters function on a macro, *intercultural* level; war, diplomacy, and colonization are encounters (or clashes) between cultures. In my examination of archetypes of travel in Chapter Four, I emphasize the micro, *interpersonal* encounter.

As this work as a whole engages with Said's *Orientalism*, Ryszard Kapuściński's work in *The Other* (2008), Gil Anidjar's *The Jew, The Arab: A History of the Enemy* (2003), along with Emmanuel Levinas (*Humanism of the Other*, 2003), Karl Marx (*Capital*, 1990), and Ana Rueda ("El enemigo 'invisible'" and "Sender y otros novelistas de la guerra marroquí") will contribute to my analysis of the enemy versus the Other in Silva's novel. In my reading of López Sarasúa's work, I rely on Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) and Mohammed Abrighach's "Concha López Sarasúa: novelista de las dos orillas" for insight and context into the colonial situation of the Moroccan Protectorates and López Sarasúa's representation of it. And finally, I find very helpful James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State* (1998) and Gayatri Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak" (1998) to uncover the dynamics at work in the decolonization of Western Sahara and Mayrata's novelization of the process.

These authors and theorists will contribute to a more complete understanding of the status of Orientalist discourse within the contemporary Spanish novel.

I. THE ENEMY, THE OTHER, AND THE TIES BETWEEN: LORENZO SILVA'S *EL NOMBRE DE LOS NUESTROS*

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate
Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
– William Butler Yeats (“An Irish Airman
Foresees His Death,” 13)

Originally trained as a lawyer, Lorenzo Silva began publishing works of fiction, literary articles, and children's literature in 1995 with the publication of *Noviembre sin violetas* [*November without Violets*] (1995). Since then he has published over fifteen novels that have earned him several prizes. He was a finalist for the Premio Nadal with *La flaqueza del bolchevique* [*The Weakness of the Bolshevik*] (1997), and he won the award for *El alquimista impaciente* [*The Impatient Alchemist*] in 2000. He has also received the Premio El Ojo Crítico in 1998 for *El lejano país de los estanques* [*The Distant Country of the Ponds*] and the Premio Primavera de Novela for *Carta blanca* (2004). *La flaqueza del bolchevique* was made into a movie in 2003. In the last fifteen years, Silva has been remarkably successful and prolific, and his positive reception is not limited to the general public; there has been a growing interest in Silva's work within academia in the last decade.³⁷

Silva's writing is not limited to fiction; his non-fiction books include *Del Rif al Yebala. Viaje al sueño y la pesadilla de Marruecos* (2001), *Y al final, la guerra. La aventura de los soldados españoles en Irak* [*And at the End of it All, War. The Adventure*

³⁷ See Rueda (“Sender y otros novelistas de la guerra marroquí: humanismo social y vanguardia política”), Larequi, Almarcegui, Fornieles, or Gerling's interview with the author for examples.

of the Spanish Soldiers in Iraq] (2006), as well as various travel narratives. Pertinent to this study is his focus on Spain's interaction with North Africa in the twentieth century. His two fictional works, *El nombre de los nuestros* (2001) and *Carta blanca* (2004) take place in the midst of the Rif War (1911-1927). *Del Rif al Yebala* is non-fiction, recounting Silva's travels through the areas that were formerly the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco. Silva also edited and wrote a prologue and commentary for a 2001 edition of Ramón J. Sender's *Imán*. These themes are personal for Silva, as his grandfather fought in North Africa; he says about these works:

Aunque muchos prefieran ignorarlo, Marruecos es el vecino meridional del país en que vivo, España, al que además le unen intensos y antiguos vínculos de toda índole. Nuestra historia ha sido común en muchos momentos, a veces de forma trágica. En uno de esos episodios luctuosos, la guerra de 1920-1927, participó uno de mis abuelos... Por eso, y porque además tengo familia marroquí, no he podido mirar al sur con indiferencia. (*Lorenzo Silva: Una página personal dedicada a los lectores*)³⁸

These novels are powerful indictments against Spain's military actions in Morocco, returning to the social humanism of Ramón Sender, Arturo Barea, José Antonio Balbontín, or José Díaz Fernández.³⁹ Silva's revision of Spain's military intervention in

³⁸ [Even though many prefer to ignore it, Morocco is the meridional neighbor of the country in which I live, Spain, intense and ancient ties of all kinds unite them also. Our history has been a common one in many moments, sometimes in a tragic form. In one of these painful episodes, the war of 1920-1927, one of my grandfathers participated... For this reason, and because I also have Moroccan family members, I have not been able to look to the south with indifference.]

³⁹ See Rueda, "Sender y otros novelistas de la guerra marroquí" for a comparison between Silva and these earlier authors.

Africa offers a contemporary consideration of the bellicose interactions between Spain and Morocco that marked the beginning of the twentieth century.

Silva's *El nombre de los nuestros* is the focus of this section as it occurs almost entirely within the theater of war in North Africa. Developing in the midst of the Rif War, specifically June and July 1921, Silva's recounting of the weeks leading up to and the tragedy of the Disaster of Annual (21 July, 1921) offers a unique consideration of an African Other that is both culturally and strategically opposed to the Spanish forces. The war setting of the novel, developing entirely on the front lines of active battle, highlights a bellicose engagement with Moroccans. The Other is not only ethnically Other but also an enemy or fellow soldier. The umbrella term *Other* is nuanced into either a threatening aggressor or a collaborative companion, reducing emphasis on cultural *Otherness* to dynamics of hostility and friendship.⁴⁰

Thus, in addition to the theorists of Otherness already mentioned, central to this analysis of Silva's novel is Gil Anidjar's *The Jew, The Arab: A History of the Enemy* (2003), as Anidjar distinguishes the enemy from the Other. Emmanuel Levinas's *Humanism of the Other* (2003), and Ryszard Kapuściński's *The Other* (2008) also provide context and insight. Articles by Ana Rueda — specifically "El enemigo 'invisible' de la Guerra de África (1859-60) y el proyecto histórico del nacionalismo español: Del Castillo, Alarcón y Landa" and "Sender y otros novelistas de la guerra marroquí: humanismo social y vanguardia política" — will also offer context and insight to the present study. Each of these authors engage with the question of alterity and the

⁴⁰ These collaborative companions were referred to as Harka, a term for indigenous Moroccan troops under European command, specifically used by the Spanish in the African campaigns (Wikipedia).

Other, and so will contribute directly to a more complete analysis of Silva's war novel.⁴¹ My analysis will highlight how Lorenzo Silva, with *El nombre de los nuestros*, sidesteps cultural alterity and concomittant Orientalist tropes, instead emphasizing socio-economic difference over cultural difference, creating a work that highlights social inequality over cultural hierarchy.

Within *El nombre de los nuestros*, alterity is reduced to an "anonimato colectivo"⁴² (Rueda, "Sender y otros novelistas" 186). Irrespective of race or culture, all participants in the war front are exposed to the very real possibility of death and are united in their common mortality. Anidjar's theorization of the enemy proposes that

The enemy is not the other – and the movement by which the enemy vanishes into the distance... is a movement that remains within the space of the same...

The movement of the enemy thus has to be distinguished from that of the other who comes from afar, the neighbor or *prochain* who, before the subject, comes. Symmetrically opposed – rather than asymmetrically approaching – the enemy departs and vanishes, which is to say that the enemy also *remains* as departing and vanishing. The space within which this movement takes place is defined by Levinas as the space of the political, as the space of war. (3)

That is, the confrontation between forces – sides – jockeying for control of the same physical space or territory, refigures the dynamics of privileging Same over Other.

⁴¹ For critical works that engage directly with Silva's literary production, see Craig-Odders, García Jambrina, and Oropesa; however, these articles focus primarily on Silva's detective/crime novels. Silva has been interviewed about his war writing (see Gerling, Broeck, or Esquirol), but aside from Rueda's "Sender y otros novelistas" there has not been much written about the Silva's African war novels.

⁴² [collective anonymity]

Shared goals, relative proximity, and intense, aggressive interaction distinguish the enemy from the Other. Trajectories of parallel movement mark the relationship between opposing forces;⁴³ the mirroring confrontation and the dynamic instability of the war front redefine interaction with opposing forces. It is also the plurality of the opposition; *armies* or forces engage one another. The enemy is stripped of individuality – “The enemy is a thing” (Anidjar 24).

While Ryszard Kapuściński does not specifically distinguish the enemy from the Other, he does explicitly suggest that “conflict, collision, is just one quite unnecessary form of contact between civilisations. Another one that features even more often is exchange” (20), and he further articulates that “the circumstances, the context... decide whether we see a person as an enemy or as a partner at any given moment” (21).

Kapuściński is more lenient in his understanding of the Other: “The Other can be both of these [enemy or partner], and that is the basis of his changeable, elusive nature” (21).

Both Anidjar and Kapuściński draw on the work of Levinas, and both seem to concur on “Levinas’s assertion that war is the suspended space of indifference, where alterity has no place” (Anidjar 5). Indifference is a state of in-difference and the “suspension of all obligations” that form the basis of Levinas’s concern for the Other (Anidjar 5). The enemy may be an Other, culturally, ethnically or otherwise, but the unique dynamics present on the battlefield – the loss of individuality, direct confrontation, and the suspension of law – are significant enough to confer extra signification upon the Other. The distinction is important: the enemy may be Other, but the Other is not necessarily an enemy. As Rueda suggests, “el ‘enemigo’ como marcador discursivo no se solapa

⁴³ I examine the dynamics of movement and travel more in depth in Chapter Four.

exactamente con el Otro ni tampoco con el enemigo empírico o marcial. La enemistad tiene una especificidad discursiva – militar, política y hasta teológica – en el contexto de la literatura de guerra” (“El enemigo ‘invisible’ de la Guerra de África” 147).⁴⁴ It is through this “discursive specificity” that Silva is able to consciously de-emphasize alterity to find a universal ground of common humanity.

In her examination of war literature from the first War of Africa (1859-1860), Rueda proposes that, in the war setting, the enemy/Other is rendered discursively invisible for the purpose of mitigating “los horrores de la guerra, justificada en términos de otredad, y hasta cierto punto libera al cronista, y por extensión a los dirigentes del pueblo español, de la responsabilidad ética que contraen con el marroquí a través de la acción armada” (“El enemigo ‘invisible’” 147).⁴⁵ Ultimately, “la retórica bélica perpetuó dos nacionalidades rivales que nunca llegaron a asimilarse” (Rueda, “El enemigo ‘invisible’” 164).⁴⁶ The battlefield written is whitewashed palatable; difference justifies action – war is instigated to (ostensibly) civilize the Other – but the intensity of the war front is sanitized for public consumption – by dehumanizing the Other to an indistinct enemy, questions of ethical treatment of the Other are rendered null. In tracing the evolution of the treatment of the Other, Rueda also examines the progress made between the first War of Africa and the Rif War. In the literature that arose from the Rif War of 1920-1921, Rueda examines the social humanism of these works, including a

⁴⁴ [the “enemy” as a discursive marker does not overlap exactly with the Other and neither with the empirical or martial enemy. Enmity has discursive specificity – military, political and even theological – in the context of war literature.]

⁴⁵ [the horrors of the war, justified in terms of otherness, and to a certain point liberate the chronicler, and by extension the leaders of the Spanish nation, of the ethical responsibility that they contract with the Moroccan through armed action.] Specifically examined in this article are Rafael del Castillo’s *Historia de la Guerra de África* (1859), Pedro Antonio Alarcón’s *Diario de un testigo de la Guerra de África* (1859), and Nicasio Landa’s *La campaña de Marruecos. Memorias de un médico militar* (1860).

⁴⁶ [the war rhetoric perpetuated two rival nationalities that were never able to assimilate]

consideration of Silva's work as a continuation of this project. Therefore, these articles by Rueda serve to contextualize the present study of Silva's *El nombre de los nuestros*. The literary antecedents to Silva's work highlight his efforts to discursively include not only the enemy but also the Other, and to present the horrors of the battlefield unmitigated. For Silva, war does dehumanize, but this dehumanization is not limited to the Other; each of the opposing sides is susceptible.

The plot of *El nombre de los nuestros* develops within the intense fighting of June and July, 1921 in northern Morocco, specifically the military positions of Sidi Dris, Talilit and Afrau. The narration is third person and the principal characters are the Spanish soldiers Andreu, Amador, Sergeant Molina, and the Moroccan conscript Haddú. The novel returns to the fateful unfolding of events at Annual, similar in theme to Sender's 1930 *Iman*.⁴⁷ The Riffian Harka advances upon the Spanish positions, forcing retreat to the shoreline, where a handful of soldiers are rescued but a majority are killed or captured. The chapters alternate between the positions – Sidi Dris, Afrau, and Talilit – and also include a couple of chapters on board the “cañonero *Laya*”⁴⁸ asea off the coast, from which the generals and officers plan and give orders. The novel reaches its climax as the Spanish troops are forced to retreat, with the Harka brutally massacring many and taking some captive as prisoners of war. The last few chapters detail the experience of the prisoners-of-war, covering almost a year and a half between their capture and liberation –

⁴⁷ These similarities are examined at length in Rueda's “Sender y otros novelistas de la guerra marroquí: humanismo social y vanguardia política.”

⁴⁸ [battleship *Laya*] The battleship *Laya* played a significant role as one of the seven battleships present at the “Desembarco de Alhucemas” [Disembarking of Alhucemas] on the 8th of September, 1925. This decisive battle put an end to the Rif War. Miguel Primo de Rivera commanded the troops, and Francisco Franco was promoted from colonel to brigadier general for his participation (“Desembarco de Alhucemas”).

a time marked by the cruelty of their captors and the disinterested attempts by Spain to secure their release.

The friendship between Amador, Molina, Andreu, and Haddú links the geographic separation between the chapters. They are ideologically distinct: Andreu an anarchist from Barcelona, Amador a madrileño insurance salesman, sergeant Molina a veteran soldier, and Haddú a Moroccan working as a member of the indigenous police force, a significant supporting contingent for the Spanish soldiers. Yet their ideological or background differences are minimized as they face the common enemy – the Riffian Harka. Likewise, while the members of the indigenous police force are numerous, only Haddú and Hassan are named specifically. Their singular recognition is not necessarily an oversight, or a discursive erasure of the cultural Other, since within *El nombre de los nuestros* individual identity is only afforded to a select few characters. This supports an analysis of the novel as operating in the indifferent space of war – the war front erases individuality as two opposing sides face off, and difference is subsumed within the organization engaged in conflict. That is not to say that cultural/ethnic difference is not a dynamic, yet the limited focus on Haddú and Hassan is paralleled by a similar limited focus on sergeant Molina, Amador, and Andreu. Other characters come and go but function mostly as secondary, undeveloped actors within the plot.

Even though ethnic alterity is not emphasized, as fighting intensifies it is acknowledged as a concern. The contingent cooperation between the Spanish soldiers and the indigenous police force worries the Spanish soldiers when they are forced to rely on their Moroccan counterparts. At Afrau, sergeant Molina asks Hassan “¿Qué vais a hacer

vosotros, Hassan?” (130),⁴⁹ to which Hassan responds “Yo estar amigo, sargento” (130).⁵⁰ Molina considers the grammatical implications of his response:

Molina se fijó entonces en aquella curiosa equivocación verbal que padecían sistemáticamente los moros: *no eran*, sino que *estaban* amigos. En algunos era sólo eso, un error, pero en otros tenía un probable segundo sentido. Uno es lo que es y eso no tiene vuelta de hoja, pero estar se puede estar hoy aquí y mañana allí. (130)⁵¹

and seeks to clarify, asking again “en serio”⁵² and offering to let the police leave their weapons and go home. Hassan simply replies, “Estar amigo, sargento – repitió el otro” (131).⁵³ Whether or not it was a conscious decision on the part of Silva to close this conversation by referring to Hassan as *el otro* [the Other], its use fills the relationship with nuances similar to Hassan’s choice of *estar* over *ser*. Possible implications include the recognition of deep-seated mistrust of the cultural Other, even when fighting on the same side, or also the more subtle distinction of Hassan as Other as distinguishing him from the enemy. Hassan is an individual who has voice and agency; Molina offers him a choice and he makes the perilous decision to stay and fight. His personal agency distinguishes him from the advancing Harka soldiers, Hassan’s cultural same. Hassan is merely Other, while the indistinct Harka are the Enemy. A third possibility is the

⁴⁹ [What are you all going to do, Hassan?]

⁵⁰ [I am friendly, sergeant.] This passage is a play on the two Spanish verbs for “to be,” *ser* and *estar*. A general simplification of their uses is that *ser* represents an intrinsic condition or defining, while *estar* is used for situational states. The use of “estar amigo” is agrammatical in that it is both a nonconventional usage of *estar* and Hassan uses its infinitive, unconjugated form.

⁵¹ [Molina considered that curious verbal mistake that the Moors systematically suffered: it’s not that they were *friends*, but that they were *friendly*. In some of them it was only this, an error, but in others it hid a probable secondary meaning. One is to be *friends* and there’s nothing more to it, but *friendly* meant that they could be here today and tomorrow over there.]

⁵² [seriously]

⁵³ [“I am friendly, sergeant” repeated the other]

recognition of an Other, not as culturally distinct, but as a fellow human with individual reasons for action – an Other “who is not... my enemy, and not my ‘complement’” (Levinas, *Humanism of the Other* 29). This interpretation, which focuses on the humanizing and personalizing of the Other, is supported as Hassan considers Molina’s question:

El cabo le observó con los ojos muy abiertos. No había tenido mucho trato con Molina pero el sargento siempre había sido respetuoso con él. No era como otros militares europeos, que sólo veían en los soldados indígenas a unos perros útiles para echarlos contra otros perros. (130)⁵⁴

Molina reflects on Hassan’s possible motives; to Hassan’s “Yo estar amigo,” Molina admits “no *eran* sino que *estaban* amigos... Tampoco Molina los condenaba por eso, porque fueran amigos del europeo según dictaba la oportunidad” (130-131).⁵⁵ Even though Hassan accords a distinct, respectful individuality to Molina and Molina groups Hassan with the other opportunistic indigenous police, both men recognize a personal agency in the Other, that each has made a choice to be where they are. As Levinas articulates, they are not enemies, and not necessarily complements, but rather they mutually recognize personal agency.

This Moroccan Other, fighting alongside the Spanish forces, is contrasted with the Enemy, the Harka. Ethnically the Same as the indigenous police, the Harka are ideologically Other. The Harka are not described with any individuality; they are referred to consistently in the collective. This renders their individuality – their personal humanity

⁵⁴ [The corporal observed him with his eyes wide open. He had not interacted much with Molina but the sergeant had always been respectful with him. He wasn’t like other European military types, that only saw in the indigenous soldiers some useful dogs to throw against other dogs.]

⁵⁵ [they weren’t *friends* but rather they were *friendly*... but neither did Molina condemn them for this, because they were friends of the European as the situation called for]

– effectively invisible; the Harka is a faceless, threatening force. As mentioned above, Rueda notes in “El enemigo ‘invisible’” that rendering the enemy invisible makes a history of the enemy impossible. Drawing on Derrida’s work in *Specters of Marx*, Rueda suggests that “[e]n el mayor de los casos, se producirá una historia espectral que siempre amenaza con volver a presentarse.”⁵⁶ In *El nombre de los nuestros* this also rings true as the faceless mass of strategic and advancing Harka soldiers creates a menacing and threatening force that is more terrifying because of invisibility – it is not just *unknown*; the enemy is, in this instance, *unable to be known*. It is sinister and stealthy.⁵⁷ In the very first chapter this unknown and threatening quality is planted as the Spanish soldier Pulido is terrified of his own potential death: “Pulido sólo podía creer en la muerte que le rondaba. –Que te lo digo yo. Que yo sé que no vuelvo a mi pueblo” (12).⁵⁸ Andreu attempts to comfort him by saying “Ahí fuera apenas hay un puñado de moros muertos de hambre. No han hecho más que correr desde el principio de la ofensiva” (12),⁵⁹ but Pulido is right and “La segunda noche de junio... a Pulido le degollaron de un solo tajo de gümía en su puesto de centinela” (13-14).⁶⁰ They are caught off guard, unsuspecting in a scene which foreshadows the unfolding of events that form the continued plot of the novel. The stealth and surprise keep the Spanish forces on the run and on the defensive, never able to effectively hold back an attack, to their ultimate defeat and capture. In

⁵⁶ [in the best possible scenario, it will produce a spectral history that always threatens with returning to show its face]

⁵⁷ The difference in the portrayal of the “invisible enemy” in works from the two wars (one as faceless to mitigate wars horrors and the other as faceless and threatening), can perhaps best be understood in the context of the outcomes from the two wars. In the first African War, the triumphalist spirit endures in victory, and conversely, in the Rif War the aura of the traumatic defeat at Annual casts a threatening pall over the tone. In this sense, the threatening Enemy is not only psychically threatening but also strategically threatening in the historical context of *El nombre de los nuestros*.

⁵⁸ [Pulido could only believe in the death that surrounded him. ‘I’m telling you. I know that I am never going to return to my village.]

⁵⁹ [Out there there is maybe only a handful of starving Moors. They haven’t done anything more than run since the beginning of the offence.]

⁶⁰ [The second night of June... they slit Pulido’s throat with a single dagger cut in his post as sentinel.]

chapter sixteen, after the Spanish defeat and as Amador is taken captive, an indigenous woman rips off his military stripes and wears them on her head as a hat. Amador thinks back to

unas semanas atrás, cuando hablaban de la harka como de algo desconocido y quizá inexistente. Ahora el monstruo invisible les había impuesto su presencia, y entre todos los signos inauditos que tenía para elegir, el cabo sintió que la harka era esa mujer que le había despojado de los galones y le depreciaba con la insolencia de sus fogosos ojos negros. (234)⁶¹

The formerly invisible enemy is now face to face with Amador, personified in one individual woman. He is able to see her eyes. The invisible enemy as a threatening monster is reinforced by his reflection, and the personal encounter here only highlights the *indifference* of which Levinas speaks (Anidjar 5). This woman is not an Other, she is an enemy. For Amador and the readers, her angry reaction to the captured Spanish soldier personifies and renders visible the formerly indistinct enemy. She is “symetrically opposed – rather than asymmetrically approaching” (Andijar 3) in mission, and by creating a powerful enemy, Silva gives agency to the Other. That is, what would be an Other in different contexts, is converted into a threatening force that is capable of overwhelming the Western, modern military machine within the theater of war.

This power and agency turns Orientalist tropes on their head as “Orientalism depends for its strategy on the flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in

⁶¹ [some weeks back, when they talked about the Harka as something unknown and maybe nonexistent. Now the invisible monster had imposed its presence, and between all of the unprecedented signs from which he had to choose, the corporal felt that the Harka was this woman that had stripped him of his military stripes and who ridiculed him with the insolence of her ardent black eyes.]

a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (Said 7). By employing the backdrop of war – and specifically an *unsuccessful* war for the Spanish – Silva simultaneously converts the Other to a new archetype which upsets the “*positional* superiority” that undergirds Orientalist discourse. He initially employs the discursive trick of rendering the Enemy invisible that Rueda notes in Rafael del Castillo, Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, and Nicasio Landa, but instead of mitigating the horrors of war and denying the Other voice, Silva uses this phantomization of the Other to create a menacing, viable threat. Furthermore, upon coming face to face with an individual enemy, Amador recognizes the distinctly human emotion of insolence and disdain, affirming the positional superiority of the Harka in their victory. Andreu even sacrilegiously admits to Haddú that God, “Si ha de estar en alguna parte... está con los de ahí enfrente” (197).⁶² This admission denies Spain’s both physical and moral superiority in addition to its (lack of) military superiority.⁶³

Silva further subverts Spanish discursive authority by emphasizing the bravery of the indigenous police force fighting alongside the more cowardly Spanish forces. In the final battle at Afrau

Los policías permanecían leales, aunque cada vez debía resultarles más claro que militaban en el bando perdedor. Hassan, el cabo, seguía al pie del parapeto, a pesar de haber recibido un balazo en el hombro. Era el izquierdo, decía, quitándole importancia y agregaba:

– Mientras tener hombro derecho, tener donde apoyar *fusila*.

⁶² [If He has to be in some place... He is with those over there facing us.]

⁶³ In my interview with Silva, he emphasized that he would have difficulty writing a book about the First (triumphant) African War. He suggested that it was more valuable to consider the implications of defeat than to re-visit scenes of national conquest.

Los europeos, cuando caían heridos, quedaban inservibles... Si un moro no se levantaba era que ya estaba muerto. (209-210)⁶⁴

This description accords the indigenous forces both physical and moral stamina that is not found in the Spanish soldiers. This bravery is not limited to those at Afrau. At Sidi Dris, “Los moros de la policía indígena, que sabían que iban a morir pero a diferencia de los europeos lo aceptaban, esperaban en silencio a que llegara la hora” (225).⁶⁵ In fact, the last resistance of the Spanish forces was from the indigenous police and “Así se dio la paradoja de que fueran ellos, moros y mercenarios, quienes obedecieran al pie de la letra la orden de defender la bandera hasta el fin, que sólo unos pocos europeos observaban” (227-228).⁶⁶ Silva denies the Spanish forces even an honorable defeat; their cowardice is highlighted by the loyalty of the indigenous police. The text further underscores the valor of their loyalty by emphasizing they are “moros y mercenarios;” underscoring their cultural otherness, monetary motivation, and simultaneous allegiance to the colonizing flag. The implication is that the indigenous police force is not only more loyal than the Spanish soldiers, they are also more honorable for keeping their word when they have less of a moral stake in the outcome.

There are brave Spanish soldiers. Sergeant Molina, Lieutenant Veiga, and Amador are each portrayed as honorable and brave men. Silva’s emphasis on the bravery of the indigenous police force does not serve to deny individual bravery from participants

⁶⁴ [The police remained loyal, even though each time it should have been more clear to them that they were on the losing side. Hassan, the corporal, remained at the foot of the parapet, despite having been shot in the shoulder. It was the left one, he said, denying its importance and he added: “As long as I have a right shoulder, I have a place to support my rifle.”

The Europeans, when they were wounded, became useless... If a Moor didn’t get up it was because he was already dead.]

⁶⁵ [The Moors of the indigenous police, knew they were going to die but unlike the Europeans they accepted it, waited in silence for the hour to arrive.]

⁶⁶ [Therein was the paradox that it was them, Moors and mercenaries, who obeyed to the letter the order to defend the flag until the end, an order that only a few Europeans observed.]

in the battles, but rather to undermine national narratives of cultural or moral superiority of one armed force or nation against the other. It overturns the cultural hierarchy upon which Orientalist discourse depends. By recognizing individual bravery among examples both Spanish and Moroccan, Silva also avoids the trap of over-idealizing the Other. The bravery that he highlights among the indigenous police force is not limited to them and neither is it accorded to them because of their ethnicity; it is a quality that is available to any character, regardless of race, thereby emphasizing it as a personal quality rather than as a cultural one.

As Silva undermines the colonizing mantra of moral superiority, he also realigns the demarcations of Same and Other. Same and Other are reconstructed as class distinctions, not racial ones. Silva reduces war to an economic transaction, since the wealthy and powerful can literally purchase others to take their stead. With this emphasis, the hierarchy of power is reoriented from a cultural order to a socio-economic one. That is, as examined above, the cultural Other is a powerful and threatening force, able to menace the Spanish forces; the marginalized Other is a social class that transcends cultural boundaries.

Silva establishes this alignment in two specific ways: first, by examining the class distinctions at work in the Spanish army, and second, by comparing the marginalized Spanish soldiers with their Moroccan counterparts. The practice of purchasing a *sustituto*⁶⁷ permeates the Spanish military forces.⁶⁸ Molina's uncle purchased a substitute for him, but his personal sense of honor would not allow him to send someone else in his

⁶⁷ [substitute]

⁶⁸ The "cuota militar" was a way in which wealthy individuals or families could purchase a release from obligatory military service. Established by the "ley de Reclutamiento" in 1912. In 1932 it was estimated that the Spanish government earned upwards of 15 million pesetas from this official practice. See Andrés-Gallego, et al. for more information, specifically the chapter on "Las reformas militares," 141-174.

stead: “Era ésta una corruptela que las leyes permitían. Pero Molina rechazó indignado el favor. Nadie iba a morir en su lugar por unas perras” (30).⁶⁹ Those with economic means can afford to avoid the battlefield; Amador, the outspoken socialist, points out the socio-economic injustice in saying “Vine socialista y si vuelvo iré más socialista, porque no he visto a ningún rico por aquí” (70).⁷⁰ Molina even finds this system of substitution recreated within his unit. When organizing a group of soldiers for an excursion, he discovers that certain soldiers are paying other soldiers to volunteer in their place. Enraged he tells them

—Hay una cosa que más vale que comprendan... En África cada bala tiene un nombre, y ninguna bala va a equivocarse... Pero ustedes, los que pagan, deben ser ricos, y éstos, los que les cogen la peseta, son pobres...

—Lo que quiero decir es que el nombre de la bala ni se compra ni se vende, porque será el que tenga que ser y nadie se va a llevar la desgracia de otro. Se puede comprar un abrigo o se pueden comprar unos zapatos. Pero querer comprar el dolor de una familia es una indignidad. (96-97)⁷¹

Molina refuses to perpetuate the economic injustice that supports the entire war effort.

The “otro” here is found within the Spanish forces, an economically marginalized yet

⁶⁹ [This was a corruption that the laws permitted. But Molina indignantly refused the favor. No one was going to die in his place for some change.]

⁷⁰ [I came a socialist and if I return I will go even more socialist, because I have not seen a single rich person around here.]

⁷¹ [There is something that you better understand... In Africa, each bullet has a name, and no bullet will make a mistake... But you, those that pay, you must be rich, and those, those who take your peseta, are poor... What I want to say is that the name of the bullet cannot be bought or sold, because it will find whom it has to find and no one will carry the misfortune of another. You can buy a jacket or you can buy some shoes. But to want to buy the pain of a family is an indignity.]

culturally Same entity. Similarly, indigenous police forces fighting with Molina's men are described as "mercenarios" (227), implying that the colonizing mission is financed by the capital of the wealthy at the expense of the alienated laborer.

Molina's fatalism can best be analyzed as a criticism of the commodification of the individual that occurs within the Spanish war effort and specifically the system of purchasing substitutes. Within this system, the soldiers are effectively reduced to "wage-labourers... compelled to sell [themselves]" (Marx 932) and by selling themselves, they become commodities. The human market exists to offer the financially able the opportunity to opt-out – a system in which Molina refuses to participate from the start – converts the soldiers into commodities and in the process alienates them from themselves.⁷² Within the substitution process, their lives become commodities that hold exchange-value. Molina uncovers the exploitative nature of this system by emphasizing the equal personal value of the individual. In Molina's view, no one human life is worth more or less than another; he reverses the systemic process by which "an owner of a commodity" is converted into "a commodity" (Marx 271). Molina's statement is effectively a rearticulation of Marx's description of the use-value of commodities: "Coats cannot be exchanged for coats, one use-value cannot be exchanged for another of the same kind" (132). Molina addresses the fetishism of the commodity that is occurring on the personal, human level in the war scenario. Molina's admonishment of his troops uncovers the dehumanizing, de-personalizing system that characterizes this war effort. The soldiers are reminded that they are humans, not commodities to be bought and sold.

This emphasis on the individual as opposed to the assumed market value of the human-as-commodity is not limited to the Spanish. Silva does not stop at individualizing

⁷² As described by Marx, 183.

the Spanish soldier. The power of his text, and the most significant rejection of Orientalist discourse, lies in the humanization of the enemy also. In the final chapter, after the defeat at Annual and after Amador's year and a half in the prisoner-of-war camp, Molina and Amador are reunited in Melilla. Amador recounts Molina's previous speech on the name of each bullet, Molina expounds:

—¿Sabes qué nombre se lleva la bala siempre?

—No —repuso el cabo, sin comprender muy bien la pregunta.

—El nombre de los nuestros —dijo el sargento, solemne—. Los nuestros son ellos, los infelices que siempre salen mal parados: Haddú, o los otros que cayeron en Sidi Dris, o los pobres a los que yo elegí para defender Afrau en la retirada y que se quedaron allí. Hasta los moros a los que matamos, si lo miras, son los nuestros. Nosotros somos como ellos: corremos, nos arrastramos, pasamos miedo y nunca nos ayuda nadie. Por eso tenemos que recordarlos siempre, a nuestros muertos; nosotros, Amador, porque los demás van a olvidarlo. Van a olvidar que murieron, y que chillaron, y que se desangraron encima de esta tierra. Pero tú que los has visto caer no los olvides nunca, Amador. Aunque no vuelvas a África.

(275)⁷³

⁷³ ["Do you know what name is always on the bullet?"]

"No" responded the corporal, without understanding the question very well.

"The name of *ours*," said the sergeant, solemnly "*Ours* are them, those poor devils that always have it rough: Haddú, or the others that fell in Sidi Dris, or the poor ones that I chose to defend Afrau in the retreat and who remained there. Even the Moors that we kill, if you look at it, they are *ours*. We are like them: we run, we crawl, we feel fear and no one ever helps us. For this we have to remember them forever, for our dead; we, Amador, because everyone else is going to forget it. They will forget that they died, and that they screamed, and that they lost their blood over this land. But you who have seen them fall, don't ever forget them, Amador. Even if you never return to Africa."]

The singularity of the bullet – “*la bala*” – emphasizes the individuality of the name it metonymically carries. And yet, Molina expands this individuality to a plural and possessive communality. Not only is there a *nosotros* but it is a personal *nuestro* – and those that comprise this intimate group are the poor and disenfranchised, and not limited to the ethnic Same, but extended to the enemy also. Through Molina’s voice, Silva redraws lines of Same and Other along lines of socio-economic power. The *enemy* is no longer the Harka forces that defeated the Spanish at Afrau and Sidi Dris, but rather the “cuatro hijos de puta que ahora están tan anchos en Madrid” (176)⁷⁴ – those who purchase the labor of the poor and exploit them on the colonizing battlefield. Silva emphasizes that the true battle is class warfare.

Amador is deeply affected by Molina’s words and can only respond “Al final se me hizo socialista, mi sargento”⁷⁵ to which Molina responds “Qué coño socialista” (276).⁷⁶ Molina’s sardonic response seeks to remove political titles from the argument; for him, it is an economic injustice of which political parties are only symptoms of greater ailment. “Los nuestros” are directed and sent to war by the powerful, far away from the actual fighting (the “cuatro hijos de puta” in Madrid). The generals and commanders make their choices distanced from the physical land they seek to dominate, aboard the battleship *Laya* offshore in the Mediterranean, or from Madrid. Silva emphasizes the uni-directional flow of power, from distanced officers and politicians to disenfranchised soldiers, in the moments leading up to the retreat. The soldiers are unable to communicate with the *Laya*, and vice versa, by radio or signs because both are using different codes that neither can understand (163-164, 181). Silva subtly inserts a

⁷⁴ [four sons of bitches that are now so comfortable in Madrid.]

⁷⁵ [In the end you became a socialist on me, my sergeant.]

⁷⁶ [The hell I’m a socialist.]

communicative otherness into the Same with this twist, further fracturing the totem of the discursive Same.

For Silva, Same and Other are broader, relational terms, better constructed in socio-political or economic structures than in genetic ones. Six years after his conversation with Amador in Melilla, the war is concluded with a Spanish victory (1929). The Spanish king visits the infamous bay where the soldiers retreated. His visit marks Abd el Krim's (el Jatabi) defeat. Molina observes the ceremony of passing troops before the king and muses, in a narration that appears to be part his own and part authorial voice:

Aquel hombre, y los hombres como él, seguirán ordenando que otros hombres como Molina les pelearan una causa, cualquiera, y lamentarían perderla y festejarían ganarla, pero fuera cual fuese el resultado, nunca iban a comprender. (284)⁷⁷

As he critiques the colonial and war machine, he also contemplates his surroundings and his memories: “Volvió, en fin, a experimentar la fascinación de aquellos atardeceres africanos, anaranjados y flamígeros, sobre el mar o las montañas, cuando los combatientes casi olvidaban que estaban allí para matarse unos a otros y percibían una extraña inmensidad” (284-285).⁷⁸ He appreciates his physical surroundings, validating the beauty of Africa to hold such power that it would cause him and his comrades to forget the mission they were there to fulfill. He offers to the African evenings a pacifying power that surges as a nostalgic memory. Ultimately, he moves from scenery to former

⁷⁷ [That man, and those like him, would continue commanding other men like Molina to fight for a cause, whichever, and they would lament defeat and celebrate victory, but regardless of the result, they would never understand.]

⁷⁸ [He returned, at last, to experience the fascination of those African sunsets, orange and flamboyant, over the ocean or mountains when the combatants almost forgot that they were there to kill each other and they felt a strange immensity.]

enemy. In the penultimate paragraph, “Molina pensó una vez más en la harka” (285).⁷⁹ He remembers their indistinct, early presences, and how they proved their existence in defeating a colonial force, and yet how now they seemed once again defeated, and concludes:

...por un instante, Molina la vio [la harka]. Sintió su aliento, sofocado tras la barrera de las montañas; su amenaza, invisible como el ímpetu que movía a todos los seres a vivir y perecer. Y entonces supo que para él, como para todos los que la habían conocido, la harka no dejaría de existir nunca. (285)⁸⁰

As the closing lines for the novel, they are powerfully evocative. The enemy is indeed a spectral presence that haunts, as Rueda suggests. Molina’s reflections consider the encounter with the enemy and its continuing power to threaten. However, considered alongside Silva’s re-structuring of lines of Same and Other and his effective re-definition of the enemy into a political and socio-economic enemy, this final contemplated Harka also represents the ongoing threat that the social and economically marginalized will continue to confront. The specter that haunts is not only that of the enemy Harka, but of the privileged class that sends the soldier to war. As Molina’s *nuestros* encompasses “[h]asta los moros a los que matamos” (275),⁸¹ the menacing Others are embodied in the king and his military commanders celebrating colonial victory on the beach below.

Silva’s epilogue effectively concludes a narrative that seeks to understand war and the enemy in a distinct light. The preconceived and traditional established enemy is

⁷⁹ [Molina thought one more time about the Harka.]

⁸⁰ [...for an instant, Molina saw it [the Harka]. He felt its breath, suffocating through the barrier of the mountains; its threat, invisible like the impetus that moved all beings to live and to die. And then he knew that for him, just like for all of those he had met, the Harka would never cease to exist.]

⁸¹ [even the Moors that we killed.]

reimagined into a more sinister and yet familiar force. The supposed positional superiority of the West is eroded, and Silva appears to be echoing Said's statement that "what we must respect and try to grasp is the sheer knitted together strength of Orientalist discourse, its very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions, and its redoubtable durability" (*Orientalism* 6). Silva has exposed these malignant forces, and it is perhaps with a certain amount of pessimism that the final line "la harka no dejaría de existir nunca" (285)⁸² considered alongside Said's insight, refers to an enemy that takes on many forms: potentially the literal Harka or the socio-political powerful, or even a reference to the perdurability of Orientalist discourse itself. As Said suggests that Orientalist discourse is a tool of the politically powerful to achieve its own ends, Silva deconstructs that ideological paradigm to uncover the underlying dynamics at work. Silva's narrative offers an alternate conceptualization of the true enemy and the Other. Conceptualizations of Same and Other cannot be taken at face value as Silva reconstitutes understandings of Us versus Them.

This redefinition serves to powerfully destabilize official Orientalist discourse that would write Africa and the African as a distinct Other and a potential enemy. A unified conceptualization of a cultural Same is also fractured in this recapitulation; *los nuestros – ours* – becomes an identification that transcends cultural identity, and one that is not predicated on cultural uniformity. The new lines of belonging affirm a common humanity that deemphasizes phenotypical difference. Denominators such as European, Spanish, or African neither assume nor preclude individual belonging. Markers of difference instead emphasize social and economic inequality as the true forces that divide. Silva's novel effectively uncovers the insidious way in which official Orientalist

⁸² [the Harka would never cease to exist.]

discourse is employed by the powerful at the expense of the marginalized, and his novel is a forceful reconsideration of the ideological paradigm that permeates historical Western interactions with its cultural Other.

II. RECONSIDERING THE FATHERLAND: THE EXPATRIATE AND THE OTHER IN CONCHA LÓPEZ SARASÚA'S *LA LLAMADA DEL ALMUÉDANO*

El mundo no se va a desmoronar por
tu marcha, puedes estar segura, y de
que nadie se muere por nadie
también... ¡Qué desazón!
– López Sarasúa (*La llamada del
almuédano* 231)⁸³

Originally from Asturias, Concha López Sarasúa spent twenty years living in Morocco. She currently resides and writes in Alicante. Her writing has been positively received, and her work is the topic of a book and several articles by the Moroccan Hispanist Mohamed Abrighach. A majority of her works focus on Morocco and the Arabic world and includes both fiction and travel works: *A vuelo de pájaro sobre Marruecos* [*As the Bird Flies Over Morocco*] (1995), *La daga turca y otros relatos mediterráneos* [*The Turkish Dagger and Other Mediterranean Stories*] (1996), *¿Qué buscabais en Marrakech?* [*What Were You All Looking for in Marrakech?*] (2001), and a children's trilogy: *Meriem y la ruta fantástica* [*Meriem and the Fantastic Route*] (1991), *En el país de Meriem* [*In Meriem's Country*] (1998), and *Los mil y un cuentos de Meriem* [*The Thousand and One Tales of Meriem*] (2006). She has also written the novels *Cita en París* [*Date in Paris*] (2005) and *Celanova 42: La España rural de la posguerra* [*Celanova 42: Postwar Rural Spain*] (1993) which was classified in the Premio de Novela Café Gijón in 1993. *¿Qué buscabais en Marrakech?* was a finalist for the Premio Café Gijón in 1999. In addition, her 1990 novel *La llamada del almuédano* was a finalist in the XXI Premio de Novela Ateneo de Sevilla. Her most recent novel is *¿Por qué no quiero emigrar?* [*Why Don't I Want to Emigrate?*] (2009).

⁸³ [The world is not going to fall to pieces because you leave, you can be sure of that, and no one is going to die for anyone either... What uneasiness!]

Her focus on North Africa and her representation of it has been well received by Moroccan Hispanists such as Abrighach and others.⁸⁴ She “confess[es] that... I felt my true vocation in the north of Africa, particularly in Morocco. That was undoubtedly the country that awakened my passion for the written word” (“Concha López Sarasúa,” *New Spanish Books*). Abrighach notes that her work

resucit[a] la tradición hispánica de moros y cristianos, dando lugar a una nueva aljamía literaria que ostenta una islamofilia de nuevo cuño.

Encierra, sobre todo, una verdadera poética de las dos orillas, esto es, una especie de poética de la diversidad a través de la cual se exaltan los rasgos cruzados y comunes [de] las dos riberas del *Mare Nostrum*. (“Concha López Sarasúa: novelista de las dos orillas”)⁸⁵

Abrighach further writes that López Sarasúa’s work actively strives to denounce “la frontera imaginaria que existe entre las dos orillas, consagrada por la amnesia hispánica” (“Novelista de las dos orillas”).⁸⁶ This analysis clearly highlights the value of López Sarasúa’s work for this study. To this end, *La llamada del almuédano* represents a distinct vision of the African Other – in this case a specifically Moroccan Other – that serves to juxtapose and complement the analyses of Silva’s *El nombre de los nuestros* and Mayrata’s *El imperio desierto*. As Silva’s novel engages with the conflict of war and

84 In my interviews with Moroccan Hispanists Abdellatif Limami and Hassan Boutakka, they both spoke very highly of López Sarasúa’s work and writings on Morocco.

85 [resuscitates the Hispanic tradition of Moors and Christians, giving place to a new literary *aljamía* that flaunts a novel islamophilia. It contains, above all, a true poetics of the two shores, that is, it is a kind of poetry of diversity through which the crossed and common characteristics of the *Mare Nostrum* are exalted.] The Real Academia Española defines “aljamía” as a general term among the former Muslim inhabitants of the Spanish Peninsula for the languages of the Christian populations or also describing a text in a Romance language that is transcribed with Arabic script. The term also contains the connotation of a hybridized Castilian with Arabic characteristics.

86 [the imaginary border that exists between the two shores, consecrated by Hispanic amnesia.]

Mayrata's with the political and diplomatic interaction between the West and Africa, López Sarasúa's work offers a more pacific theme, developing within a domestic setting.

La llamada del almuédano centers on the quotidian lives of the expatriate and cosmopolitan community living in Morocco in the 1940s and early 50s. The text offers very few references to specific dates or events that could contextualize the plot within a specific year or years. Francisco Fernández arrived in 1930 (93) and Fermín Gironés arrives in Morocco on January 20, 1946, at the end of World War II (163), but these references are background and the amount of time that has passed since their arrival is unclear. The central character, an aging doña Natalia, has spent the majority of her adult life in Morocco and is now considering returning to Spain due to health concerns. The provision of specific dates is ultimately unnecessary as the plot is not anchored to synchronic moments, but rather to the span of time encompassing the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco,⁸⁷ up to its end in 1956.⁸⁸ This time frame reflects the waxing and waning of the international population in Morocco, in both Spanish and French controlled Protectorates. Gozávez Pérez notes that

a 31-XII-1955 la población española en el Protectorado [sic] español de Marruecos era «estimada» en 90.939 habitantes, que representaban el 9,4% respecto a los nativos – 963.620 – ; a los indicados habría que añadir

⁸⁷ See Gozávez Pérez for an outline of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco and especially immigration numbers of Spaniards who relocated to the Protectorate, established in 1912 and ending when both Spain and France recognized Morocco's independence on 7 April 1956.

⁸⁸ The readers can assume that many expatriates are leaving Morocco due to its independence. In the initial pages doña Natalia sees a newly renamed street sign and thinks to herself “¡Qué manía con cambiarlo todo! Van a conseguir que nos perdamos con tanto nombre nuevo” [What a passion for changing everything! They are going to succeed in getting us lost with so many name changes!] (16).

otros 25.698 españoles en el Marruecos bajo administración francesa
(censo de 15-IV-1951) y más de 21.500 en Tánger. (46)⁸⁹

Gozálvez Pérez further notes that between 1935 and 1955 the Spanish population in the Protectorate doubled (70). This general time frame of two decades coincides with the cosmopolitan reality in which the expatriates move and go about their daily lives, and also aligns with the few specific dates that are mentioned in the text. In short, *La llamada del almuédano* traces the arc of Western presence in Morocco in the mid-twentieth century, from the frenetic Western immigration after both the Spanish Civil War and the second World War to the slow return migration around the time of Moroccan independence.

More specifically, the novel centers on the situation of doña Natalia, a 70-year-old Spanish woman whose children are encouraging her to return to Spain so that she can receive better medical attention for her rheumatism and be closer to family. Doña Natalia spent the majority of her life in Morocco (“¿Cuántos [años] hacía ya? Había perdido la cuenta...” 157⁹⁰), and her husband is buried in Kenitra (formerly “Port-Lyautey” 17) where she also has a burial site reserved. She is torn between her attachment to Morocco, the changing political situation (which only tangentially bothers her – as in the renaming of streets and the departure of friends), and her family’s concerns for her. While doña Natalia is the recurring and central protagonist of the novel, the narrative is not explicitly focused on her, but rather is composed of a series of vignettes in individual chapters that include a spectrum of characters.

⁸⁹ [By July 31st, 1955 the Spanish population in the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco was estimated to be 90,939 habitants, who represented 9.4% with respect to the natives – 963,620 –; to those indicated should be added another 25,698 Spaniards in the parts of Morocco under French administration (census from April 15th, 1951) and more than 21,500 in Tangier.]

⁹⁰ [How many [years] had it been now? She had lost count...]

The novel itself is composed of thirteen chapters, each one a vignette that focuses on a specific individual or anecdote. Most chapters are titled after people — “Doña Natalia” (11), “Rosette” (31), Mme. Mechbal (143), etc. — while some are titled after places — “Kenitra” (67), “Un lugar en África” (105).⁹¹ Two chapters do not follow in this pattern; the fifth chapter is titled “Exilio” (87)⁹² and the final chapter is titled “La última aleya” (243).⁹³ From this structuring of the novel, a cursory glance at the index suggests the central focal points of the work. López Sarasúa is concerned with individuals, place, the idea of exile and belonging, and the religious and cultural Other. The novel is narrated primarily in the third person, but often slips into a free indirect speech narration. The narrative is not plot driven, but rather presents a series of individual stories that paint a picture of various inhabitants of the Moroccan Protectorate.

Each of these vignettes connects in minor ways, with doña Natalia serving as the most common thread throughout them. Doña Natalia is a family friend of the Fernández Family — comprised of Francisco and Remedios and their grown daughter Rosette (María Rosa) (Chapter One, Two, Five); she is a grandmotherly figure for Gilbert (Chapter Three), confidant for María Mechbal (Chapter Eight), guardian and mentor for Halima (Chapter Eleven), and herself the focus of five chapters (“Doña Natalia,” “Kenitra,” “Un lugar en África,” “Madani, el profeta,” and “La última aleya”). Some of these chapters only mention her in passing; Gilbert simply reflects that he must accompany doña Natalia and his mother to Kenitra’s cemetery before lunch one day (65), but doña Natalia’s presence is subtly pervasive throughout the text.

⁹¹ [A Place in Africa]

⁹² [Exile]

⁹³ [The Last Verse] “Aleya” is the term for a verse from the Quran (*Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*).

Other characters given textual preference in specific chapters include Rosette Fernández, the daughter of a Spanish political exile from the Civil War and currently romantically involved with Rachid, a law professor at the University Mohamed V (who also warrants his own chapter); Mme. Mechbal (María) of Spanish origin and a former cabaret dancer now married to a Moroccan; Fermín Gironés, another Spanish political exile, or Halima, a Moroccan girl who works for doña Natalia and whom doña Natalia mentors. Developing action in the plot is limited, and the story line instead is primarily filled with the characters' reflections on their life choices and situations. As a whole, the cast of characters represents the variety of personages that comprise the cosmopolitan centers of mid-century Morocco. It is true that they represent a predominantly privileged class, and the politically or economically marginalized portion of Moroccan society is not given much diegetic consideration, but within this substrate the characters do also represent a spectrum of privilege and wealth. Some are political exiles while others are political elite, and some Moroccans and Spaniards are financially well off, while others are not.

The Other within the novel receives a textured and nuanced representation. For the African Other, there is the poor and unfortunate Halima, who becomes pregnant out of wedlock and is taken in by doña Natalia, and there is Rachid who is a law professor and who studied in Europe and is very westernized. Within the Spanish population, there are many political and ideological factions represented: Francisco Fernández is a self-exiled Republican while Fermín Gironés represents the “ala radical de la izquierda” (91).⁹⁴ Many of the characters utter overtly racist or stereotypical comments about the African Other, and yet these exclamations are not supported by the overall tone of the

⁹⁴ [radical left wing]

narrative. Abrighach considers López Sarasúa's inclusion of such comments to be a sincere "compromiso con la verdad" and an attempt to demystify any accrued sense of nostalgia towards the colonial days (*Superando orillas* 128).⁹⁵ Taken as a narrative whole, this varied cast of characters interacts and shares both the space of the Protectorates and the pages of this novel.

To analyze the Orientalism or lack thereof in López Sarasúa's text, Said continues to be a useful resource. In addition to Said's work, I will also rely on Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*. Abrighach's book length study on the work of López Sarasúa, *Superando orillas: Lectura intercultural de la narrativa de Concha López Sarasúa* (2009), is an invaluable resource and a testament to the achievement of López Sarasúa's text. These theoretical and critical works will contribute to an analysis of López Sarasúa's text that highlights how she is able to narrate a space that does not privilege the West over its African Other but rather, at times, reverses this assumed hierarchy, and consistently provides a transcultural space in which West and Orient contribute to a unique cultural reality.⁹⁶

Since this examination follows that of Silva's *El nombre de los nuestros*, it is necessary to return to a consideration of the Other, to redefine it since it acquired significant nuances within the war setting. In *La llamada del almuédano*, the ethnic, linguistic, and/or religious Other is an acknowledged reality. As noted above, the text is filled with characters from varied backgrounds. Moreover, the narration shifts between Spanish, French, Arabic, and even occasionally English. The polyglossic nature of the

⁹⁵ [commitment to the truth]

⁹⁶ "Transculturation" was a term coined by Fernando Ortiz to avoid the problematic prefixes of "acculturation" and "deculturation." See Santí for a useful study of Malinowski and Ortiz's development and theorization of the term, especially pages 204-210.

text reflects the cosmopolitan reality of the Moroccan Protectorates. The narration is primarily in Spanish – such that one can reasonably follow the narrative without significant knowledge of French, Arabic, or English – but slips into the other languages without warning and without translation. Narration remains in Spanish, but dialog contains frequent multilingual expressions. Just as the language shifts, so does the narrative viewpoint. Narrated primarily in the third person singular, it also frequently changes to a first person narration at points, often within a single sentence as is the case in the chapter titled “Gilbert:” “Cerró los ojos resignado y en su rostro se dibujó una leve sonrisa; reconocía que era un soñador; no puedo remediarlo, sobre todo cuando vengo a esta ciudad” (51).⁹⁷ This constant shift in both language and narration creates a narrative instability that avoids privileging either language or narrative viewpoint. That is, even though Spanish is the language of the text, other linguistic realities of the plot are offered narrative space and consideration. The linguistic hybridity of the Moroccan Protectorate is recognized and represented in this narration. The fact that the non-Spanish phrases and words are presented without translation emphasizes the characters’ ease of maneuverability within a linguistic setting that is presumably strange and very foreign to monolingual readers. In similar fashion, the shifting narrative viewpoint allows multiple voices the opportunity for consideration and expression.

These narrative choices serve to undermine the “flexible *positional* superiority [upon which Orientalism depends], which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (Said 7). The language of exchange is not simply the colonial languages of French or

⁹⁷ [Resigned, he closed his eyes and on his face was traced a light smile; he recognized that he was a dreamer; I can’t fix that, above all when I come to this city.]

Spanish, but rather a blending of all languages represented in the territory. The text effectively recreates a space of transculturation that goes beyond simplistic Orientalist portrayals. As Mary Louise Pratt outlines in *Imperial Eyes*, “Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone” (6). The “contact zone” must be an essential consideration of this process, and Pratt defines it as “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations” (6). The contact zones of *La llamada del almuédano* differ from those that Pratt examines in *Imperial Eyes* in that, for her, the “ongoing relations” that contact zones create “usually involv[e] conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). Her titular “imperial eyes” are ones that “passively look out and possess” (7), whereas *La llamada del almuédano* is remarkably devoid of conflict and arrogance. Instead it depends largely on personal, intimate story-lines for plot development, rather than adrenaline-fueled action or mystery. These contact zones are not the sites of active conquest and cultural inequality, but rather ones of interpersonal, empathetic exchange.

Even while the narrative avoids cultural hierarchy and actively decries instances of racial denigration, the contact zones that it offers are spaces of the elite and the colonial. The expatriates may be beneficent and multicultural, but they are colonial immigrants, congregating at embassy functions or colonial social clubs. As the text gives voice to the linguistic and cultural Other, it largely ignores the economically and politically marginalized Other. Abrighach contextualizes this narrative focus by suggesting that López Sarasúa “desdramatiza el fenómeno tal vez porque la emigración española al Norte de África no fue tan trágica como lo es la actual travesía marroquí del

Estrecho en pateras” (*Superando orillas* 127).⁹⁸ Rachid, the most prominent Moroccan character, is a law professor and well versed in the Western philosophy of Socrates and Plato, “obsesionado con la lectura de Hegel o de Marx” (130).⁹⁹ He may be ethnically Other, but he is philosophically Western. The historical context is that of the active European colonialism of Morocco, and the characters that populate the pages are the privileged class of the colony. The levels of Spanish emigration to Morocco that Gozávez Pérez details (noted above) provide a broader context to the contact zones that the novel offers. López Sarasúa’s Morocco is the cosmopolitan space of the international contact zones. She does not write the indigenous Morocco, or the culturally Other Moroccan, instead she focuses her narrative on the social space that was unique to the Protectorates. To further contextualize López Sarasúa’s narrative focus, it is useful to understand that Spanish emigration to Morocco in the mid-twentieth century was more than just a colonial venture, as Heriberto Cairo outlines:

Naturalized geopolitics represents national destiny as dominated by nature. From the 1860s to the 1950s the geopolitical image of a Euro-African Spain was formulated in different ways. The basic argument was that there is a spatial continuity from the Pyrenees in the north to the Atlas in the south. There would be two Spains: one peninsular in the European continent and one Transfetana or Tingitana in the African continent. So the Spanish national destiny would be to achieve the unity of both Spains. Thus the incorporation of colonies in Northwest Africa or the

⁹⁸ [de-dramatizes the phenomenon perhaps because Spanish emigration to North Africa was not as tragic as the contemporary Moroccan voyage in *patera*.]

⁹⁹ [obsessed with the work of Hegel or Marx.]

establishment of the protectorate was not in a way an act of colonization but one of unification. (64)¹⁰⁰

Therefore, the assumption of Morocco as a geographically Other space is diminished under the conceptualization that the Protectorate is merely an extension of Spain across the Mediterranean. This consideration does not resolve any issues, but rather serves to highlight the complex ideologies, cultures, and personages that interacted in these cosmopolitan contact zones.

Doña Natalia, the novel's central protagonist, is a benevolent character, even in her status as a privileged colonial.¹⁰¹ The central story-line is of her coming to terms with her imminent departure from the place that she has called home for the majority of her adult life. Morocco is her home and Spain represents for her a strange and unknown place; she is comfortable maneuvering the culturally and linguistically heterogeneous world of the Moroccan Protectorate. Her proximate departure is part of a wider trend among the expatriate Europeans living in the Protectorate; doña Natalia reflects that “poco a poco nos vamos todos de aquí” (16).¹⁰² This changing reality that comes with the newly found independence contributes to a sense of nostalgia among the remaining expatriates – “¡Con lo bien que vivíamos...!” (16)¹⁰³ – and an uneasiness at the changes such as renaming streets with Arabic names (16) or a more hostile political environment (with recent crimes and aggressions against the government 17). However, despite the

¹⁰⁰ I do not suggest that López Sarasúa advocates this particular position; I merely point out the potentially distinct ideology that encouraged Spanish emigration to the Moroccan Protectorate during this time period. This conceptualization of Spain as extending from the Pyrenees to the Atlas Mountains long predates the twentieth century's Spanish tide of immigration to North Africa. Isabel la Católica envisioned the Reconquista extending across the Strait of Gibraltar. See Flores Morales for a collection of ideological statements by prominent Spanish thinkers and politicians regarding Africa.

¹⁰¹ The novel does not portray her as a “privileged colonial,” this assumption comes from the historical context of the plot, combined with Albert Memmi's assertion that “every colonizer is privileged” (11).

¹⁰² [little by little we're all leaving here.]

¹⁰³ [How good we used to live!]

characters' nostalgia for colonial glory days or the subtle exclusion of non-privileged, cultural Others, the text actively seeks to value the Moroccan Other and to present the West and its African Other equitably.

The colonial nostalgia that doña Natalia and other characters express is problematic upon analysis. The narrative indulges the characters' nostalgia, and it is not until one of the final chapters that the text offers a strong admonishment of the colonial pinings. As doña Natalia deliberates and worries about her inevitable return to Spain, she has a dream where a "Mandani, el profeta" tells her that

Nadie va a notar tu falta, vas a ser uno más entre los que se van; porque no vas a creerte imprescindible, ¿eh?, por muy atada que te sientas a esta tierra... Todo va a seguir igualito, no lo dudes. Escucha, ¿oyes el ruido del mar? Pues, ahí seguirá, día y noche, y los geranios y los gladiolos del jardín continuarán floreciendo mientras alguien los riegue. ¡Serás ilusa! El mundo no se va a desmoronar por tu marcha, puedes estar segura, y de que nadie se muere por nadie también... ¡Qué desazón! ¿Por qué soñaré cosas tan raras? (231)¹⁰⁴

The self-assumed importance of the colonial in the Protectorate is undermined with this dream. Colonization as a *mission civilisatrice* is rendered untenable with the assertion that "[el] jardín continuar[á] floreciendo mientras alguien l[o] riegue" (231). And most important, nostalgia is negated in the assertion that she is "ilusa" or naïve.

¹⁰⁴ [No one is going to notice your absence, you are just going to be one more among those that leave; you're not going to think yourself irreplaceable, are you?, for no matter how tied you feel to this land... Everything is going to continue on the same, don't you doubt it. Listen, do you hear the sound of the ocean? Well, there it will continue, day and night, and the geraniums and the gladiolas in the garden will continue flowering while someone waters them. You are naïve! The world is not going to fall to pieces because you leave, you can be sure of that, and no one is going to die for anyone either... What uneasiness! Why do I dream such strange things?]

While the multiple linguistic and narrative voices avoid a unitary viewpoint, the text also explicitly decries cultural prejudices. The clearest example is in the chapter “Mme. Mechbal.” In this chapter María Mechbal, a Spaniard married to a Moroccan, visits doña Natalia for her advice on contacting the family that disowned her when she married the Moroccan Ali Mechbal. She confides in doña Natalia that “[m]is padres no me han perdonado nunca mi matrimonio; para ellos el haberme casado con un árabe ha sido como una cosa vergonzosa; algo que hay que esconder al resto de la familia”¹⁰⁵ and that she should consider that her parents “habían muerto para mí” (148).¹⁰⁶ Doña Natalia’s responds by reminding María of her happiness with her husband:

[Doña Natalia:] tú eres feliz, ¿no?

[María Mechbal:] —Ya lo ve usted; yo creo que son cosas tan claras que no pueden ocultarse fácilmente.

Y dio rienda suelta a los numerosos detalles que configuraban la base de su felicidad; realizó emocionada las virtudes de aquel hombre bondadoso y enamorado. (148)¹⁰⁷

For María and doña Natalia, Ali Mechbal’s ethnicity is unimportant and María’s parents’ inability to accept her relationship is ridiculous. Her husband is described in personal qualities, not racial ones: “Ali es tan bueno... Ni con una lupa creo que habría encontrado a otro igual, y el buenazo sí que hace todo lo que yo quiero, le guste o no” (152).¹⁰⁸ María

¹⁰⁵ [My parents have never forgiven me for my marriage; for them, having married an Arab has been something embarrassing; something that they have to hide from the rest of the family.]

¹⁰⁶ [were dead to me.]

¹⁰⁷ [[Doña Natalia:] you’re happy, right?

[María Mechbal:] —You see it; I think that there are things so clear that you can’t hide them easily.

And she let loose with numerous details that configured the basis of her happiness; with excitement, she emphasized the virtues of that loving and kind man.]

¹⁰⁸ [Ali is so good... Even with a magnifying glass I don’t think that I could have found another as good, and the kind man does everything I want, whether he likes it or not.]

shares the story of her relationship to Ali with doña Natalia, concluding by asking doña Natalia to take news to her family when she returns to Madrid so that perhaps they can “forgive her” and allow her to return with her daughter to visit. To this ultimate desire, doña Natalia responds by saying

—Pero vamos a ver, María, ¿qué es lo que tienen que perdonarte, hija mía? —Le indignaba esa actitud—. ¡Pues no faltaba más! Es como si tu marido no fuese tan honrado como el mejor; más todavía, porque ¡bien que te lo demuestra el pobre! (155-156)¹⁰⁹

Doña Natalia explicitly counters any preconceptions that one culture is better than the other as she emphasizes the personal qualities over cultural difference.

Doña Natalia also emphasizes the value of the contact zone for facilitating an appreciation of the Other. In the same conversation from above, she further comforts María by recounting her first “venida a África”¹¹⁰ emphasizing the preconceptions that she had: “pesadillas en las que un moro, negro como el ébano, le arrebatava a uno de sus hijos y se perdía con él en la lejanía montado en un brioso corcel” (157).¹¹¹ She admits that “[m]ás tarde, a su llegada, se sorprendió al comprobar que existían árabes con la piel incluso más blanca que la suya, ¡que ya era decir!” (157).¹¹² In this admission, she suggests two things; one, that unverified preconceptions are untrustworthy – “Lo que ocurre a tus padres es que no conocen Marruecos ni a las gentes de esta tierra... ¡Pero si

¹⁰⁹ [—Let’s see here, María, what is it that they have to forgive you of, my child? This attitude infuriated her. —Well, that’s that! It’s as if your husband wasn’t as honorable as the best; even more, because he shows you so well the poor man!]

¹¹⁰ [voyage to Africa]

¹¹¹ [nightmares in which a Moor, black like ebony, seized one of her sons and took off with him, mounted upon a spirited steed.]

¹¹² [Later, upon her arrival, she was surprised to find out that there existed Arabs with skin that was even whiter than hers, and that was saying a lot!]

me ocurrió a mí también antes de venirme...!” (156)¹¹³ – and two, that there is little phenotypical difference between Spaniards and their North African Others. She values the African Other through her familiarity with it, and she is confident that if María’s family were to share this experience, then their preconceptions and stereotypes would be revealed as unjustified. Doña Natalia effectively emphasizes the importance of the contact zone as a space where preconceptions are replaced by appreciation.

Perhaps the most specific mention of race from doña Natalia can be found in the first chapter where she also emphasizes individual qualities over cultural generalizations:

No tenía queja de los marroquíes; los encontraba hospitalarios y dadivosos. Eran muchos años los que llevaba allí para no conocerlos; tendrían sus defectos, pero también sus virtudes como el resto de los mortales. (25)¹¹⁴

Admittedly, there are instances where her comments seem to be racially insensitive. For instance, during their conversation, María grabs her hands and leans to kiss them in gratitude and doña Natalia responds “¡Ves como te has vuelto tan servil como ellos!” (156)¹¹⁵ and this admonition — especially the specific use of *ellos* — comes across forcefully. In addition, the surprised tone of her thought “¡Pues no es poco feliz madame Mechbal y está casada con un marroquí!” (21-22),¹¹⁶ even though it expresses a positive sentiment, contains sarcastic undertones. That is to say, even though the narration makes specific and repeated attempts to avoid the Orientalist traps along the way, these

¹¹³ [What happens with your parents is that they don’t know Morocco nor the people of this land... But that also happened to me before I came...!]

¹¹⁴ [She didn’t have any complaints about the Moroccans; she found them hospitable and generous. She had been there too long not to know them; they could have their defects, but also their virtues just like the rest of the mortals.]

¹¹⁵ [Don’t you see how you’ve become as servile as them!]

¹¹⁶ [Well, madame Mechbal is plenty happy and she’s married to a Moroccan!]

occasional phrases that stand out in their use of divisive pronouns such as *ellos* or incredulity at the success of an interracial marriage hint at “the sheer knitted-together strength of Orientalist discourse... and its redoubtable durability” (Said 6). While López Sarasúa attempts to undermine and destabilize any preconceived notions of Western “*positional* superiority” over the African Other, certain descriptions or lines remain – such as the ones above – that remind us that Orientalist portrayals still endure.

The dramatic coup over Orientalist discourse occurs in the final chapter – “La última aleya.” Doña Natalia and Halima are shopping in the calle de los Cónsules¹¹⁷ in Rabat and decide to stop at a café for tea. They hear music – that “parece más bien a una queja” (249)¹¹⁸ – and intrigued they go to the café from which it emanates. Doña Natalia asks what they are singing and she is told they are “Canciones andalusíes, señora” by a waiter “en perfecto castellano, jactándose de su procedencia tetuaní” (249).¹¹⁹ Doña Natalia is captivated by the melancholy music and further questions the waiter as to its meaning. It is in classical Arabic and so the young man must ask the musicians for clarification, but he shares with doña Natalia that “Dice que es un poema de exilio, de cuando los árabes estaban en España; este poeta se llamaba Ibn Amira; creo que había nacido en Valencia” (250).¹²⁰ Surprised, doña Natalia exclaims “De Valencia soy yo, ¡fíjese!” (251).¹²¹ The waiter translates the song of exile for her, and afterwards she comments to Halima:

¹¹⁷ [the street of the Consuls.]

¹¹⁸ [sounds more like a whine.]

¹¹⁹ [Andalusian songs, madam... in perfect Castillian, boasting about his Tetuani origin.]

¹²⁰ [He says that it is a poem about exile, from when the Arabs were in Spain; this poet was called Ibn Amira; I think that he was born in Valencia.] Abū-I-Mutarrif Ibn Amira (~1184 to ~1270) was a poet born in Valencia or Alcira and forced into exile when James I reconquered Valencia. Ibn Amira went to Tunisia in exile. See Lachica.

¹²¹ [I’m from Valencia, imagine that!]

¿Has visto, Halima?, he tenido que venir aquí para enterarme de que aquellos poetas querían tanto a mi tierra. Ni sabía que hubiese existido este Ibn Amira... Los moros eran infieles, sólo te enseñaban eso; infieles e invasores; de lo que sí estoy segura es que el que los expulsó de Valencia se llamaba Jaume, primero o segundo, ¡ya ni me acuerdo!... Bueno, sí, era Jaume el Conqueridor. ¡Lo que son las cosas...! (251)¹²²

Doña Natalia is deeply moved by the experience. Not only does this explanation recall the cultural diversity of Spain's past, but it also subtly evokes the diversity of contemporary Spain by employing the Catalan spelling of "Jaume el Conqueridor."¹²³ The café becomes a contact zone where the Spanish, Arabic, and Catalan presences are all evoked and entwined. With few substantial changes, a similar scene can be imagined occurring in Valencia in the early thirteenth century. Her preference of the Catalan term over the Spanish "Conquistador" subtly hints at the cultural diversity that permeates Spanish identity and unites Spain and North Africa.

This scene is a revelation for the elderly doña Natalia. In the final pages of the novel she prepares to leave and reflects on "¡Cuánto había aprendido esa tarde! Nunca se le habría ocurrido pensar que aquellos versos los había inspirado Valencia, su propia tierra, ¡cuán grande era su ignorancia!, ¡y qué inhumano el exilio!" (254).¹²⁴ The poem

¹²² [Do you see it, Halima? I had to come here to understand that those poets so loved my land. I didn't even know that this Ibn Amira existed... The Moors were infidels, they only taught you this; infidels and invaders; but of one thing I am sure is that the one who expelled them from Valencia was named Jaume, first or second, I don't even remember!... Well, yes, it was Jaume the Conqueror. What an amazing coincidence...!]

¹²³ James I the Conqueror, Jaime I de Aragón, (1208-1276) was responsible for the "reconquest" of the Balearic Islands between 1229 and 1235 and Valencia in 1238. See Harvey for more information on James I.

¹²⁴ [How much had she learned this afternoon! It would never have occurred to her to think that those verses had been inspired by Valencia, her own land, how great was her ignorance! and how inhumane was exile!]

comforts her as she feels she is about to embark on her own personal exile in moving back to Spain, and the novel closes as she listens to the “llamada del almuédano.”¹²⁵

“Allāh akbar! Allāh akbar! Desde la cumbre del Oukaimeden un almuédano llamaba a la plegaria” (255).¹²⁶ She has a new understanding of exile and belonging that privileges neither Spain nor the Maghreb, but rather sympathizes with the shared pain of loss.

This final chapter is not only the moment when doña Natalia comes to terms with the reality of her return to Spain, but also makes a conscious effort to connect the contemporary reality of the mass exodus of expatriates with the thirteenth century Arab reality.¹²⁷ Doña Natalia is able to emotionally connect with the exiled suffering of the poet Ibn Amira and it causes her to reevaluate what she was taught growing up – “Los moros eran infieles, sólo te enseñaban eso; infieles e invasores” (251).¹²⁸ She resigns herself to a return to Spain, accepting a self-imposed exile from the land she loves. López Sarasúa complicates the concept of fatherland, re-establishing it not along lines of cultural difference or indigenous heritage, but on personal connection. Doña Natalia’s perception that a return to Spain will be her own exile turns on its head the very concept of “exile” as being distanced from one’s “native” land, and connects her with her historical and cultural Other, the poet Ibn Amira, as she finds solace in his poem. She realizes that her exile is no different from the one experienced by the Moors who were expelled from Spain by the Catholic Kings. She also understands that the discourse of

¹²⁵ [the muezzin calling to prayer]

¹²⁶ [Allāh akbar! Allāh akbar! From the peak of Oukaimeden a muezzin led the call to prayer.]

¹²⁷ “The reconquest of Spain” contained many battles and exiles before the final date of 1492. Jaume el Conqueridor successfully wrested the Kingdom of Valencia from Moorish control in the thirteenth century. See Harvey.

¹²⁸ [The Moors were infidels, they only taught you this; infidels and invaders.]

difference that has maintained the conceptualization of Spanish-versus-Moor as entirely distinct for so many centuries is a limited understanding of a complex reality.

Even with this final and emphatic re-conceptualization of Same and Other, phrases or lines remain in the narration that discomfort or appear out of place. As doña Natalia recounts the name of “Jaume el Conqueridor,” her reminiscing appears to emphasize a conquering West over its vanquished Other. The use of *jactarse*¹²⁹ to describe her waiter’s use of Spanish – “en perfecto castellano, jactándose de su procedencia tetuani” (249)¹³⁰ – seems slightly excessive. And when she chides Mme. Mechbal for being “tan servil como ellos” (156),¹³¹ it appears to undermine any grand effort on López Sarasúa’s part to completely avoid essentializing representations within the narrative. However, Mohamed Abrighach sees López Sarasúa’s narration as an extreme honesty. He credits her with being objective to a fault: “No es un posicionamiento ideológico, sino un compromiso con la verdad y una desmitificación... una sincera forma de repensar la historia” (*Superando orillas* 128).¹³² Abrighach sees these phrases that irk as “humor satírico de notable audacia intelectual, sobre todo, en lo relacionado con la descripción de la paradoja de los inmigrantes... en su forma de encarar y convivir con la alteridad norteafricana y marroquí” (*Superando orillas* 127).¹³³ And so, in offering López Sarasúa the benefit of the doubt, she effectively reconceptualizes ideas of fatherland and exile, valorizing both Africa and the African Other while refusing to whitewash the legacy of Orientalism and Orientalist discourse.

¹²⁹ [To boast, to brag.]

¹³⁰ [in perfect Castillian, boasting about his Tetuani origin.]

¹³¹ [as servile as them]

¹³² [It is not an ideological positioning, but rather a compromise with the truth and a de-mythification... a sincere form of re-thinking history.]

¹³³ [satirical humor of a noticeable intellectual audacity, above all, in that is related to the paradoxical description of the immigrants... it is her way of facing and living with the North African and Moroccan alterity.]

Abrighach's insight is charitable; the narrative could be interpreted as brutally honest in its representation, but also as (unintentionally) offensive. Ultimately, the sting is removed from doña Natalia's occasional uncomfortable observations. Her age and her affectionate title of "doña" used throughout confer upon her possibly offensive words a benign antiquity. The reader understands that she cares deeply about her home in Morocco and those with whom she interacts; her offensive utterances represent a legacy of expression that her experiences in the Protectorate belie. Within this narrative context, doña Natalia's words express Orientalist tropes while her actions and interactions undermine their power. While Abrighach's interpretation excuses the use of Orientalist discourse in López Sarasúa's text, I find that López Sarasúa's narrative goes further than a mere "desmitificación;" her representation attempts an intentional subversion of Orientalism's authority. For López Sarasúa, Orientalism is a discursive force that persists, but it is one that loses its affective power within the intercultural contact zone.

As her narrative unfolds within the colonial setting of the Moroccan Protectorates, López Sarasúa writes an intercultural contact zone that is distinct from Silva's representation of war. López Sarasúa's novel offers a complementary historical context to Silva's work; the war setting is replaced with the colony. Physical conflict is notably absent from *La llamada del almuédano*. What propels the story are the emotional ties and the affection that interpersonal contact provides. In its quotidian preoccupations, López Sarasúa's text normalizes relationships between Westerners and their African Others. Ties between individuals — or between individuals and places — are emotional, not cultural. Even while her characters may indulge in nostalgia for the glory days of the colonial Protectorates, López Sarasúa simultaneously avoids any whitewashing of the

past and shows that their discourse is undermined by their experience. The characters of the novel often employ the Orientalist speech that promoted and perpetuated colonialism and stereotypes, and yet López Sarasúa's narrative ultimately focuses on the contact zones where individuals from various cultural backgrounds come together and value emotional connections over superficial, phenotypical differences. *La llamada del almuédano* suggests that the interpersonal relationship has the potential to overcome Orientalism as it shows that the African Other is nothing more than another human being; one who loves and suffers in the same ways as the Westerner.

III. THE OTHER, DIPLOMACY, AND BUREAUCRACY: DECOLONIZING WESTERN SAHARA IN RAMÓN MAYRATA'S *EL IMPERIO DESIERTO*

Los he visto huyendo de sus hogares,
los he visto muriendo
en su larga huida.

I have seen them fleeing from their homes,
I have seen them dying
in their long flight.

También he visto telarañas,
treinta años después,
en aquellas
puertas que no se cerraban.

I have also seen spiderwebs,
thirty years later,
in those
doors that never closed.

Se esconden los crímenes,
se negocian los principios
y se intenta sigilosamente matar
una esperanza.

Crimes are hidden,
principles are negotiated
and they try to stealthily kill
a hope.

Entonces,
¿qué es la carta magna del mundo?

Therefore,
what is the magna carta of the world?

¿Un derecho elemental en desuso?
¿Un veredicto a nuestra legal razón?
Resoluciones con lágrimas
de desplazados,
que firman tras cada sesión las Corbatas
Azules en Nueva York.

An elemental right in disuse?
A verdict for our legal reason?
Resolutions with tears
from the displaced,
that Blue Ties sign after each session
in New York.

El mundo, Naciones Unidas,
el Consejo de Seguridad.
Todos no pueden ser locos para ignorar
mi franca palabra.
Dejadme gritar: ¡Quiero ser yo mismo!
Como me otorga esa carta magna.
—Bahia Awah (“La indiferencia del
mundo”)¹³⁴

The world, the United Nations,
the Security Council.
They can't all be crazy to ignore
my frank word.
Let me scream: I want to be myself!
Just like this magna carta grants me.
—Bahia Awah (“The indifference of the
world”)¹³⁵

Ramón Mayrata was first a poet and only later a novelist. His first book of poetry, *Estética de las serpientes* [*Aesthetic of the Serpents*], was published in 1972 while his first novel, *El imperio desierto*, was not published until 1992. He has since continued to

¹³⁴ Bahia Awah is a Saharawi poet and author currently living in Madrid. Much of his poetry is available on his website, and he also has a recent memoir titled *La maestra que me enseñó en una tabla de madera*.

¹³⁵ Translation mine.

publish novels and collections of short stories, including *Una duda de Alicia* [*Alicia's Doubt*](1990), *Si me escuchas esta noche* [*If You Listen to Me Tonight*] (1991), *El sillón malva* [*The Mauve Chair*] (1994), *Sin puertas* [*Without Doors*](1996), *Alí Bey, el Abasí* [*Ali Bey, al Abbasi*] (1995), *Confín de la ciudad* [*Border of the City*] (1998), and *Miracielos* (2000), among other works of both prose and poetry. Mayrata worked in Paris as a reporter and translator and, in addition to his fiction and poetry, also has several non-fiction books and a collection of his literary articles titled *El ojo de la arbitrariedad* [*The Eye of Arbitrariness*] (1986).

Mayrata has received some recognition throughout his career. His early poetry appears in an anthology collected by Vicente Aleixandre, *Espejo del amor y de la muerte* [*Mirror of Love and of Death*] (1971). *Alí Bey, el Abasí* has been translated into Arabic and *Miracielos* was adapted for theater by Carlos Rod in 2002. His critical writing on literature and art has been collected in various works and published in journals also.¹³⁶

Most pertinent to this study is his focus and writings on Western Sahara. *El imperio desierto* will serve as the central text for this analysis and it is worth noting that it is a work of fiction that contains significant autobiographical elements. Ramón Mayrata worked as an anthropologist in the then Spanish Sahara in the mid-1970s, in the midst of the ultimately unsuccessful decolonization of the territory.¹³⁷ The plot of *El imperio desierto* mirrors this reality as Ignacio Aguirre, a young anthropologist, is sent to the Spanish Sahara to write a history of the Saharawi people. Also relevant to this work is the anthology of stories and writings about the Saharan territory compiled by Mayrata,

¹³⁶ See his articles “El hombre del ojo blanco y opaco” (1994), “La perplejidad del arte moderno” (1993), or “El esplendor de la Tierra Pura” (1996) or *Viaje por Egipto y Asia menor* (1996).

¹³⁷ See Hodges for an extensive consideration of the Spanish presence and decolonization in the Western Sahara, or Mundy and Zunes for a more recent study.

Relatos del Sáhara (2001) and his fictional account of the historical figure of Alí Bey/Domingo Badía in *Alí Bey, el Abasí*. Unfortunately, these latter texts will need to be explored elsewhere, and I have chosen to focus on *El imperio desierto* here as it directly confronts the issue of Western Sahara and its decolonization. Mayrata's work with the Saharawi nation and his involvement with the cause of independence have earned him great respect among many in the contemporary Saharawi refugee community.¹³⁸

This section will rely upon James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State* (1998) and Edward Said's *Orientalism* to understand the ways in which the West has historically forced the colonial subject to conform to Western ideas of organization for official recognition. Scott's articulation of the concept of *legibility* specifically illuminates this Western imposition, and I argue that Mayrata recognizes this pattern of paternalism and writes a novel that values alternate cultural valorizations and legibilities. Mayrata's text highlights the problematic nature of the West's treatment of its African colonies as exemplified in the decolonization process and international diplomatic processes. *El imperio desierto* ultimately emphasizes that a culture that does not conform to Western standards of legibility is doomed to marginalization, as implied by the double entendre of the title as either *The Desert Empire* or *The Deserted Empire*.

El imperio desierto occurs over the final year of the Spanish Sahara colony. The Spanish Sahara was governed as a Spanish territory from 1884 to 1975, notably as a separate and distinct territory from the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco. As the novel opens, Spain is initializing the process of decolonization and handing autonomy over to the Saharawi populace, due to international pressure. As a brief historical context, the

¹³⁸ This was very apparent as I met with members of the Saharawi community in Madrid in the summer of 2011, specifically in my conversations with the author Bahia Awah and the poet Ebnu.

governments of Morocco and Mauritania simultaneously claimed sovereignty over the territory, seeking to have the Spanish Sahara divided between them before allowing Western Sahara to establish itself as an independent state, effectively contesting the legal validity of an independent Saharawi nation. Spain took the case to the International Court of Justice, which ruled in favor of the potential Saharawi state.¹³⁹ Undeterred, King Hassan II organized a peaceful demonstration that included approximately 350,000 unarmed Moroccan civilians who marched across the border into the Spanish Sahara on November 6, 1975. Spain was unwilling to become involved in a potentially large-scale conflict due to the failing health of Franco, among other reasons, and so offered little resistance to the pacific occupation of the territory. Spain withdrew shortly thereafter, leaving the territory under internationally contested Moroccan control. The Saharawi nationalists, united under the *Frente Polisario* were forced to retreat to refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria, where they continue to subsist, seeking international recognition and restoration.¹⁴⁰

El imperio desierto develops during the most contentious time of the decolonization process. A young anthropologist, Ignacio Aguirre, is hired to go to the territory and to prepare a history textbook of the Saharawi people for use in the indigenous schools that will come with the anticipated independence. At this specific time, around 1974, the Saharan territory is clouded in secrecy, due to the *Ley de Secretos Oficiales* of 1968¹⁴¹ that prohibits news and information about the territory from reaching

¹³⁹ See “Western Sahara: Advisory Opinion of 16 October 1975” for the International Court of Justice’s ruling.

¹⁴⁰ For more information about the Spanish withdrawal from the Sahara territory, see Hodges and Mundy & Zunes.

¹⁴¹ See “Ley 9/1968, de 5 de abril, reguladora de los Secretos Oficiales” for the full content of the law passed in 1968. See also Carreras Serra for an explanation and a contextualization of the law, especially Chapter XX “Los secretos oficiales” (281-286).

the general Spanish populace. The territory is administered under strict military rule, even as the process is underway for Saharawi independence in the very near future.

As the political situation deteriorates between Spain, the Saharawi, and Morocco, Ignacio's initial mission to prepare a history textbook is replaced with a charge to compile the documentation necessary to present the case for Saharawi sovereignty to the International Court of Justice. Ignacio and his Saharawi collaborators must negotiate diplomatic avenues of official recognition and documentation, at times making concessions to the Western conceptions of validity and bureaucracy, all the while working towards an anticipated independence.

Ramón Mayrata's treatment of the Other is significant in this context, because, due to the nature of the Ignacio Aguirre's anthropological project, the very goal is to establish and to highlight ethnic, political, and cultural difference. The premise of national self-determination is based upon a unique, historical Saharawi identity that ethnically separates the indigenous inhabitants of the territory from their Moroccan and Mauritanian neighbors. Ignacio's project is two-fold: first, to compile from various sources and oral histories the documentation necessary to prove the unique ethnic Otherness of the Saharawi, and, second, to render this indigenous documentation *legible* for the West and specifically the International Court of Justice. Mayrata's focus on this process highlights the West's belief that the subaltern cannot speak for itself. Spain's paternalistic handling of the Spanish Sahara's decolonialization suggests that "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak" (Spivak 287); Ignacio's job is to literally create a Saharawi history and to speak for the colonial subjects before the Western world.

The term *legible* is adapted from James C. Scott's use of the term in *Seeing Like a State*.¹⁴² This book is apropos to the Saharawi situation, as Scott examines modernity and the concomitant sedentarization of people with increased state apparatus. In Scott's words, "the state has always seemed to be the enemy of 'people who move around'" (1). Even though Scott's use of "enemy" is not the theorized bellicose enemy of Anidjar, this articulation does highlight the fact that the Saharawi's tradition of nomadism hinders their ability to form a state that is *legible* as such to the Western world. Scott explains the concept of legibility within diplomacy as one emerging

as a central problem in statecraft. The premodern state was, in many crucial respects, partially blind; it knew precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields, their location, their very identity. It lacked anything like a detailed "map" of its terrain and its people. It lacked, for the most part, a measure, a metric, that would allow it to "translate" what it knew into a common standard necessary for a synoptic view. (2)

In Scott's view, organization, sedentarization, and standardization allow states to control their populace and also create an organized aesthetic that contributes to a consolidated national identity, distinguishable from other states. Organization and standardization effectively render a state legible.

This theorization is pertinent to the Saharawi example in *El imperio desierto* in that the Saharawi are only partially sedentarized. The infrastructure present in the Spanish Sahara colony is a Spanish infrastructure, governed by Spaniards. The nomadic

¹⁴² In this section, I use Scott's terms *legible* and *legibility* because he explains their usage explicitly in his book. One could potentially use other synonyms such as *distinguishable*, *recognizable*, or *identifiable* in their stead.

heritage of the Saharawi is not legible to the international community due to its difference and the misleading appearance of a lacking in national unity. Conversely, Morocco's legible (read modern, bureaucratic) state apparatus gives its claims to sovereignty a certain degree of international validity, even though the International Court of Justice ruled in favor of the Saharawi. The Western aesthetic favors a government structure that offers a clear hierarchy, where "lines of influence and command are exclusively from the center to the periphery" (Scott 112). King Hassan II's Morocco reflects this modern conceptualization of the state much more accurately than the leaderless independence movement of the Polisario in *El imperio desierto*.

Another important hurdle for the Saharawi of *El imperio desierto* is their historical reliance on the oral transmission of history. Scott offers five characteristics in the process of "State simplifications," of which two are directly relevant here: first, that "they are... nearly always written (verbal or numerical) *documentary* facts" and second, that "most stylized state facts are also *aggregated* facts. Aggregate facts may be impersonal... or simply a collection of facts about individuals" (80). The Saharawi cultural history is neither textually documented nor proximately aggregated. Prior to the Spanish decolonization of the territory, the Saharawi had relied on oral transmission of their history, and the documents that were available were dispersed throughout the families of the territory, uncataloged and unorganized. The dispersal of the familial and historical information limits the Saharawi's ability to document and prove their traditional independence from the Moroccan sultanate. Therefore, in order to earn viability in the West's consideration, the Saharawi must gather and document their history in a manner that is legible to the West. As mentioned above, this is Ignacio

Aguirre's project in the territory. To accomplish this task, Ignacio forms a team composed of Saharawi men who help him to gather scarce historical documents from families and to document family histories.¹⁴³ Ignacio's team faces significant resistance from the Spanish police force in the Saharan territory as they believe that he is aiding the popular uprising of the *Frente Polisario*. Ignacio and his colleagues also encounter reluctance from the local Saharawi populace who are hesitant to entrust their important documents to a cultural outsider. However, once Ignacio convinces his team members and the local patriarchs of his sincerity, they are able to persuade the disparate families of the territory to loan them over "ocho mil páginas de documentos" for research and archiving (153).¹⁴⁴ Ignacio succeeds in aggregating official documentation, a step towards rendering Saharawi history legible to the West.

The novel is split into five sections, of which Ignacio Aguirre is the primary focus. It maintains a third person omniscient narration throughout, and traces the history of Ignacio's involvement with the project. The first section begins in Madrid with Ignacio as a recently graduated anthropology student; he is contacted by the Spanish government and asked to undertake this project in the Saharan territory. Sections two and three detail his arrival and research work, and in section four he returns to Madrid to present his research, but he is kidnapped in the Canary Islands by the police Comandante García Ramos from El Aaiun and held captive. He is eventually released and returns to Madrid to pass along his findings to the government.¹⁴⁵ In section five, Ignacio returns to the

¹⁴³ The 2008 edition of *El imperio desierto* is followed by the short story "Aquel mendigo de la Plaza Esbehiheh" that examines more in depth the difficulties that the protagonist (one very similar to Ignacio Aguirre) faces in convincing the Saharawi to commit their oral traditions to written format.

¹⁴⁴ [eight thousand pages of documents]

¹⁴⁵ The specific ministry to which Ignacio reports is never explicitly mentioned. The effect of this omission within the text is one of general culpability upon all branches of the Spanish government, instead of any singular agency.

territory in the midst of the most chaotic moments of the Spanish withdrawal. He is injured in a bomb blast and later put on a plane out of the country at which point the novel ends. The plot follows many of the generic conventions of the adventure novel in its action packed sequences, plot surprises, and romantic relationships, but it is also a serious consideration of the problems and consequences associated with Spain's botched withdrawal from the Spanish Sahara.

El imperio desierto ultimately humanizes the Saharawi Other and sympathizes with this Other that is condemned to operate within a cultural paradigm that is not their own. In my analysis of this book, I focus on three ways in which Mayrata represents the Saharawi Other that undermine and depart from traditional Orientalist discourse. These three points are: 1) Mayrata's emphasis on how the West (i.e. European Colonial Powers, the praxis of diplomacy, and archival of knowledge) dominates all interactions; 2) the ways in which Mayrata humanizes the Saharawi and consciously avoids idolizing his cultural Other, and 3) the narrative attention to the cultural differences that disadvantage the Saharawi in a world that operates according to the Western paradigm. As I examine these three elements within the novel, I will show that Mayrata's work offers a vision of the Saharawi Other that is sympathetic without being paternalistic, and which also recognizes cultural difference without exoticizing.

I have already alluded above to the Western domination; this is initially evident in Ignacio's official charge to write a history textbook for the Saharawi. His new job is explained to him as such:

Parece que están firmemente decididos a dar la independencia al territorio.
Ya sabes, por las presiones de la ONU. Pero se han encontrado con que no

existe ningún libro de texto que recoja la historia del Sáhara. En un país independiente tienen que estudiar su propia historia en las escuelas. Y eso es lo que quieren que tú hagas. Una historia del territorio para uso de los nuevos saharianos.

[Ignacio:]—Me parece que se llaman saharauis. (20)¹⁴⁶

The third person plural of “están firmemente decididos” refers to the Spanish government, subtly emphasizing that the possibility of independence is something that the colonizers offer, not something the colonized necessarily demand. Furthermore, Ignacio is a young, inexperienced anthropologist who knows very little about the territory, and yet he is the one chosen to document the “historia del Sáhara!... Desde la prehistoria... hasta nuestros días” (20).¹⁴⁷ His inexperience and lack of knowledge, however, is contrasted with the inexcusable ignorance of those who offer him the job, as he corrects “saharianos” with the correct nomenclature. In addition, the paternalistic use of “los nuevos saharianos” emphasizes a nonchalant dismissal of a people group that has existed for centuries, subtly crediting the Spanish with creating a new national identity. The Saharawi are not offered the opportunity to write their own history. Ignacio is privileged over potential Saharawi authors for his status as a Westerner, despite his uninspiring credentials.

Ignacio must serve as an intermediary, to “translate” the oral history of the Saharawi into a format that is acceptable in Western diplomatic circles, to render it

¹⁴⁶ [It appears that they are firmly decided on giving independence to the territory. You know, because of UN pressure. But they’ve found that there there is not any existing textbook that covers the history of the Sahara. In an independent country they have to study their own history in the schools. And that is what they want you to do. A history of the territory for the new Saharans.]

[Ignacio:] —I believe that they’re called Saharawis.]

¹⁴⁷ [history of the Sahara!... From prehistory... up to our time]

legible to the West. What begins as an educational goal for his project — to create a history textbook for use in independent Saharawi schools — becomes a much higher-stakes game as Morocco and Mauritania threaten invasion and contest the presumed independence of the territory. Ignacio, therefore, becomes an official representative for the Saharawi before the International Court of Justice and the wider, Western diplomatic community. His position as such highlights the fact that the Saharawi of the novel do not have their own voice; they must find help through their (paternalistic) colonizers who will accompany them on the pathway to self-determination. He is charged with documenting and archiving the totality of Saharawi history and warned that “No va a ser fácil su labor. Piense que la imprenta ha sido introducida recientemente en el territorio. Naturalmente, carece de archivos organizados y de bibliotecas. Se ha escrito poco sobre esta zona del desierto” (21).¹⁴⁸ In fact, the West’s mania for official bureaucratic documentation is subtly ridiculed when Ignacio learns during his interview with the current President of the Government that

Lo suyo ya tiene nombre — dijo, sonriente —. Se llamará Comisión Hispano-saharawi de Estudios Históricos... Se trata de una mera fórmula administrativa, no se inquiete. Podrá hacer y deshacer. ¿Quién podría llevarle la contraria?... ¡Vamos a ver! ¡Pregunte, pregunte en todo este edificio quién sabe una sola palabra sobre la historia del territorio! (36)¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ [Your job won’t be easy. Think about the fact that the printed word has only been introduced recently in the territory. Naturally, they lack organized archives and libraries. Little has been written about this zone of the desert.] The printing press and libraries are pillars of Western society; the Saharawis’ lack of either (at least in a form recognizable to Western parties) is therefore a significant example of their cultural difference from the West. For a comparison, see Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, specifically Chapters 2 and 3 (“Cultural Roots” and “The Origins of National Consciousness,” 9-46). Anderson traces the origin of national consciousness to the rise of written scripts, ultimately privileging “signs, not sounds” (13).

¹⁴⁹ [—Your job already has a name — he said, smiling —. It will be called the Hispano-Saharawi Commission of Historical Studies... We’re talking about a mere administrative formula, don’t worry. You can

And his value stems largely from his title:

—Usted no es funcionario, Aguirre. Tiene que tener un nombre. Le hemos nombrado director de la Comisión. De otro modo se perdería para la Administración. Todas estas cosas tienen su importancia. A mil y pico kilómetros de distancia, usted no existiría para nosotros. (36)¹⁵⁰

This admission by the President of the Government offers two important interpretations. First, the Spanish colonial government knows and/or cares very little about the Saharan territory and yet it decides and implements the decolonization process without indigenous input. Second, this passage subtly emphasizes, and perhaps ridicules, the West's obsession with official titles and bureaucracy, suggesting that Ignacio would "cease to exist" if he did not have an official title that secured his continued recognition. In between the lines of this passage is the possibility of a third interpretation: that the Saharawi are not recognized because their societal structures do not conform to legible Western paradigms.

To further emphasize the Saharawi's plight as completely unknown by the West,¹⁵¹ before he leaves for his new job, Ignacio meets with one of his best friends, Jaime Barnet. As students, Jaime and Ignacio had participated in various leftist political groups, with Ignacio eventually falling in love and leaving aside his political actions, while Jaime "se entregó apasionadamente a la política. Su militancia en la Federación

do as you like. Who could stop you?... Let's see! Ask, go ahead and ask in this entire building who could tell you one single word about the history of the territory!]

¹⁵⁰ [—You are not a functionary, Aguirre. You have to have a title. We have named you Director of the Commission. If you didn't have the title, you'd be lost to the Administration. All of these things have their importance. At a thousand and something kilometers of distance, you wouldn't exist for us.]

¹⁵¹ The reason largely being the Spanish *Ley de Secretos Oficiales* that prohibited information about the territory from being reported.

Comunista... se convirtió en su única relación con el mundo exterior” (42).¹⁵² As Ignacio tells Jaime about his new project, Jaime insists that he get in touch with “el Morehob,” the independence movement that Trotsky’s Fourth International supports:

[Jaime:] — Por lo visto, la IV Internacional apoya a un grupo que se llama el Morehob.

[Ignacio:] — ¿Qué significan esas siglas?

— Algo así como Movimiento de los Hombres Azules.

— Es un hermoso nombre.

— Lo dirige un tal Eduardo Moha desde Argel.

— ¿Desde Argel? ¿Son proargelinos? ¿Y la IV Internacional les apoya?

— Bueno, no se trata de camaradas, claro. Están muy lejos de nuestras posiciones. Pero no existe ningún otro grupo organizado en el territorio. Yo supongo que será uno de esos movimientos de liberación nacional un poco vagos y confusos, en los que cabe todo. En eso consiste nuestra oportunidad, precisamente. ¿Comprendes? (43)¹⁵³

Jaime’s “nuestra oportunidad” belies his concern for the Morehob and/or Saharawi. Not only does neither he nor the Fourth International have any information about what the actual situation is in the Spanish Sahara (much less that there already exists an

¹⁵² [he gave himself over passionately to politics. His militance in the Communist Federation... converted into his only relation with the outside world]

¹⁵³ [[Jaime:] — Apparently, the Fourth International supports a group called Morehob.

[Ignacio:] — What does this acronym stand for?

— Something like the Movement of the Blue Men.

— It’s a beautiful name.

— It’s directed by some Eduardo Moha from Algeria.

— From Algeria? Are they pro-Algerian? And the Fourth International supports them?

— Well, we’re not talking about comrades, clearly. They are very far from our positions. But there is not any other organized group in the territory. I suppose that this will be one of those movements for national liberation somewhat vague and confused, that is made up of a little bit of everything. In this is our opportunity, precisely. You understand?]

independence movement, the Polisario), but also the Fourth International hopes to use any potential independence movement for their own ends:

— No podemos dejar pasar la ocasión, Ignacio. ¿No te das cuenta? Si conseguimos organizar un movimiento armado en aquella colonia, tendría un efecto propagandístico, aquí, en España. Dejaríamos de ser un grupo minoritario en el conjunto de las organizaciones de izquierda. Estoy seguro de ello. (43)¹⁵⁴

The selfish interests of Jaime, representative of the Spanish left, together with the paternalism and disinterest of the governing right further emphasize the Saharawi's marginalized position at the mercy of a manipulative West. With this scene, Mayrata sidesteps specific political accusations against the left or right, instead insinuating that neither side is without blame. Ignacio offers a tempered response: "No quiero tomar una decisión hasta saber qué pasa realmente en aquel país" (43).¹⁵⁵ When Jaime questions his loyalty, he opines:

[Jaime:] — Hasta ahora nos has apoyado siempre.

[Ignacio:] — Contra Franco sí.

— ¿No es lo mismo?

Ignacio se encogió de hombros.

— No estoy seguro de ello. Además, vuestras teorías, vuestras diferencias con los otros partidos te juro que me traen al fresco. He colaborado con

¹⁵⁴ [We can't let the occasion escape, Ignacio. Don't you realize? If we are able to organize an armed movement in that colony, it would have a propagandistic effect, here, in Spain. We would no longer be a minority group in the group of leftist organizations. I am sure of it.]

¹⁵⁵ [I don't want to make any decision until I know what's really going on in that country.]

vosotros porque os enfrentáis al régimen de Franco. Pero ni siquiera estoy seguro de que el vuestro sea el mejor modo de hacerlo. (44)¹⁵⁶

At the root of both Jaime's and the Spanish government's motives is the idea that "The Oriental [The Saharawi] is irrational, ... childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (Said 40). Mayrata subtly recognizes the cultural discourse that privileges the West over its Other, regardless of political orientation.

Said's articulation further contributes to this consideration, complementing Scott's idea of *legibility*:

the way of enlivening the relationship [between the West and the Orient] was everywhere to stress the fact that the Oriental lived in a different but thoroughly organized world of his own, a world with its own national, cultural, and epistemological boundaries and principles of internal coherence. Yet what gave the Oriental's world its intelligibility and identity was not the result of his own efforts but rather the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West. (Said 40)

In the case of the Saharawi and the Spanish Sahara, there is very little knowledge that the Spanish colonizers have gathered (or cared to gather). At the moment when this knowledge of the Saharawi Other is needed, Ignacio is contracted to gather the information and render it intelligible/legible. What before was simple indifference is now

¹⁵⁶ [[Jaime:] — Up to now you've always supported us.

[Ignacio:] — Against Franco, yes.

— Isn't this the same?

Ignacio shrugged his shoulders.

I'm not sure about it. Also, your theories, your differences from the other parties, I swear they don't interest me that much. I have collaborated with you all because you stood up to Franco's regime. But I'm not even sure that your way is the best way to do so.]

shown to be also extremely paternalistic. And the Saharawi are never offered the opportunity to speak directly for themselves, their voice must be “*contained and represented* by dominating frameworks” (Said 40), i.e. the voice of the naïve Western anthropologist, Ignacio Aguirre.

To Ignacio’s and Mayrata’s credit, though, Ignacio is not only sympathetic to the Saharawi cause, but also values the differences between Western and Saharawi conceptions of knowledge and history. He finds comparisons between Spain and the Saharawi without waxing nostalgic. At the start of his career as an anthropologist, before the Sahara offer, he reflects: “Para un antropólogo, España era un país tentador. Aún podía apreciarse formas de vida ancestrales, reducidas al recuerdo en el resto de Europa” (13).¹⁵⁷ He deeply values the oral tradition that is not only a Saharawi characteristic, but one in which his grandmother took part. He used to read French novels to her:

Generalmente se trataba de novelas francesas que se sabía prácticamente de memoria pero que agradecía escuchar en otros labios, como si el sonido de una voz distinta les otorgara nuevo interés y emoción. Luego repetía lentamente las palabras que acababa de oír y las depositaba en lo que sin duda constituía su mayor tesoro: la memoria. (34)¹⁵⁸

The written word, the written history, is shown to be the valued and legible documentation format in the contemporary West. Ignacio’s memories of his grandmother and his reasons for becoming an anthropologist emphasize that the value placed on oral

¹⁵⁷ [For an anthropologist, Spain was a tempting country. You could still see ancestral forms of living, ones that were reduced to memory in the rest of Europe.]

¹⁵⁸ [Generally it was French novels that she practically knew from memory but that she appreciated hearing on other lips, as if the sound of a distinct voice gave them new interest and emotion. Then she would slowly repeat the words that she had just heard and she deposited them in what was without doubt her greatest treasure: her memory.]

history within Spain has diminished in recent history. Memory is not valued as a legitimate or a legible documentation source for international mediation purposes.¹⁵⁹ The memories of Ignacio's grandmother are alluded to when the Saharawi Lieutenant Mohamed Fadel introduces him to the other indigenous guards:

—¡Soldados del Sáhara! Este hombre que veis aquí ha venido a escribir nuestra historia. La de los hombres del fusil y la de las gentes de libros. La de la sangre hirviente de los brazos y la de la sangre calma de los corazones. Nosotros la conocemos, *porque la hemos escuchado de los labios de nuestros padres y abuelos*. Pero hay muchas gentes que no saben quiénes son los saharauis, cómo han vivido hasta ahora y las cosas que han hecho. Esas gentes nos desdeñan a causa de su historia. Cuando él escriba la verdad, *el susurro de la voz de nuestros mayores* se extenderá por el mundo como el viento y nadie pondrá en duda que hemos de ser un pueblo independiente... (Emphasis mine, 69-70)¹⁶⁰

Ignacio shares an appreciation for the oral tradition from his own grandmother. Implicit in this excerpt is also his forthcoming documentation of that tradition: “Cuando él *escriba*

¹⁵⁹ The West's obsession with the written word as more valued than the spoken word has been theorized extensively. Derrida's “Plato's Pharmacy” (1981) and *Of Grammatology* (1976) being two of the most often referenced. Walter Ong, in *Orality and Literacy* (1982), suggests that, at the very least, “writing from the beginning did not reduce orality but enhanced it, making it possible to organize ‘principles’ or constituents of oratory into a scientific ‘art,’ a sequentially ordered body of explanation that showed how and why oratory achieved and could be made to achieve its various specific effects” (9). That is, the written word is at minimum a marked improvement upon the purely oral communicative format.

¹⁶⁰ [Soldiers of the Sahara! This man that you see here has come to write our history. The history of the men of guns and the history of the people of books. The history of the boiling blood of the arms and the history of the calm blood of the hearts. We know this history, *because we have heard it on the lips of our fathers and our grandfathers*. But there are many peoples that do not know who the Saharawi are, how they have lived up to now and the things they have done. These peoples have disdain for us because of their history. When he writes the truth, *the whisper of the voice of our ancestors* will extend throughout the world like the wind and no one will doubt that we must be an independent nation...]

la verdad.” (emphasis mine)¹⁶¹ Mohamed Fadel views Ignacio’s future transcription of the oral history as one that will allow it to be understood and appreciated beyond the territory’s borders, a transcribed version that will be acceptable for the West’s logocentric favoring of the written over the oral. Fadel believes that Ignacio’s written history of the Saharawi has the potential to accurately transcribe and reflect the literal voice of the Saharawi ancestors. While this documentary format is not traditionally valued by the Saharawi, Fadel recognizes that they must employ the written word to express the value of their oral history to the West.

Ignacio quickly proves himself able to manipulate written language in an effective manner. When Ignacio first arrives in the Spanish Sahara and immediately after Mohamed Fadel’s introduction, the commanding secretary general Fernández-Hoz gives him twenty-four hours to prepare an initial draft that will convince him that Ignacio is the appropriate person for the job. As Ignacio struggles with his approach, he chooses to employ poetic imagery over scientific jargon, relying on the affective power of his text to convince, “más que un sumario, sonaba como un apasionado poema” (85).¹⁶² He gives the draft to the secretary general and later attends a meeting where Fernández-Hoz addresses members of the Saharawi elders and Spanish administrators. Ignacio is surprised to discover that the secretary general’s passionate speech “empleaba literalmente párrafos enteros del escrito que le había entregado unas horas antes” (88).¹⁶³ It is this experience that also confirms for him the power that the written word can have to influence, and it is his blending of oral descriptions with scientific documentation that allows him to achieve this effect.

¹⁶¹ [When he *writes* the truth.]

¹⁶² [more than a summary, it sounded like a passionate poem.]

¹⁶³ [used literally entire paragraphs from the writing that he had given to him earlier.]

Conversely, the power of the written word is also clearly understood and valued by the Saharawi; Fadel emphasizes that “el saharauí venera las palabras y les concede mayor valor que a los objetos más preciados” (70).¹⁶⁴ This is specifically evident in the case of the political prisoner Basiri, captured by the Spanish and whose current presence or status is unknown. Basiri was the original founder of the Frente Polisario; he was detained four years earlier – in 1970 – by the Spanish legion and no one knows where he is kept or if he is still alive. However, his memory continues to live and inspire, not only through his previous actions, but also through a scrap of paper, written in blue pen and somehow smuggled out of his prison, that represents his “último testimonio” (172).¹⁶⁵ He effectively continues to live through his words, adding example to the affirmation by Buhe – one of Ignacio’s collaborators – that “Los manuscritos de los hombres eminentes y sabios tenían para los saharauis un valor casi sagrado, pues conservaban la *baraka*, la impronta del poder de quien los escribió” (172).¹⁶⁶ Even though Basiri never appears as a physical presence in the narrative, he is a spectral character that forms an essential part of the plot through the power of his written word.

Ultimately, the Saharawi are presented as flexible and capable individuals who value their oral tradition but understand the need to cater to the Western values of documentation. It is the West that is unable to understand the African Other or cultural values and conceptualizations that differ from the Western paradigm. While this could be interpreted as Europe articulating the Orient (Said 57), forcing the African Other to conform to standards and practices that are defined by the West, Mayrata instead presents

¹⁶⁴ [the Saharawi venerates words and gives them more value than any other precious object.]

¹⁶⁵ [last testament]

¹⁶⁶ [The manuscripts of the eminent and wise men had for the Saharawi an almost sacred value, because they conserved the *baraka*, the stamp of the power of those who wrote it.]

the Saharawi as recognizing the differences and making concessions for official recognition but not abandoning the qualities and traditions that distinguish them. Mayrata's presentation of the Saharawi is a nuanced one; it recognizes the power of Orientalism as a dominant paradigm, yet suggests that the Saharawi collaborate but do not compromise with the West in its strict conceptions of what is considered "official documentation." Mayrata's text does, however, emphasize the West's overbearing paternalism and disenfranchisement of the Other.

As Mayrata outlines the West's attempts to speak for the Saharawi and the concomitant paternalism of the West for its colonized Other, he simultaneously makes an effort not to exoticize or idolize/idealize his portrayal of the Saharawi. Even though, at times, the prose waxes poetic about the exotic attraction of the desert ("El desierto es otro planeta," 305¹⁶⁷), Mayrata makes specific efforts to humanize the Saharawi as well as to admit the West's difficulty in understanding and speaking for its Other.

The cruelty of colonialism is an obvious component of the Spanish control of the territory. The text alludes to the Legionnaire's massacre of a group of Saharawi on the 17th of July, 1970—the protest that led to the detention of Basiri. Comandante García Ramos, of the Territorial Police, is also a ruthless figure in his control of the city. Ignacio is, in fact, kidnapped by García Ramos and his men in the Canary Islands, and he is brutally tortured and detained. However, the Saharawi independence movement is not without its own brutality. Mayrata avoids the facile trap of idealizing their fight by showing that even sympathetic characters such as Ignacio's collaborator, Buhe, can be as cruel as the malevolent García Ramos, or even more so. At one point, Ignacio is clandestinely taken to meet with Buhe and other members of the Polisario. In a gruesome

¹⁶⁷ [The desert is another planet.]

description, Buhe and the other Polisario members show Ignacio the severed head of Mahayub, another of Ignacio's collaborators and also an agent of the Moroccan crown who had recently detonated a bomb in Laayoune. The cold stoicism of Buhe and his comrades stuns Ignacio. He finds that his friends are capable of atrocities that he did not expect, and that now Buhe expresses himself "como un militar" (237).¹⁶⁸ This acknowledgement by Ignacio does shift the discourse from one of clashing cultures to one of confronting armies,¹⁶⁹ but it also emphasizes shared human characteristics between the West and its Other, albeit ruthless ones.

As for the West's difficulty in understanding and speaking for its Other, Mayrata first suggests this in a comical narration that comes in a letter from Manuela, Ignacio's girlfriend at the beginning of the novel. Manuela is studying anthropology in London and attends a conference. She narrates:

Por fin, a las 8.15 se convocó la anunciada conferencia. El público era la flor y nata de la antropología británica. Me chocaron sus atuendos multicolores entre los que menudeaban las barretinas catalanas, las chilabas, los peinados estilo Nefertiti, los ponchos andinos, las guayaberas, los aros en la nariz, la *henna*, los turbantes. Tan variopintos ropajes contrastaban con el sorbio traje gris y la corbata roja del conferenciante, un profesor de antropología ugandés, de raza negra, que

¹⁶⁸ [like a soldier]

¹⁶⁹ See the first section of this chapter on *El nombre de los nuestros* for an examination of the difference between the Other and the enemy.

había llegado puntualmente [a las 4:30] pero al que habían mantenido amordazado hasta esa hora. (46)¹⁷⁰

In their attempt to represent their studied Other, these anthropologists overcompensate. With this comical description, Mayrata subtly erodes the monolithic and the discursive power of the West's attempts to speak for the Other, effectively undermining Orientalism as a field of study. Manuela does conclude her letter by admitting "N.B.: Indudablemente exagero. Pero sé que a ti te gustan las exageraciones" (47).¹⁷¹ This final addition not only admits the hyperbolic nature of her earlier narration, but also subtly offers a meta-narrative consideration. What is implied is that narrative exaggerations are often employed for their affective power with the reader. Ultimately, the *nota bene* (N.B.) admits the subjective quality of any text or attempt at representation.

Mayrata also tempers the occasional romantic tendencies of Ignacio by contrasting him with his friend Jaime. When Ignacio returns to Madrid to present his work to the government officials, he engages in a lengthy conversation with Jaime. Jaime is brutal in his pragmatism, suggesting that the Saharan territory should be handed over to Morocco for control because it contains few resources that would allow it to be a viable independent nation. In his counter-argument, Ignacio is less reasonable and relies more on eloquent and poetic opinions ("¿Cómo lograría explicártelo? Tú sabes que un paisaje es un marco histórico" 304,¹⁷² "Los saharauis son un milagro" 305¹⁷³). Jaime warns

¹⁷⁰ [Finally, at 8:15 they began the announced conference. The public was the cream of the crop of British anthropology. Their multicolor outfits shocked me and among those that wandered about were Catalan barretinas, chilabas, Nefertiti styled hairdos, Andean ponchos, guayaberas, rings in the nose, *henna*, turbans. Such varied outfits contrasted with the sober grey suit and the red tie of the speaker, a Ugandan professor of Anthropology, a black man, who had arrived punctually [at 4:30] but who had been kept silent up until this hour.]

¹⁷¹ [N.B.: Indubitably I exaggerate. But I know that you like exaggerations.]

¹⁷² [How could I explain it to you? You know that a landscape is a historical framework...]

¹⁷³ [The Saharawi are a miracle.]

Ignacio not to idealize the Saharawi (305), and the ultimate effect of their back and forth is one that suggests that Ignacio may be too singular in his portrayal of the Saharawi, but Jaime is too general in his. This contrast emphasizes the difficulty of objective narration, admitting the possible faults of a Western author attempting to represent his African Other, while the text is literally about a Westerner writing the history of his African Other. The salient phrase that seeks to overcome the limitations of a textual representation comes from Ignacio: “Sólo cuando consigues entrar en relación con sus habitantes, el desierto deja de ser un paraje inhóspito, inhumano, para convertirse en la tierra de unos hombres que gracias a una cultura adecuada lo han hecho milagrosamente habitable” (305).¹⁷⁴ Ignacio emphasizes the importance of the face-to-face encounter and the personal exchange between individuals that can contribute to understanding the Other, in this, Ignacio seems to be offering the same advice as doña Natalia in *La llamada del Almuédano*. In this, the novel aligns with Kapuściński’s assertion that “an encounter with Others is not a simple, automatic thing, but involves will and an effort that not everyone is always ready to undertake” (31). The Other may be different, but that difference should not serve as an impediment to mutual appreciation.

As a final point, Mayrata emphasizes the cultural differences that disadvantage the Saharawi in a world that operates within the Western paradigm. Ignacio’s position as a translator, as one who will render legible the Saharawi Other to the West has been examined above. The Saharawi preference for the oral tradition over the written one also marginalizes their voice on the international stage. In addition, the very idea of what constitutes a society, a state, is conceptually different for the Saharawi. I refer specifically

¹⁷⁴ [Only when you are able to enter into a relationship with its inhabitants, does the desert stop being an inhospitable, inhuman place, and converts into the land of some men who, thanks to an adequate culture, have made it miraculously habitable.]

to infrastructure (or lack thereof). If the state “has always seemed to be the enemy of ‘people who move around’” (Scott 1), what does a state of indigenous nomads look like? The text suggests that the infrastructure present in the Spanish Sahara is of almost purely colonial construction as Ignacio’s friend, the German archeologist Dr. Koller, explains to him that:

En el desierto, las ciudades son aún más inverosímiles. En la zona sahariana dominada por sus compatriotas jamás se levantó ciudad alguna. Con la excepción de Smara. Y ese sueño tuvo que aguardar hasta el siglo XIX para convertirse en realidad. Las ciudades actuales son una creación colonial. Casi un espejismo. Una ilusión sostenida por la metrópoli. (63)¹⁷⁵

However, Dr. Koller does not deny that the Saharawi have their own conceptualization of “organization,” it is merely one that does not adhere to the Western paradigm:

Me refiero también al hecho de que fuera siempre un territorio sin Estado, aunque eso no quiere decir que no poseyera su propia forma de organización. Pero para un europeo, la ausencia de rastros del Estado provoca un sentimiento de extrañeza y desamparo mucho más vivo que la ausencia de vegetación. (78)¹⁷⁶

In addition, one of Ignacio’s research team members, Ma el Ainin, explains to him the Saharawi conceptualization of an “Estado errante”¹⁷⁷ where sedentary settlements are

¹⁷⁵ [In the desert, the cities are even more implausible. In the Saharan zone, dominated by your compatriots there has never been a city raised. With the exception of Smara. And this dream had to wait until the nineteenth century to become a reality. The cities are actually a colonial creation. Almost a mirage. An illusion sustained by the motherland.]

¹⁷⁶ [I refer also to the fact that it was always a territory without a State, even though that’s not to say that it did not possess its own form of organization. But for a European, the absence of signs of the State provokes a sentiment of strangeness and neglect much more acute than that of the absence of vegetation.]

¹⁷⁷ [wandering State]

only “la túnica de piedra con la que cubrir un cuerpo que ya existía” (109).¹⁷⁸ In these passages, and in his presentation of the Saharawi Other, Mayrata suggests that the cultural and geographical differences that mark the Saharawi also disadvantage them on the world stage. By implication, the Western models of state infrastructure and organization exclude other historical varieties that should be just as valid, if not more so because they have an earlier historical precedence. Mayrata’s text attempts to give voice to this very different Other, at times also questioning his own authority to do so. This self-reflexive process admits its own flaws and values the differences of the Other it attempts to represent, forcefully rejecting facile stereotypes or Orientalist discourse.

The dreams of the Saharawi are ultimately deferred as Hassan II of Morocco organizes the Green March and effective takeover of the territory while the Spanish simultaneously abandon the Saharawi to fate. In the text and in history, many Saharawi fled to the refugee camps in Algeria to continue their fight for recognition, a fight which continues to this day – over thirty years later. In their final encounter, as Buhe prepares to depart for Algeria, he says to Ignacio: “A partir de ahora viviremos en el desierto, como culebras. Creo que nunca olvidaré el tiempo que pasamos juntos, cuando los saharauis aún podíamos soñar con comportarnos como seres humanos” (360).¹⁷⁹ This emotional parting line expresses two powerful ideas; first, that the international community’s (and specifically Spain’s) abandonment of the Saharawi has dehumanized them as a people, which serves as a strong condemnation of the colonial paradigm. Secondly, it serves as a reminder that, even though cultural differences abound, there is a common humanity that

¹⁷⁸ [the stone tunic with which to cover a body that already existed.]

¹⁷⁹ [From this moment on we will live in the desert, like snakes. I think that I will never forget the time that we spent together, when we the Saharawi could still dream about behaving like human beings.]

should not be ignored — the Saharawi have been dehumanized by the international community, but they are not essentially different and deserve justice.

Ramón Mayrata's *El imperio desierto* attempts to write the Saharawi Other in ways that consciously subvert Orientalist discourse. He values the difference of his African Other, humanizes this Other, but ultimately also erodes his own ability to objectively represent this Other. The narrative humility of Mayrata attests to an attempt not to privilege the West over its African Other, but neither does he fall into the trap of over-idealizing the African Other. Instead it hopes to achieve a vision of coexisting, equally valued differences, and in this sense is a powerful counter-Orientalist work of fiction.

El imperio desierto contributes to the analyses of *El nombre de los nuestros* and *La llamada del Almuédano* by examining the West's diplomatic engagement with the African Other. Mayrata's vision of this engagement is of the limited paternalistic understanding that Western bureaucracy has for systems and paradigms that differ in form or conceptualization. The Saharawi are effectively doomed to statelessness because of their difference. As Mayrata engages with this injustice, he actively writes against Oriental discourses of Western superiority by emphasizing the validity of differing cultural ideologies. Ultimately, the Spanish anthropologist or the Saharawi freedom fighter are individual humans, with hopes and flaws, who are forced to navigate the bureaucratic realm of international diplomacy. Mayrata's novel effectively valorizes the Saharawi and their fight for independence, while simultaneously admitting the pitfalls that face a Western author attempting to speak for his African Other. In this lies the counter-Orientalist power and value of this work.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has attempted to highlight how specific narrative context has the potential to nuance the literary representation of the Other. The specific contexts of war, colonization, and diplomacy offer dynamically unique settings upon which Spanish protagonists confront, coexist with, and interact with their African Others. As Silva, López Sarasúa, and Mayrata each return to a historic moment of Hispano-African interaction from the twentieth century, we are invited to analyze how these contemporary authors view and interpret Spain's involvement with the African continent.

Silva's war setting highlights the important distinctions between an enemy and an Other, while also reframing the conceptualization of a totemic Same into differences constructed upon socio-economic status. His work suggests that money, capital, and economic interests are the true divisions among humans, and he discounts an essentialist division based on race or culture. The context of war serves to criticize Spain's exploitation of the economically marginalized in order to wage a campaign that benefits the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the poor. The very idea of war as predicated on opposing sides in confrontation, "us" versus "them" and Same against Other, is subverted and reconstructed into a new conceptualization of who are Same and who are Other.¹⁸⁰

Silva's work does not abandon the discourse of difference that is the basis of Orientalism, but the target is reassessed. The assumed cultural hierarchy of the West over its African Other is shown to be an essentialized and limiting view; the West holds no

¹⁸⁰ For those who are more visual thinkers, if I were an artist I would illustrate this as two opposing sides of Same and Other separated by a parallel line that marks the divide. Silva's novel takes this dividing line and repositions it along the perpendicular, bisecting the previously intact sides and highlighting the differences internal to each, but also universal between each.

position of privilege or distinction in Silva's view. In this sense, it is a powerful rejection of the tradition of Orientalism, even while employing some of the same structures of thought that enable its ideological contestant. Therefore, war perhaps serves to undermine and reassess conventional discourse about difference, but at the same time it continues to perpetuate dichotomies of difference, merely reified in novel fashions.

López Sarasúa's colonial setting also serves to deemphasize lines of difference as based upon nationality, and to reestablish them along broader, more empathetic lines. For her protagonists, national identity is complicated by affection for a geographically Other territory. As the narrative also emphasizes the common humanity shared between Spaniard and North African, so it invokes the shared history of the two contemporary Others, a history which spans both sides of the Strait. Unlike Silva, López Sarasúa avoids the discourse of difference in her reconceptualization of identity, instead focusing on similarity, interaction, and coexistence. When characters employ rhetoric of Same versus Other, there is often a responding voice that inserts a qualifying phrase undermining the veracity of the first assertion. Therefore, not only does López Sarasúa's novel avoid and actively counter Orientalist discourse, but it also eschews the very discursive structure upon which Orientalism depends. The peaceful, quotidian qualities of the colonial context allow López Sarasúa to focus on interaction and coexistence rather than confrontation and contrast.

Mayrata's novel does not attempt to deny difference—the very context of diplomatic engagement implies it—the question is therefore how to find acceptable reconciliation between the differing parties. *El imperio desierto* examines some of the pitfalls of the West's treatment of its African Other, as the West attempts to speak for and

comprehend an Other that does not conform to Western ideas of legibility and identity. Mayrata is very cautious as he treads a line narrating the cultural difference of the Saharawi without either idealizing the African Other, or discounting its value. Most significantly, where Silva employs the binary structure of Orientalist reasoning as a weapon of critique (refocused on a social Other), Mayrata accepts the binary structure as a given and seeks to find a way for Same and Other to coexist and communicate.

Silva, López Sarasúa, and Mayrata each articulate Spain's interaction with its African Other through distinct strategies. I have argued in this chapter that each of these authors is actively writing against the prejudicial tradition of Orientalist discourse, and yet the variety represented in these three authors shows that there is not a singular, consolidated approach being employed by contemporary Spanish authors to dismantle Orientalism. Rather, this analysis signals the multidirectional approach that authors are employing to challenge the legacy of Orientalism.

CHAPTER THREE.

THE OTHER AS MIRAGE: GENDERED AND EROTICIZED PORTRAYALS OF THE OTHER

In *Diario de un testigo de la Guerra de África* (1856), Pedro Antonio de Alarcón describes his arrival on the coast of Ceuta by invoking the mythological characterization of Africa:

La Mitología, siempre reveladora, nos la representa en una mujer bizarra, de porte oriental, casi desnuda, sentada sobre un elefante (símbolo de sus interminables desiertos), teniendo en una mano el cuerno de la abundancia, como recordando su vivaz y opulenta vegetación, y un escorpión en la otra, para significar que en ella todos los dones de la Naturaleza, lejos de producir la vida, dan la muerte, y que su aire, su tierra, su agua, su sol y sus habitantes, todo es nocivo, espantable y ponzoñoso—. . . . en ella reside lo nuevo, lo temeroso, lo extraño, lo desconocido. (11)¹⁸¹

As noted in the Introduction, he goes on to paraphrase the Roman general Scipio Africanus by declaring: “al asentar mi planta en esta parte del Mundo... no puedo menos de doblar la rodilla, poniendo el pensamiento en mi Dios y en mi madre patria, y exclamar... —*¡África, ya eres mía!*” (11).¹⁸² Alarcón’s passionate descriptions gender an entire continent, reducing it to a discursive construct that is emphatically possessed by the Westerner.

¹⁸¹ [Mythology, always revealing, has represented Africa for us as a strikingly beautiful woman, of Oriental demeanor, almost nude, seated on an elephant (symbol of her unending deserts), holding in one hand the cornucopia, to remind us of her bright and opulent vegetation, and a scorpion in the other, to signify that in her all of the gifts of Nature, rather than producing life, give death, and that her air, her land, her water, her sun, and her inhabitants, all is harmful, frightening, and venomous—. . . . in her resides the new, the fearful, the strange, the unknown.]

¹⁸² [upon planting my foot on this part of the world... I could do nothing less than bend my knee, putting my thoughts to my God and my motherland, and exclaim... —*Africa, now you are mine!*]

As Alarcón makes of Africa a fevered, female subject that is desired and possessed by the Western male, likewise do many of the paintings of Mariano Fortuny i Marsal¹⁸³ — such as the “Odalisque” (1861) — sexualize the Oriental woman, splaying the nude female body in lush tones for a Western audience.¹⁸⁴ The image of the Odalisque is conflated with that of Africa as the two express “lo nuevo, lo temeroso, lo extraño, lo desconocido.”¹⁸⁵ Throughout Spanish letters, Africa has served as a gendered Other and its inhabitants eroticized. Spanish colonialism operated under the impetus of glory for the “patria” — the fatherland — while Africa was virgin territory to be conquered and ravished. The West effectively stands before “the entire Orient... prone, like a lounging odalisque,” prepared for a colonial “penetration” (Varisco 55). This image of the reclining Odalisque as well as Jean-Léon Gérôme’s *The Snake Charmer* which graces the cover of the first edition of Said’s theoretical work clearly reflect the “stark thesis of *Orientalism*... replicated in... image” (Varisco 25).

The blatant Orientalism of Alarcón and Fortuny has persisted in differing levels of force since the first War of Africa. Indeed, the seductive and sensual “morita”¹⁸⁶ is such a recurring figure in the works by authors from the two African Wars, that it can almost be considered an exception to encounter a work that does not have a young and beautiful

¹⁸³ Marià Fortuny i Marsal (1838-1874) was a Spanish painter whose work was both largely Romantic and Orientalist in composition. In the first War of Africa he was charged with painting the Spanish campaigns in Morocco. For more information, see Thompson and Scott’s work *The East Imagined, Experienced, Remembered: Orientalist Nineteenth Century Paintings* (1988).

¹⁸⁴ In *Disorientations*, Martin-Márquez suggests that the composition of Fortuny’s odalisque paintings “serves to entrap and immobilized the imperialist viewer. Thus, Fortuny’s odalisques consistently function to destabilize the racialized and gendered power structures that were so essential to Orientalist works of the period” (371). While this dynamic may be true, Fortuny does deliberately employ the trope of Oriental sensuality as a marketable quality for a Western audience.

¹⁸⁵ [the new, the fearful, the strange, the unknown]

¹⁸⁶ “morita” is the diminutive for “mora,” a female “moor.”

“Aixa”¹⁸⁷ whose gaze intrigues and whose innocence seduces the young Spanish soldier.

In *El blocao* (1928), José Díaz Fernández describes his Aixa as

Indecisa y trémula, filtrándose como un poco de luz por el verde tabique de los rosales. Si Aixa fuera una muchacha europea me recordaría como un tonto; tan acobardado, inexpresivo e inmóvil me figuro a mí mismo en aquel momento. Tuve la gran suerte de que Aixa no fuese una señorita de la buena sociedad, acostumbrada a medir la timidez de sus pretendientes, sino una morita de apenas quince años... Estaba sin velos y era como una chuchería recién comprada a la que acababan de quitar la envoltura de papel de seda. Morena. Pero una morenez de melocotón no muy maduro, con esa pelusa que hace la piel de la fruta tan parecida a piel de mujer.

(24-25)¹⁸⁸

Díaz Fernández’s Aixa is clearly Other and his narrator notes that this Otherness offers him a chance to escape the timidity that normally would plague him in front of a Western female. The trope of the veil attempts to represent her as she is, but instead reveals more about the Western narrator mesmerized by her dark and fruit-like skin. Both Aixa and Africa seduce and are seduced by the Western author, and these are tropes that continue to play out in contemporary Spanish literature.

¹⁸⁷ Aixa is a common Muslim name. Aisha bint Abu Bakr (612-678) was one of Muhammed’s wives. It is also often transcribed as A’ishah, Aisyah, Ayesha, A’isha, Aishat, Aishah, or Aisha (“Aisha bin Abu Bakr”).

¹⁸⁸ [Indecisive and trembling, filtering herself like a bit of light through the green wall of rosebushes. If Aixa were a European girl, she would remember me as an idiot; so cowardly, inexpressive and immobile I imagine myself in that moment. I had the great luck that Aixa was not a little girl from high society, accustomed to weighing the timidity of her suitors, rather a *morita* of barely 15 years... She was unveiled and was like a recently bought sweet that had just been unwrapped from its silk paper. Dark. But the darkness of a peach that is not very ripe, with the soft fuzz that makes the skin of the fruit so similar to that of a woman.]

This chapter examines contemporary representations of the Other that are explicitly or subtly gendered or eroticized. While Chapter Two focused on how methods of engagement affect literary representation, here I examine the broader implications that an eroticized literary representation suggests, and in so doing I essentially invert my point of critical observation as I continue to examine how the Orientalist tendency is reflected, maintained or rejected in the Spanish novel. This combined process of examination will contribute to a more complete analysis of the portrayal of Africa in the contemporary Spanish novel.

In the Western tradition, Western culture has been valued over any Other, and this assumed authority has lent itself (completely) to the colonizing mission. One of the relationships that must be considered in this study is how positions of cultural or political superiority and authority have shifted in their literary representations. If there has indeed been a shift in this assumption in the contemporary Spanish novel, then this would be a valuable indication of the need to reevaluate theories of Orientalism to see if they can be applied to the new novel on Africa. An essential component of my analysis of the valorization of the Other will be investigating specifically gendered portrayals of the African Other in this chapter. I do this by examining three works, María Dueñas' 2009 *El tiempo entre costuras*, Fernando Gamboa's 2008 *Guinea*, and Montserrat Abumalham's 2001 *¿Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?* Each of these novels contributes a specific angle to the discussion of gender and Africa. Dueñas' novel relies on the romantic idea of Africa as a land of opportunity where a young Spanish woman can rebuild her life; Gamboa's work contains a highly eroticized African male that seduces a Spanish woman, and Abumalham's epistolary novel gives voice to the literary, Oriental archetype of

Shahrazad. While Gamboa's work is the most explicitly erotic of the three, Dueñas' narrative implies the seductive qualities that Africa is able to confer upon her protagonist and Abumalham draws on the narrative seduction of the historical, literary archetype of Shahrazad.

These authors represent a variety of viewpoints and approaches to the question and representation of a gendered Africa and its ability to seduce. Dueñas' protagonist benefits from the romantic qualities that experience in Africa provide to her. Gamboa's work offers an opportunity to examine the hyper-sexualization of the African male. Abumalham, as a female Hispano-Maghrebi author, contributes an Other voice as she draws on Oriental literary traditions and merges them with Spanish ones, creating a work in Spanish with an Othered narrator who seduces through the epistolary genre. They also represent a range of style and target audience. *El tiempo entre costuras* was a runaway best-seller and along with *Guinea* these novels are both action-adventure works. The representation of Africa and the African in these novels is a significant element for their commercial success.¹⁸⁹ *¿Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?* is a short epistolary novel, more philosophical in its prose than the gripping page-turners of Dueñas and Gamboa.

In the section on *El tiempo entre costuras*, I examine the use of Africa as a land of possibility, liberating a young Spanish woman to recreate her life and identity. Africa contributes both cultural and erotic capital to Sira Quiroga as she is literally turned into Arish Agoriuq, International Spy. My consideration of *Guinea* focuses on the Spanish Blanca Idoia's relationship with the Guinean Gabriel Biné as she falls in love with him, and later learns that he is a figment of her imagination. Gamboa's text manipulates the creation of the erotic, male African Other as potential fantasy. The final section of this

¹⁸⁹ See the beginning of the specific sections on these works for a brief summary of their editorial success.

chapter, examining *¿Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?*, analyzes the way Abumalham writes this culturally Other voice in ways that circumvent Orientalist discursive tendencies.

As noted above in the poetic prose of Alarcón, Africa has long been gendered and eroticized in the Western imagination.¹⁹⁰ In *Travel As Metaphor*, Van den Abbeele astutely elaborates that there has traditionally been a “phallogentrism whereby the ‘law of the home’ (*oikonomia*) organizes a set of gender determinations.” The same gender determinations that perpetuate perceived hierarchies of male privilege are repeated geographically to render Africa analogous to the marginalized female. Africa has so often been portrayed as “‘virgin’ territories to be conquered, ‘dark continents’ to be explored” (Abbeele xxv), imbuing the continent with gender-laden metaphors. These gendered representations of place highlight underlying conceptions of Same and Other while strengthening paradigms of Western, male power.

The metaphorical gendering of the African geography contributes to the concomitant eroticization of the African. The odalisque, the morita, the harem, and the virile African male are often deeply embedded with sensual connotations in the Western literary tradition. Alarcón, Fortuny i Marsal, and Díaz Fernández represent just a few of the Western artists that relied on these tropes in their work. Fatima Mernissi’s book *Scheherazade goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (2001) examines in detail the West’s fascination with the sensual possibilities of an erotic Other, writing that the emblematic Scheherazade achieved “what the Muslims who had fought the Crusaders failed to do: She ravished the Christians... The translations [of *The Thousand and One Nights*] opened up the gates to an Orient where sexuality was boldly explored” (61-64).

¹⁹⁰ See Reina Lewis *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity, and Representation* (1996) or Barbara Hodgson *Dreaming of East: Western Women and the Exotic Allure of the Orient* (2005) for works dealing with gender and the Orient.

Contemporary authors are not immune to the temptation to hyper-sexualize Africa and the African, and even when not blatant, there often persists a reliance on tired erotic tropes of the continent and its inhabitants.

The effect of this gendering is most often to perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes and the subtle assumption of Western (and masculine) dominance. These tropes prove difficult to dislodge and continue to survive in contemporary Spanish letters. They may be more subtle or nuanced, but Africa and the African are still heavily gendered and eroticized in many works, including some of the ones under consideration here. These sexually powerful stereotypes do have the potential to undermine Orientalist discourse, and by examining the ways in which Dueñas, Gamboa, and Abumalham narrate questions of gender and alterity we can find the nexus between the writing of gender and the status of Orientalist discourse in the contemporary Spanish novel.

Juan Goytisolo uses Africa as an eroticized and liberated Other from which to criticize Spanish sexual and political conservatism. For Goytisolo, the eroticization of the African Other serves as a controversial juxtaposition to an impotent and deflated Spanish virility. This contentious provocation is being replaced by new gendered representations in the contemporary Spanish novel. Each of the authors examined in this chapter represents a unique take on Africa and the African Other that implicates questions of gender and alterity. For Dueñas' Sira Quiroga, Africa literally offers her cultural and seductive capital that allow her to recreate her life. Gamboa's Blanca Idoia creates a fevered romance with an idealized African man. And Abumalham's Shahrazad is an Othered voice that speaks with poetry and strength, but avoids totalizing discourse or ultimate authority.

As is examined in other chapters in this study, authors as distinct as Javier Reverte and Donato Ndongo — as well as the three authors of this chapter — are writing Africa in ways that differ from the project of Goytisolo, Alarcón, or Fortuny. Transcultural gender interactions reflect changing social and moral mores; portrayals of interracial marriage and LGBT relationships have distinct functions in the contemporary novel from Goytisolo's provocative manifestos, and the image of Africa as a reclining Odalisque is being reimagined in fascinating ways. Ultimately, in this chapter I analyze how gendered portrayals of the Other have contributed to Orientalist stereotypes, or been used to overturn them, and how the contemporary Spanish authors are employing such gendered portrayals with new motives. The ultimate question will be: Do these new representations perpetuate gendered conceptualizations of the Other that maintain Western prominence or do new erotic portrayals of the Other serve distinct functions in the contemporary novel that potentially overturn the traditions of Orientalist discourse on Africa? Unfortunately, the answers are not all emancipating; it appears that gendering Africa and eroticizing the African Other prove to be the easiest traps for Western writers, the most tempting metaphors and imagery. Alarcón's invocation of Africa as a woman concludes with the portentous affirmation that "De esta manera, África será siempre el imán de las imaginaciones ardientes" (11),¹⁹¹ and his words still ring true. However, that is not to say that contemporary authors are writing under the same Orientalist paradigm of Alarcón, Díaz Fernández or even Goytisolo. At the threshold of the twenty-first century, it is necessary to examine the intersections of gender, representation, and Africa in the contemporary Spanish novel so that we can identify and move beyond discursive constructions that privilege one geography or gender over another.

¹⁹¹ [In this manner, Africa will always be the magnet of the burning imaginations.]

I. THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS AS THEY SEAM: RE-FASHIONING SELF IN
MARÍA DUEÑAS' *EL TIEMPO ENTRE COSTURAS*

Each of us carries around those
growing-up places, the institutions, a
sort of backdrop, a stage set. So
often we act out the present against
the backdrop of the past.
—Mohanty (*Feminism Without
Borders* 90)

María Dueñas' 2009 novel *El tiempo entre costuras* was a runaway bestseller. It is listed as one of the most requested books in Spanish libraries (Eulalia)¹⁹² with over a million copies sold and the translation and publication rights granted to over 27 countries (María Dueñas). It is Dueñas' first work of fiction; she wrote it while a professor of Philology at the University of Murcia, where she also completed her PhD in English. She holds a Master's degree in Romance and Classical Languages from Michigan State University and throughout her career has taught at a number of other universities including the University of Castilla-La Mancha, the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, and West Virginia University (*Universidad de Murcia*). At this point in time, there exists little, if any, critical examination of Dueñas' first book. I do not doubt that this oversight will be amended soon, due both to the significant commercial success of the novel and also to the literary quality with which it is written.

Many consumer reviews of the book applaud its engaging prose and its entertaining story-telling (*Amazon.com*). The editorial reviews also offer glowing endorsements from authors such as the Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa, Esmeralda Santiago, and Kate Morton (*Amazon.com*). It has also been adapted for a mini-series on Antena 3 which will debut in fall 2012 (*Antena 3*). The book is indeed a page-turner, full

¹⁹² A sequel has already been promised by the author, titled *Misión olvido* [*Forgotten Mission*], it is slated to be published in the fall of 2012 ("*Misión Olvido*").

of cliff hangers and shocking twists. The prose is accessible without diluting the quality of its literary expression. Its structure and plot development is such that it is not surprising that it lends itself to the medium of television, and also shares much in common with the serial novels of the late 19th and early 20th century, such as Clarín's *La Regenta*. It is an impressive and captivating work for a first novel, developing over 600 pages.

The historical setting is what is initially pertinent to this study. Colonial Tétouan, that is the Tétouan of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco, is the backdrop for a significant portion of the plot.¹⁹³ María Dueñas is admittedly fascinated by Spain's colonial presence in Morocco. Her training as an academic lead her to close her fictional text with a bibliography of historical works that helped her to recreate her historical fiction narrative, and she prefaces the bibliography by stating that “Las convenciones de la vida académica a la que llevo vinculada más de veinte años exigen a los autores reconocer sus fuentes de manera ordenada y rigurosa” (*El tiempo entre costuras* 633).¹⁹⁴ There is, therefore, a stated attempt at a historic fidelity and a certain “academic rigor,” and yet she also states on her blog for the book that:

Para recomponer con fidelidad los escenarios de Tánger y Tetuán en esos días, he recurrido sobre todo de los testimonios de aquellos que vivieron ese entorno y ese tiempo en primera persona: algunos de los miembros de la Asociación La Medina y, sobre todo, mi propia familia materna, residente durante décadas en el Protectorado. Gracias a los recuerdos

¹⁹³ The Spanish Protectorate of Morocco was officially established in 1912 by the Treaty of Fez and ended with the recognition of Moroccan independence in 1956. See Luis Villanova *El Protectorado de España en Marruecos: Organización política y territorial* (2004) for more information.

¹⁹⁴ [The conventions of academic life to which I have been committed for more than twenty years demand that authors recognize their sources in an organized and rigorous manner.]

cargados de nostalgia de todos ellos, los personajes de la novela han podido recorrer las calles, los rincones y el palpito de nuestro pasado colonial en el norte de África, un contexto casi desvanecido de la memoria colectiva y apenas evocado en la narrativa española contemporánea.

(Dueñas, *eltiempoentrecosturas.blogspot.com*)¹⁹⁵

This statement is revealing in the use of the phrase “recuerdos cargados de nostalgia,”¹⁹⁶ perhaps inadvertently uncovering a collective mourning for the lost African colony. It is also a reminder that, as well researched and documented as Dueñas attempts to be when recreating this past, from our vantage point of the twenty-first century this is an impossible task to accomplish objectively. Thus, it is perhaps most appropriate to highlight at this point what the novel accomplishes and what are its limitations as relevant to the examination of Orientalism in the contemporary Spanish novel.

The plot of *El tiempo entre costuras* develops within the colonial circles of Tétouan and Tangier. The characters are predominantly European, with only an occasional “morita”¹⁹⁷ who works as a servant. The African Other is a marginal figure within the novel, and this is striking in that the plot develops in Africa and also in that the book is dedicated “[a] todos los antiguos residentes del Protectorado español en Marruecos y a los marroquíes que con ellos convivieron” (9).¹⁹⁸ There is little interaction

¹⁹⁵ [To recreate with fidelity the settings of Tangier and Tétouan, I have relied on, above all, the testimonies of those who lived in this environment and this time firsthand: some of the members of the Association The Medina and, above all, my own maternal family, residents for decades of the Protectorate. Thanks to the memories charged with nostalgia of all of them, the characters of the novel have been able to travel the streets, the corners and the heartbeat of our colonial past in the north of Africa, a context almost disappeared from our collective memory and hardly ever evoked in the contemporary Spanish narrative.]

¹⁹⁶ [memories charged with nostalgia]

¹⁹⁷ Here the term is not as sexualized as in the context of Díaz Fernández’s *El blocao*, but rather refers to a young, unmarried Moroccan girl.

¹⁹⁸ [To all of the former residents of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco and to the Moroccans that lived alongside them.]

between European and African; the colonial cities of Tétouan (Spanish) and Tangier (International Zone) are frenetic cosmopolitan zones where Europeans come to live and play and only infrequently interact with the indigenous population. Therefore, this analysis of *El tiempo entre costuras* does not focus on Dueñas' representation of the African Other, but rather on Africa itself as a place of colonial possibility. To paraphrase Ana Rueda, rendering the Other discursively invisible effectively mitigates the horrors of colonization, liberating the writer and the Spanish public from the ethical responsibility towards the Other.¹⁹⁹ The Moroccan Other does not form a part of the essential plot line, and by focusing almost exclusively on the comings and goings of the European inhabitants, Dueñas does not need to address the issues of economic, social or political inequality that undergird the colonial paradigm.²⁰⁰

Therefore, my analysis here does not focus on the African within the novel, but rather on Africa as a place “cargado de nostalgia”²⁰¹ for the Spanish collective memory. If the African is rendered textually invisible, then one must ask the question *why Africa?* If the primary characters of the story are Portuguese, French, British, or Spanish, why could the novel not have taken place in France, Spain, or Portugal? Again, the colonial paradigm contains the answer to this question; the opportunity available in a colony²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ As already examined in Chapter Two, and as articulated by Rueda in “El enemigo ‘invisible’ de la Guerra de África” (147).

²⁰⁰ Memmi's seminal *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965) examines the ways in which “every colonizer is privileged” over the indigenous inhabitants within the colonial sphere (11). Therefore, to clarify, even though the protagonist Sira Quiroga is initially a poor and helpless individual, her mere status as a European offers her opportunity not available to the Moroccan colonial population. Dueñas focuses primarily on the social and economic divisions among Europeans, but it is important to consider the relativity of such a representation in the colonial context.

²⁰¹ [charged with nostalgia]

²⁰² In discussing the colonizer, Memmi suggests that “leaving for a colony is not a choice sought because of its uncertain dangers, nor is it a desire of one tempted by adventure. It is simply a voyage towards an easier life” (*The Colonizer and the Colonized* 3), and offers the “best possible definition of a colony: a place where one earns more and spends less” (4). This opportunity is so lucrative that Memmi believes that “the

combined with the exoticism of Africa within the discourse of Western Orientalism confers upon the colonial territory a certain cultural capital, an exotic value, which is not available from European geographical counterparts. I will return to these questions below, by examining them more in depth within the text, but my examination of this novel does warrant this initial explanation of the potential shortcomings and choices of the author. This novel is pertinent to this study not for its representation of the African Other, but for its representation of Africa as a playground for the European colonial powers and the exotic imagery of Africa as a transformative space for the European.

This consideration of *El tiempo entre costuras* focuses on the portrayal of Dueñas' protagonist, Sira Quiroga, as she leaves Spain for Morocco and establishes a successful sewing business in Tétouan. Africa serves as a stage where Sira is able to rebuild her life after a series of disasters, and when she later returns to Spain under an assumed, Arabized name, the exotic flair that she adopts – effectively a Europeanized Africanness that is palatable to the upper echelons of European society – confers upon her an exotic cultural capital that she is able to convert into literal capital through the success of her haute couture sewing shop. As a theoretical framework to this approach, I will rely on contemporary feminist theory by theorists such as Chandra Mohanty, Linda McDowell and Kristyn Gorton. Alongside *Orientalism*, I also use Daniel Varisco's *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (2007) to contribute to my analysis of the Orientalism of the novel. These critics will help to illuminate my thesis that Dueñas' *Africa* is a space where an unprivileged, poor Spanish girl can find opportunity

colonialist knows that in his own country he would be nothing; he would go back to being a mediocre man” (61).

unavailable to her in her homeland; *Africa* is a transformative space where the European can find tremendous opportunity.

The novel is narrated in the first person voice of the protagonist, the singular Sira Quiroga. The story traces her life from a young girl in a poor neighborhood in Madrid, to Tangier and Tétouan immediately before, during and after the Spanish Civil War, to a return to Madrid and Lisbon in the time leading up to World War II. She tells of her misfortunes and fortunes as she witnesses and participates in some of the most dramatic moments for Spain and Europe in the 20th century. From her youth in Madrid, Sira elopes to Tangier with a charming man who soon leaves her pregnant and robs her of all her money. She flees to Tétouan, destitute, and miscarries. As the Civil War breaks out in Spain, the local police commissioner takes her passport and forces her to pay the pending debts of her disappeared lover from Tangier. With the help of friends, she is eventually able to open a high-fashion boutique serving the wealthy expatriates who are trapped in the Moroccan territory due to the war in Spain. Sira's skills as a seamstress allow her business to flourish and she becomes the premier *modiste* of the Moroccan territory. She is eventually able to get her mother out of Madrid to join her in Tétouan where they begin to work together.

In the years leading up to World War II, Sira is contacted by the British Secret Intelligence Service and recruited to work for them in Madrid. She agrees, leaving her shop in Tétouan to her mother and returning to Madrid to open a shop that would service the wives of Spanish and German military and political leaders. In order to return to Spain, she adopts an assumed identity with a Moroccan passport and an alias, "Arish Agoriuq" —

¿Extraño? No tanto. Tan sólo era el nombre y el apellido de siempre puestos del revés... No era un nombre árabe en absoluto, pero sonaba extraño y no resultaría sospechoso en Madrid, donde nadie tenía idea de cómo se llamaba la gente allá por la tierra mora... (388)²⁰³

She finds great success as a *modista* and as a spy and is sent on a mission to Lisbon to obtain information about a Portuguese merchant who is suspected of making deals with the Germans that work against the British. She runs into a British reporter, Marcus Logan, whom she originally had met in Tétouan, finds out that the Portuguese merchant wants him dead and alerts him. She gathers all of the information needed and as she is returning to Madrid by train discovers that a hit squad is after her and on her train. Marcus Logan shows up and they escape the train and return to Madrid by car. In Madrid again, when Sira/Arish discovers that Marcus is also a spy for the British and not a reporter, she re-kindles her relationship with him and she makes a conscious decision to take charge of her life and control her own future. In the epilogue, Sira narrates what became of her many companions throughout the novel.

As a novel that reads well – as is obvious from its commercial success and television adaptation – an analysis of the novel highlights its limitations. It is clearly a Euro-centric plot, despite the fact that it develops largely within North Africa. Questions of European colonialism are ignored. Questions of gender are nevertheless pertinent; Sira develops from a young naif into a strong and independent woman, even though Dueñas chooses to end the novel with the fairy tale happy ending of her being rescued by the British spy Marcus Logan and becoming romantically involved with him.

²⁰³ [Strange? Not really. It was only my first and last name in reverse... It wasn't by any means an Arabic name, but it sounded strange and wouldn't be suspicious in Madrid, where no one had any idea what people went by over there in Moorish lands...]

Indeed, the “feminist” qualities of the narrative are ones more associated with second wave feminism — “financial autonomy, a successful career, sexual freedom” (Gorton 212) — than of the more global, postcolonial concerns of contemporary feminist theory. Sira is a successful capitalist; her business flourishes, as she is literally able to profit from the initial investment of capital. This is significant to emphasize that while Dueñas may be promoting a feminist agenda (consciously or not), it is not the third wave one of theorists such as Chandra Mohanty who seeks an “anticapitalist critique” and a solidarity with the experience of the marginalized, feminine Other (Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders* 8). Dueñas’ rags-to-riches story is one clearly bearing the “authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse” (Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders* 19). Sira begins as an oppressed young woman who is taken advantage of by an older man, and she eventually becomes a mature and forceful woman who consciously decides to control her own future.

This transformation should not be considered in isolation. It is relevant to this project because it occurs in the narrative and historical space of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco. In her article “Place and Space,” Linda McDowell suggests that “[t]he mapping of a place or location onto gender identities has been a key part of the establishment and maintenance of women’s position and is reflected in both the materiality and the symbolic representation of women’s lives” (13). Therefore, the geographical space of Africa — written as the European Protectorates — contributes to the dynamics at work within the plot. Africa offers a significant convergence of place and gender that reflects long-held Western conceptualizations of the continent as a “zone of potential loss or profit” (Abbeele xvi). Sira discovers that, for her, Africa becomes a

territory of opportunity and self-discovery, of literal profit. Her position of privilege as a colonizer enables her to re-create herself, or perhaps more appropriately *re-fashion* herself.

The conflux of gender and Africa in this work is only pertinent to this study in what we can analyze as the contemporary representation of Africa in the Spanish novel. To this end, it is useful to compare analogies of male:female::West:Africa.²⁰⁴ By showing that the traditional male/female hierarchy is upset through Sira's personal success it can perhaps be extrapolated that a simultaneous upset occurs in the West/Africa dichotomy, privileging Africa over a European West that is war-ridden and financially exhausted. Despite the colonial setting, and the nostalgia for that time period, Dueñas upsets the “*positional* superiority” of the West over Orient — and upon which Orientalism depends — through a representation of Africa that is perhaps idealized (nostalgic?), but nonetheless reconfigures the traditionally superordinate hierarchy of West over Africa (Said, *Orientalism* 7).

However, just as Dueñas' feminism seems to be drawn from the sixties and seventies second wave movement, so is the image of Africa also anchored in the colonial nostalgia. But while initially problematic, it is also nuanced and still critically significant. In early thirties Spain, the country is plunged into chaos and Sira is called to come and meet her estranged father for the first time. Sensing the impending fall of the Second Republic and the outbreak of war, he gives to Sira her inheritance and advises:

—Bueno, pues mi consejo es el siguiente: marchaos de aquí lo antes posible. Las dos, lejos, tenéis que ir os cuanto más lejos de Madrid, mejor.

²⁰⁴ Chandra Mohanty examines the subordinate categories of nature:culture::female:male in “Under Western Eyes,” 77.

Fuera de España a ser posible. A Europa no, que tampoco allí tiene buena cara la situación. Marchaos a América o, si os hace demasiado lejano, a África. A Marruecos; iros al Protectorado, es un buen sitio para vivir. Un sitio tranquilo donde, desde el final de la guerra con los moros, nunca pasa nada. Empezad una vida nueva lejos de este país enloquecido, porque el día menos pensado va a estallar algo tremendo y aquí no va a quedar nadie vivo. (52)²⁰⁵

Europe is unstable and dangerous, in Africa lies opportunity and tranquility that contrast sharply with a crumbling West as Sira narrates: “La caída de la bolsa de Nueva York unos años atrás, la inestabilidad política y un montón de cosas más que a mí no me interesaban” (56).²⁰⁶ The image of West as rational and ordered versus Africa as savage and dangerous is overturned in this moment of Western history. Ironically, the “Protectorate” becomes a refuge that protects the colonizers from their own instability.

Dueñas’ counter-Orientalism is subtle, but present. As Sira begins to settle into life in Tétouan, her neighbor and friend Félix Aranda teaches her about why Spain is in Morocco. She learns about the Rif War and the steady immigration of Spanish families to the territory — “Y yo, entre ellos, una más” (201)²⁰⁷ — and Sira’s reflections on this knowledge are blatantly patronizing:

²⁰⁵ [Well, my advice is the following: leave here as soon as possible. The two of you, far away, you have to get as far away from Madrid as possible, the farther the better. Out of Spain if possible. To Europe no, things don’t look good there either. Go to America or, if that seems too far, to Africa. To Morocco; go to the Protectorate, it’s a good place to live. A tranquil place where, since the end of the war with the Moors, nothing ever happens. Begin a new life far from this crazy country, because on the least expected day something big is going to explode and no one will be left alive.]

²⁰⁶ [The fall of the stockmarket in New York some years back, the political instability, and a ton of other things that did not interest me.]

²⁰⁷ [And I, among them, one more.]

A cambio de su impuesta presencia... España había proporcionado a Marruecos avances en equipamientos, sanidad y obras, y los primeros pasos hacia una moderada mejora de la explotación agrícola. Y una escuela de artes y oficios tradicionales. Y todo aquello que los nativos pudieran obtener de beneficio en las actividades destinadas a satisfacer a la población colonizadora: el tendido eléctrico, el agua potable, escuelas y academias, comercios, el transporte público, dispensarios y hospitales, el tren que unía Tetuán con Ceuta, el que aún llevaba a la playa de Río Martín. España de Marruecos, en términos materiales, había conseguido muy poco. (201)²⁰⁸

The list of colonial “gifts” to Morocco is long and posits Spain’s beneficent and patronizing role as colonizer. However, Dueñas closes the history lesson with a somber reminder of what Spain did receive from its African territory:

En términos humanos... sí había obtenido algo importante para uno de los dos bandos de la contienda civil: miles de soldados de las fuerzas indígenas marroquíes que en aquellos días luchaban como fieras al otro lado del Estrecho por la causa ajena del ejército sublevado. (201)²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ [In exchange for their imposed presence... Spain had provided Morocco advances in equipment, health, and infrastructure, and the first steps towards a moderate improvement in agricultural exploitation. And a school of arts and traditional works. And all that the natives were able to obtain as a benefit in the activities destined to satisfy the colonizing population: power lines, potable water, schools and academies, businesses, public transport, clinics and hospitals, the train that united Tétouan with Ceuta, the one that even went to the beach at Río Martín. Spain from Morocco, in material terms, had received very little.]

²⁰⁹ [In human terms... yes, something important had been obtained for one of the sides of the civil contest: thousands of soldiers from the Moroccan indigenous force that in those days fought like beasts on the other side of the Strait for the foreign cause of the revolting army.]

Dueñas highlights the manipulative and exploitative colonial relationship, unearthing the dark secret of Spain's relationship with the Protectorate and of the Nationalist's mercenary support. Spain's presupposed moral highground is eroded by this assertion.

Dueñas further undermines any moral highground of colonial Spain through her fictionalized account of historical figures such as Serrano Suñer²¹⁰ and Johannes Bernhardt.²¹¹ They are manipulative and underhanded politicians who are morally corrupt and seek to exploit the mineral resources of Morocco and Spain. On the other hand, Juan Luis Beigbeder y Atienza— first the “alto comisario de España en Marruecos” (226)²¹² and later a minister for the “ministro de Asuntos Exteriores” (351)²¹³ — is portrayed as genuinely interested in Moroccan life and culture.²¹⁴ He learns Arabic, meets with tribal leaders regularly, is respected by the local population, and keeps a Koran open on his desk: “A Beigbeder le definieron como ilustre africanista y profundo conocedor del islam; se alabó su dominio del árabe, su sólida formación, [y] su larga residencia en pueblos musulmanes” (352).²¹⁵ Even though Beigbeder is close to Franco (in the novel), he is also distrusted by the caudillo²¹⁶ for initially unknown reasons. However, the reader eventually discovers that Franco's distrust is a result of his jealousy for Beigbeder's linguistic skills. Beigbeder explains to Sira: “el gran general africanista, el insigne e

²¹⁰ Ramón Serrano Suñer, “el Cuñadísimo” [the exalted brother-in-law], was the Interior and Foreign Affairs Minister and the President of the Falangist caucus (Falange Española Tradicionalista de las JONS) under Francisco Franco. He was brother-in-law to Franco as they both married sisters. He was pro-Third Reich before and during World War II. See Merino for a biography and Bowen for an examination of Spain's collaboration with Nazi Germany.

²¹¹ Johannes Bernhardt was the head of a German mining consortium in Spain, seeking to obtain mining rights for tungsten, used in making missiles. See Payne for a detailed history of the German-Spanish relations of World War II, specifically the chapter “Neutrality by Compulsion,” 236-252.

²¹² [High Commissary of Spain in Morocco]

²¹³ [Minister of Foreign Affairs]

²¹⁴ See Payne, 47 or Halstead, “A ‘Somewhat Machiavellian’ Face: Colonel Juan Beigbeder as High Commissioner in Spanish Morocco, 1937-1939.”

²¹⁵ [Beigbeder was defined as an illustrious Africanist and a profound scholar of Islam; his knowledge of Arabic was praised, his solid formation, [and] his long residence in Muslim territory.]

²¹⁶ [leader]

invicto caudillo de España, el salvador de la patria, no habla árabe a pesar de sus esfuerzos. Ni entiende al pueblo marroquí, ni le importan todos ellos lo más mínimo” (436).²¹⁷ Franco is presented as a failure in this representation, such that the Moroccan public does not care for him at all, and Spain’s colonial mission in Africa is reduced to a petty attempt to “revivir el sueño imperial, participar en el reparto del festín colonial africano entre las naciones europeas aunque fuera con las migajas que las grandes potencias le concedieron; aspirar a llegar al tobillo de Francia e Inglaterra” (200).²¹⁸ In these descriptions, both Franco and Spain are impotent colonialists, ultimately manipulated by Hitler’s Germany. These subtle additions counterbalance the nostalgic idealization of the colonial Protectorates.

For better or for worse, as mentioned above, Spain’s Moroccan territories serve as the backdrop for Sira’s transformation from a shy young naif into an independent and strong woman. When Sira arrives in Tétuoan, recently abandoned by her lover, sick and miscarrying and in debt to creditors in Tangier, she is at rock bottom. She has nothing to her name and is alone in an unknown city in a foreign country, unable to return to Madrid because war has broken out. As she is questioned by the local commissary Claudio Vázquez, she thinks to herself:

Me sentía incapaz de enfrentarme por mí misma a una realidad desconocida. Nunca había hecho nada sin ayuda, siempre había tenido a alguien que marcara mis pasos: mi madre, Ignacio, Ramiro. Me sentía

²¹⁷ [the great Africanist general, the famous and undefeated leader of Spain, the savior of the fatherland, does not speak Arabic despite his efforts. He does not understand the Moroccan public, neither do they care the least about him.]

²¹⁸ [revive the imperial dream, participate in the distribution of the African colonial feast between the European nations even though it was only the crumbs that the great power conceded to it; to aspire to rise to the ankle of France and England.]

inútil, inepta para enfrentarme sola a la vida y sus envites. Incapaz de sobrevivir sin una mano que me llevara agarrada con fuerza, sin una cabeza decidiendo por mí. Sin una presencia cercana en la que confiar y de la que depender. (88)²¹⁹

But as the days pass, Sira learns to adapt and to “aprender a vivir sola” (104)²²⁰ and she consciously reflects on this process that “saqué fuerzas de donde no existían y me armé de valor” (133).²²¹ She rediscovers her sewing skills, ones her mother taught her as a child but which she had not used in years, and establishes her business, serving the wealthiest and most powerful in the Protectorate. She only much later confesses the sordid tales of her youthful misfortunes to her friend Rosalinda, who responds to her humble and tragic history with “a quién demonios importa de dónde vienes cuando eres la mejor modista de todo Marruecos” (264).²²² Her business acumen brings her financial success, and she is soon able to pay off her creditors and begin saving to bring her mother out of Spain to join her in Tétouan.

Sira soon discovers a new self-confidence and a strength that she previously did not possess. She attends a party with the British journalist/spy, Marcus Logan, and he asks her for her help in uncovering some information from Serrano Suñer and Johannes Bernhardt. She agrees to help, but she also negotiates her own conditions that Logan will also find out some information for her. Sira holds up her end of the agreement and discovers more information about secret agreements between Bernhardt and Suñer than

²¹⁹ [I felt incapable of facing by myself an unknown reality. I had never done anything without help, I had always had someone to show me the way: my mother, Ignacio, Ramiro. I felt useless, inept to face alone life and its stakes. Incapable of surviving without a hand that held me with force, without a head deciding for me. Without a close presence in which to confide and on which to depend.]

²²⁰ [to learn to live alone]

²²¹ [I pulled out strength from where it didn't exist and I armed myself with courage.]

²²² [to whom the hell does it matter where you come from when you are the best *modista* in all of Morocco.]

Logan expected. Sira's poise and confidence in navigating the situation hint at a developing personal strength and agency.

It is true that Sira's personal maturation could have occurred in Spain, the Americas, or some other Western backdrop, but Africa does contribute in specific ways to this process, and not just for Sira. Her closest friend Rosalinda, a British expatriate who is romantically involved with Beigbeder, has also found in the Spanish Protectorate a place to escape from her past and to recreate a new life. For the wealthy colonials, Morocco offers them everything from their homeland, plus a degree of anonymity (339). Africa reveals its mystique when Sira is contacted by the British Special Intelligence Service to move back to Madrid and open up another shop, with the purpose of spying upon the wealthy and powerful wives. As noted above, she is given a new, assumed identity, that of "Arish Agoriuq" — an affected Arabic-sounding name. At this point, she is, in effect, a completely distinct person from the young girl who left Madrid several years before.

When she returns to Madrid, she relies on her exotic, Orientalist narrative to find financial success and to stand out. For the decor of her new shop, "Arish" describes that

Además de las telas y los útiles de costura, compré... algunas piezas de artesanía marroquí con la ilusión de dar a mi taller madrileño un aire exótico en concordancia con mi nuevo nombre y mi supuesto pasado de prestigiosa modista tangerina. Bandejas de cobre repujado, lámparas con cristales de mil colores, teteras de plata, algunas piezas de cerámica y

tres grandes alfombras bereberes. Un pedacito de África en el centro del mapa de la exhausta España. (415)²²³

She teaches her assistants to prepare and serve tea “a la manera moruna,”²²⁴ how to “pintarse los ojos con khol,”²²⁵ and she even sews a caftan “para dar a su presencia un aire exótico” (419).²²⁶ Sira/Arish openly admits that it is a “falso exotismo,”²²⁷ but it functions not only to increase her perceived cultural capital among Madrid’s elite, but also to give her personal strength: “Actuaba ante las clientas con aplomo y decisión, protegida por la armadura de mi falso exotismo” (419).²²⁸ She questions what led her to agree to return to Madrid as a spy and *modista*, wondering if she did it “por lealtad a Rosalinda”²²⁹ or because “se lo debía a mi madre y a mi país”²³⁰ and she ultimately considers that “Quizá no lo hice por nadie o tan sólo por mí misma” (416).²³¹ She finds her sense of personal agency strengthened by her experience in Morocco, and this identity serves her as a personal “armadura.”²³²

Such an analysis is admittedly problematic. Sira appropriates another culture for her own ends. As she assumes a Moroccan passport and affects an exotic air, Sira creates a Moroccan “alias” that has little to do with the reality. Said suggests that, in *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*, Chateaubriand “attempts to *consume* the Orient. He not only

²²³ [In addition to the cloths and the sewing tools, I bought... some pieces of Moroccan handicrafts with the intention of giving my shop in Madrid an exotic atmosphere in concordance with my new name and my supposed past as a prestigious Tangerian dressmaker. Trays of embossed copper, lamps with crystals of a thousand colors, silver teapots, some pieces of ceramic, and the large Berber rugs. A small piece of Africa in the center of the map of the exhausted Spain.]

²²⁴ [in the Moorish fashion]

²²⁵ [paint their eyes with khol]

²²⁶ [to give her appearance an exotic air]

²²⁷ [false exoticism]

²²⁸ [I behaved in front of my clients with composure and decisiveness, protected by the armor of my false exoticism]

²²⁹ [for loyalty to Rosalinda]

²³⁰ [I owed it to my mother and my country]

²³¹ [Maybe I didn’t do it for anyone or maybe just for myself]

²³² [armor]

appropriates it, he represents and speaks for it” (174), and a similar argument can be made for Sira except that she attempts to *sell* the Orient rather than *consume* it. Arish employs her exotic persona to achieve financial success in her shop and to gain the confidence of the political elite in Madrid. Said’s further analysis of the work of Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Renan, and Sacy, also serves to understand Dueñas’ and Sira’s use of Africa; by including Dueñas in the list of authors above, it can be said that their Orient was not so much grasped, appropriated, reduced, or codified as lived in, exploited aesthetically and imaginatively as a roomy place full of possibility. What mattered to them was the structure of their work as an independent, aesthetic, and personal fact, and not the ways by which, if one wanted to, one could effectively dominate or set down the Orient graphically. Their egos never absorbed the Orient, nor totally identified the Orient with documentary and textual knowledge of it (with official Orientalism, in short). (182)

Said seems to suggest that the Orientalism of Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Renan, and Sacy (and one could include Dueñas) is an *orientalism* – without the capital “O” – that is more benign than the official, academic narrative against which he writes. He appears to insinuate that it functions on similar principles, but lacks the rigor and force of the academic project of Orientalism. Said essentially gives these authors a pass; their work lacks the political support that undergird Orientalism as a destructive force.

Indeed, Daniel Varisco, in *Reading Orientalism*, takes issue with Said’s dismissal of this Orientalism-*light*. Varisco contests that “Said’s suggestion that Orientalism is a ‘style’” (297) is too narrowly defined by Said:

Consider the various ways any given individual could appropriate the Orient as a pilgrim, crusader, hardened mercenary, merchant, missionary, colonial administrator, poet, novelist, satirist, artist, mystic, tourist. It is precisely this tinker-tailor-candlestickmaker hetero-genus-ness in discourse that is obscured in the argument of *Orientalism*. (298)

Varisco's assertion does not dismiss the purely "aesthetic" or "imaginative" use of Africa/the Orient as a benign project, but rather highlights the pervasiveness of Orientalist discourse across a range of genres and "styles."

Varisco's reminder underscores the problems of Dueñas' novel. While Sira is able to parlay debt and ruin in Africa to personal fortune and independence by appropriating a culture that is not her own, the representation of Africa is mired in a tradition of representation that leaves it as a land of possibility for the Westerner, almost devoid of indigenous inhabitants. Therefore, it is useful to return to my previous suggestion that what may be at work is an analogous relationship of male:female::West:Africa. As Sira upsets the traditional male/female hierarchy by becoming "propietaria, al fin y al cabo, del rumbo de mi vida" (605),²³³ is there a concurrent upset of the West and Africa's relationship of Western dominance?

It is clear that Sira finds the strength to be independent through Africa, and yet the representation of Africa — even though positive — does not diverge from a narrative of colonial nostalgia. Within the text Morocco is not a land of Moroccans, but of Europeans. When Sira/Arish meets Manuel da Silva in Lisbon for the first time, they share the following exchange:

²³³ [proprietor, at long last, of the direction of my life]

—Es usted la primer mujer marroquí que conozco en mi vida. Esta zona está ahora mismo llena de extranjeros de mil nacionalidades distintas, pero todos proceden de Europa.

—¿No ha estado nunca en Marruecos?

—No. Y lo lamento; sobre todo si todas las marroquíes son como usted.

—Es un país fascinante de gente maravillosa, pero me temo que le sería difícil encontrar allí muchas mujeres como yo. Soy una marroquí atípica porque mi madre es española. No soy musulmana y mi lengua materna no es el árabe, sino el español. Pero adoro Marruecos... (512)²³⁴

Africa – Morocco – is reduced to little more than an imagined, exotic geographical space.

The qualities that do not serve her are discarded: she is *not* muslim, she does *not* speak arabic, but she does pepper her speech

con desfachatez [con] palabras en francés y árabe: posiblemente decía en esta lengua bastantes sandeces, habida cuenta de que a menudo repetía simples expresiones retenidas a fuerza de haberlas oído en las calles de Tánger y Tetuán, pero cuyo sentido y uso exacto desconocía. (419)²³⁵

²³⁴ [“You are the first Moroccan woman that I have met in my life. This zone is right now full of foreigners from a thousand different nationalities, but all of them proceed from Europe.” / “You’ve never been in Morocco?” / “No. And I lament it; above all if all of the Moroccan women are like yourself.” / “It is a fascinating country of marvelous people, but I am afraid that it would be difficult to find many women like myself there. I am an atypical Moroccan because my mother is Spanish. I am not Muslim and my maternal language is not Arabic, but rather Spanish. But I adore Morocco...”]

²³⁵ [with gall with words in French and Arabic: possibly in the latter a little non-sensical, given that I often repeated simple expressions retained from overhearing them in the streets of Tangier and Tétouan, but whose exact meaning and use I did not know.]

Her “falso exotismo” (419)²³⁶ enables her to overcome the “*positional* superiority” of the male/female paradigm, but it does little for Africa’s unequal, colonial relationship with the West.

Africa does occupy a favored and favorable position within the text, and so it would be relatively easy to affirm the benign nature of the representation as Said appears to do with Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Renan, and Sacy. But such a reading would overlook the fact that, while *El tiempo entre costuras* does not offer a negative representation of Africa, neither does it depart from a pattern of representation that appropriates Africa for Western purposes. *El tiempo entre costuras* is a novel that — as V. Y. Mudimbe suggests in *The Idea of Africa* — “exploit[s] the exotic representations and categories of Africa as illustrated, say, in English or French literature, and... marginalize[s] Africa” and continues “a tradition which, for centuries, has conveyed this exotic idea of Africa” (xi). It is, ultimately, ethnocentric and Eurocentric, despite a large portion of the plot developing within the geographical space of Africa. And while it is perhaps Orientalism-*light*, it does not depart from the Western paradigm of representation that appropriates Africa for its own ends.

Neither is the feminism of this novel particularly contemporary. Sira’s maturation is powerful and inspiring as she manuevers and manipulates her passage to personal agency. But this is a Western feminism, anchored in second-wave feminist ideas of financial, professional, and sexual equality for women. Sira’s story and the novel’s commercial success show that “women’s ‘liberation’ is a marketable commodity” (Gorton 212). This is not a feminism concerned with questions of “decolonization, anticapitalist critique, and solidarity” (Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders* 3). Dueñas’ tale of female

²³⁶ [false exoticism]

liberation posits one archetype and does not address the diversity of contemporary feminism. Mohanty's critique of such a position is telling for this study:

[in such an instance] power is automatically defined in binary terms: people who have it (read: men) and people who do not (read: women). Men exploit, women are exploited. Such simplistic formulations are historically reductive; they are also ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions. All they do is reinforce binary divisions between men and women. (*Feminism Without Borders* 31)

Dueñas does upend the binary hierarchy of powerful men and impotent women in Sira's story, but Sira only becomes a co-exploiter. Sira is the one who exploits Africa, and I would hold that this ultimate, insidious interpretation suggests that, hidden between the seams of this novel, are surviving remnants of Orientalist discourse, alive and well.

II. SEEING THINGS: IMAGINING THE OTHER IN FERNANDO GAMBOA'S *GUINEA*

The specter is not only the carnal apparition of the spirit, its phenomenal body, its fallen and guilty body, it is also the impatient and nostalgic waiting for a redemption, namely, once again, for a spirit... The ghost would be the deferred spirit, the promise or calculation of an expiation.

—Derrida (*Specters of Marx* 170-171)

Fernando Gamboa defines himself first as a dedicated traveler and later as a writer (Cuatrecasas). His personal website lists his travels through Africa and Latin America and his varied jobs as a scuba-diver, Spanish professor, entrepreneur, poker player, and travel guide and his 2009 interview in *La vanguardia* begins with the following introduction: “Fernando Gamboa es de esos escritores nómadas que viven su vida a ritmo de ‘carpe diem’, sin casa, ni coche, ni familia. No le hace falta, asegura convencido. Hasta hace unos años, Gamboa se consideraba de profesión aventurero” (Cuatrecasas).²³⁷ His first book, *La última cripta* [*The last Crypt*], was published in 2007 followed by *Guinea* in 2008 and in 2009 *La historia de Luz* [*The History of Light*] was published as an ebook. A sequel to *La última cripta* is being prepared for publication—tentatively titled *Ciudad negra* [*Black City*]— and Gamboa has stated that he is currently working on a third installment of the series, titled *Apokalypse*.

Fernando Gamboa has received very little (i.e. no) critical attention for his works, and the commercial success of his first two books may best be explained by the fact that his third book, *La historia de Luz*, was self-published as an eBook. Indeed, the success and the press that Gamboa received for his 2008 *Guinea* can possibly best be attributed to

²³⁷ [Fernando Gamboa is one of those nomadic writers that live their life to the rhythm of ‘carpe diem’, without a house, a car, a family. He doesn’t miss it, he adamantly affirms. For some years now, Gamboa has considered himself to be a professional adventurer.]

his own self-promotion. That is not to say that his works are without merit; online reviews by bloggers and consumers are generally very positive about the novel. Carmen Fernández Etreros, on the blog *La tormenta en un vaso* [*The Storm in a Glass*] says about *Guinea* that “En la novela se mantiene una hábil tensión basada en un ritmo cercano a lo cinematográfico, basado en la imagen y en la acción, y un diálogo entre los personajes fluido y dinámico,”²³⁸ and the novel does read with an ease and a speed that at times seems ready-made for the big screen. *Guinea* is an engaging and entertaining adventure novel. However, for this study and of general interest in the novel, is the fact that *Guinea* is not just an entertaining read, but also a politically charged narrative. The novel’s review on *Descargar-Libros.es* proclaims that

A pesar de ser una obra de aventuras, *Guinea* es además una denuncia, una llamada a la conciencia de todos los privilegiados del llamado primer mundo que, envueltos en realidades insultantemente distintas ignoran la oscura vida que envuelve a pueblos cruelmente oprimidos.²³⁹

And this assertion is supported by an open letter that Gamboa circulated shortly after publication of his book. This open letter can be found on J.L. Mejuto’s blog, and Mejuto prefaces it with the following:

He recibido un correo con una carta de F. Gamboa. Al principio de la misma pensé... que se trataba de un medio de promoción de su última novela “Guinea”, Al avanzar en la lectura del documento descubrí que es una denuncia sincera y desgarradora sobre la situación de Guinea

²³⁸ [In the novel a skillful tension is maintained based in a rhythm close to the cinematographic, based on the image and in the action, and a fluid and dynamic dialogue between characters.]

²³⁹ [Despite being an adventure novel, *Guinea* is also a denouncement, a call to the conscience of all the privileged of the so-called first world that, wrapped up in realities that are insultingly different, ignore the dark life that surrounds people who are cruelly oppressed.]

Ecuatorial, mejor dicho de la situación de miseria y ausencia de los más elementales derechos humanos del pueblo guineano... (“Guinea, Fernando Gamboa”)²⁴⁰

The body of Gamboa’s letter does detail many horrors committed by Equatorial Guinea’s dictator Teodoro Obiang Nguema,²⁴¹ and the political and economic situation in Guinea is indeed dire, but the letter begins with the introduction “Para que los que no me conozcan, me llamo Fernando Gamboa, y hace unos meses terminé una nueva novela de aventuras titulada *Guinea* que en este mes de Octubre saldrá a la venta publicada por Ediciones El Andén”²⁴² and concludes

Pero esta carta es sólo el primero paso, ahora te toca a ti dar el siguiente ayudando a que llegue a la mayor cantidad posible de personas. Si crees que esta lucha tiene sentido y deseas poner tu grano de arena, reenvía este mensaje a todos tus contactos. (*Mis paridas y tus comentarios*)²⁴³

Whether Gamboa’s intention was in fact to draw attention to the political situation in Equatorial Guinea or an attempt to self-promote his novel through viral marketing is

²⁴⁰ [I have received a mailing with a letter from F. Gamboa. At first I thought... that it was some sort of promotion for his most recent novel “Guinea,” upon reading the document I discovered that it is a sincere and heartbreaking denouncement about the situation in Equatorial Guinea, or rather of the miserable situation and the absence of the most basic human rights for the Guinean people...] The blog comments that follow this post are worth viewing for the emphatic and enthusiastic support for the denunciation of the Guinean government.

²⁴¹ Equatorial Guinea is the only sub-Saharan country in Africa where Spanish is one of the official languages. Spain controlled it with varying levels of interest from 1778 until official decolonization in 1968. Since Spanish withdrawal in 1968, Equatorial Guinea has had only two presidents. Francisco Macías Nguema ruled from 1968-1979 when he was overthrown and executed in a coup d’etat by his nephew Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who has been president since. Both of their presidencies have been marked by extreme corruption, brutal political oppression, and domestic bloodshed. See Ndong and Castro for a complete history of Spain and Equatorial Guinea.

²⁴² [For those of you who don’t know me, my name is Fernando Gamboa, and some months ago I finished an adventure novel titled *Guinea* that this coming October will be sold by Ediciones El Andén.]

²⁴³ [But this letter is only the first step, now it is your turn to take the next step helping this letter reach the greatest number of people possible. If you think that this fight makes sense and you want to add your grain of salt, re-send this message to all of your contacts.]

speculation, but these paratexts highlight an authorial desire to represent Africa to the West through a certain ideological prism, and I hold that Gamboa's novel represents a masterful (even if unintentional) subversion of the West's attempt to represent and narrate its African Other.

Furthermore, the urgency of Gamboa's paratextual writings seems to contradict the central accomplishment of the novel. Through these extra-diegetic writings, Gamboa appears intent on speaking for those who do not have a voice in Equatorial Guinea, the politically marginalized, and yet the narrative of *Guinea* questions the very methods in which the West writes its Other. Fernando Gamboa's position as a white, Western author speaking on behalf of an oppressed Other reflects Marx's statement (also used by Said as an epigraph to *Orientalism*) that "They cannot represent one another, they must themselves be represented" (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* 143). Gamboa positions himself as a spokesman for Guinea against the brutality of Obiang's dictatorship even while his fictional narrative undermines his ability to do so objectively. For this reason, Gamboa's representation of Africa and the African is not only directly pertinent to the thesis of this study but also intriguing in its contradictions. It is a surprisingly effective undermining of Western Orientalist discourse. The fact that Gamboa's paratextual writings express an alternate authorial view of the text suggests that this subversive coup is accidental. As Gamboa appears to balance moral imperative with a compelling narrative, *Guinea* is imbued with subtleties that make it a fascinating text for analysis, especially within this dissertation.

Central to my thesis here is the West's, Gamboa's, attempts to speak for its African Other. Despite the fact that Gamboa insists that his fictional text is based on testimonies and first-hand accounts, it is important to ultimately remember that

[t]he things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original. The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could speak for itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job... there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a *re-presentation*, or a representation. (Said, *Orientalism* 21)

I will return to Said's statement later, but introduce it here to establish that Gamboa's *Guinea*—through its use of setting, narrative device, and its representation of the Other—highlights the process of representation of the Other as one that is unstable and highly subjective. This interpretation is at odds with Gamboa's public explanation of the novel; however, intentional or not, *Guinea* undermines the West's authority to objectively represent its African Other.

Guinea presents a riveting and compelling plot set against the current military dictatorship of Teodoro Obiang Nguema in Equatorial Guinea, West Africa. Blanca Idoia, a young Spanish woman, is arrested by the country's police on a minor pretext but escapes with a fellow inmate, the Guinean Gabriel Biné. Gabriel helps Blanca make a harrowing escape across Equatorial Guinea and into Cameroon. Blanca makes it home to Spain but returns to rescue Gabriel. Upon her return the two of them plot together to assassinate the dictator Teodoro Obiang Nguema. When Blanca finally comes face to

face with the dictator with the tools to assassinate him, she becomes aware that Gabriel was a figment of her imagination – he was entirely imaginary. Her subsequent failure to assassinate Obiang haunts her as much as her memories of a relationship with a man who never existed.

Through the retelling of Blanca's ordeal, through both her conflict and cooperation with the African Other, *Guinea* operates on a variety of representative levels. She is in obvious conflict with the corrupt Guinean police force and dictatorship; she is helped along on her flight by the pitiable subjects of the Guinean countryside; she is sheltered by Spanish missionaries and international volunteer doctors, and she becomes romantically involved with Gabriel, her companion. As Gamboa writes Blanca Idoia's story, he is writing the African Other from a Western authorial viewpoint, and yet *Guinea* goes beyond mere "ontological and epistemological distinction[s] between 'the Orient' and... 'the Occident'" (Said, *Orientalism* 2), even though these distinctions form a part of the underlying narrative of the novel. The revelation of Gabriel as phantasm does change the nature of our consideration, as David Punter notes: "the spectral presence in postcolonial texts of past histories of violence, imperialism and exploitation [is] the principal ground on which a postcolonial writing must be constructed" ("Spectral Criticism" 267-268). Blanca creates in Gabriel an imaginary African Other that accompanies and protects her. In Blanca's haunting by Gabriel, the postcolonial becomes spectral, and this examination must in turn be psychic as opposed to purely material. This Other, specifically Gabriel, is Blanca's mental creation and reflects the intimate, inherent condition of the spectral: to recognize and yet not to recognize the other; to recognize a foreign body at the heart of the self; to be aware... that

one's very vocabulary, even perhaps one's gestures, have been formed by the other. (Punter, "Spectral Criticism" 269)

That is, the Other that I will focus on here is a spectral Other that haunts the post-colonizer. But not only is the spectrality of this Other significant; Gabriel is a highly sexualized mental creation. The young white Spanish female protagonist creates a strong and erotic African male to protect and seduce her. As I analyze this novel, my consideration of these characteristics will show that they draw on a history of Orientalist gendering of Africa and the African male, while the use of a spectral incarnation of these characteristics highlights the instability and subjectivity of the same eroticized stereotypes.

My thesis within this particular analysis is that this creation of the Other reflects psychoanalytic concepts of repression and trauma,²⁴⁴ and hints at an authorial self-conscious presentation of the Other that, while superficially eroticizing and disingenuous, ultimately questions the representation and reception of the Other in fiction. Through a consideration of the structure of the text, a psychoanalytic examination of Blanca's character, and an analysis of the overall effect, I hope to dissect the underlying dynamics of this novel and its representation of the Other as found in the character Gabriel. A reading of these themes – the Other, trauma and repression, gender, and the postcolonial – will articulate my thesis: that the representation of the Other in this novel – in the character of the "imagined" Gabriel – relies on historical stereotypes and clichéd tropes, and simultaneously destabilizes their creation. To accomplish this, I focus on three

²⁴⁴ For an insightful collection of essays on memory and trauma, see *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* edited by Cathy Caruth wherein the definition of trauma as an event "outside the range of human experience" (100) is examined and theorized, specifically in the essay by Laura S. Brown "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma".

possible readings of the representation of the Other. First, the manifestation of the Other as a result of trauma. Second, of the Other as erotic phantom. And third, a reverse argument, to turn the text on its head and consider the possibility that Gabriel did exist and that the narrator turned him into a specter.

An initial consideration must begin with the structure of the text and the authority of the narrator. As noted above, Fernando Gamboa has written a fictional text, and yet seems reluctant to commit his novel completely to fiction. This is apparent both from textual evidence and from the public comments he has made on his book such as his open letter “Demonios en el Paraíso”.²⁴⁵ Within the novel, through a stylistic development often found in the realist novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Gamboa attempts to implicate his fictional world with the extra-diegetic dimension. It is a trope at least as old as Cervantes – the original master of meta-fiction. Gamboa’s first chapter is narrated in the first person by an authorial voice that is not explicitly Fernando Gamboa; he creates the simulacrum of an autobiographical voice: “Soy escritor... He venido a buscar ideas para una buena novela” (12).²⁴⁶ His new acquaintance, the protagonist Blanca Idoia, offers him: “una buena historia... una historia auténtica... Una increíble odisea de valor, amor, odio, de... Una historia real... que a veces parece dejar de serlo. Voy a contarte mi historia” (12).²⁴⁷ The chapter concludes with the affirmation that “Yo me he limitado a transcribirla palabra por palabra, tal y como ella me la narró”²⁴⁸ and then the voice addresses the reader directly, making the reader complicit: “[Yo soy u]n eslabón, del mismo modo que usted, cuando llegue a la última página de

²⁴⁵ [Demons in Paradise]

²⁴⁶ [I am a writer... I have come to look for ideas for a good novel]

²⁴⁷ [a good story... an authentic story... An incredible odyssey of bravery, love, hate, of... A real story... that sometimes doesn't seem so. I am going to tell you my story]

²⁴⁸ [I have limited myself to transcribing word for word, just as she narrated it to me]

este libro, puede que se convierta en otro eslabón de esa misma cadena” (13).²⁴⁹

Addressing the reader directly further complicates the clear lines between the diegetic and the extra-diegetic, and makes the text acquire a testimonial value: it is Blanca Idoia’s testimony of her traumatic experience in Equatorial Guinea. In “Education and Crisis,” Shoshana Felman asserts that testimony is an effective modern “discursive *practice*” because it functions as a “performative *speech act*... that exceeds any substantialized significance... [and] that dynamically explodes any conceptual reifications and any constantive delimitations” (17). Gamboa relies upon testimony’s “explosive” power in order to affect the reader and to effect the perceived veracity of the text and its representations. Felman also considers the use of testimony as a rhetorical, legal argument in seeking restitution. In this sense, Gamboa’s fictional text functions parasitically along with the testimonial genre by drawing upon its rhetorically affective power.

After the first chapter, the narrative slips into Blanca Idoia’s first person voice, and its first person integrity is never interrupted by the authorial voice from that point on. And yet, the book closes with a chapter titled “El olvido,”²⁵⁰ in which the initial, authorial voice returns to wrap up the story, affirming once again that Blanca had dictated every word to him. The text is dated, presumably closed, and yet followed immediately by a “Nota del autor”²⁵¹ where, once again, the authorial voice addresses the reader directly: “Lo que acaban de leer es una novela, una ficción que he creído necesaria para describir

²⁴⁹ [I am a link, in the same way that you are, when you arrive at the final page of this book, perhaps you will become another link of this same chain]

²⁵⁰ [Oblivion]

²⁵¹ [Author’s note]

la escalofriante realidad” (379).²⁵² This inclusion creates yet another narrative level, presumably one more connected to the extra-diegetic world. While the inclusion undermines the veracity of the text previously asserted, it also reaffirms the story-line’s testimonial basis – gathered from “testimonios recogidos personalmente” (379).²⁵³ By relying on testimony, then, Gamboa emphasizes a “commitment to truth” – albeit expressed in fiction, and his fictional characters function in order to *bear witness* to a traumatic reality (Laub 73). The reader is led to believe that the story being told is a realistic, if not a real, story.

Said discusses the use of personal testimony and Orientalism in the following manner:

Residence in the Orient involves personal experience and personal testimony to a certain extent. Contributions to the library of Orientalism and to its consolidation depend on how experience and testimony get converted from a purely personal document into the enabling codes of Orientalist science. In other words, within a text there has to take place a metamorphosis from personal to official statement... (157)

Therefore, Gamboa’s use of testimony within a fictional text is not only a narrative device, but also a conscious authorial decision that highlights and forces the reader to question distinctions of veracity and fiction within the novel. To take the novel at face value and to interpret literally its assertions is to convert this testimony into “official

²⁵² [What you have just read is a novel, a fiction that I believed was necessary to describe the horrifying reality]

²⁵³ [Personally gathered testimonies]

statement,” and Gamboa’s open letter attempts such a transformation.²⁵⁴ However, an observant reader must realize that this is a fictional text, and though the narrative voice affirms that it is testimonial in nature, the novel also employs narrative devices that undermine this very assertion.

The text deconstructs simultaneously the premise and promise of reality in Blanca Idoia’s testimony. That is, the narrative trick that underpins the story undermines its reliability and thereby destabilizes directly the authorial assertion of mimesis.

Cervantes’s *Quijote* serves as a prototype, a novel that also “begins out of an erosion of belief in the authority of the written word and it begins with Cervantes” (Alter 3). This cervantine technique constitutes the reader’s discovery at the end that Blanca Idoia has imagined her companion’s entire existence – the novel’s secondary protagonist. Our discovery of Blanca’s mental instability retroactively calls into question her entire narration. Even if the text claims to represent an event “palabra por palabra, tal y como ella me la narró,”²⁵⁵ her narrative is inherently unreliable.²⁵⁶ Every aspect of the text regains its fictive possibility, in direct contrast to Gamboa’s assertion of its realistic possibility. It is, perhaps, the ultimate cervantine “fictionality of fictions” (Alter 3).

Within the diegetic world, any character may or may not exist outside of Blanca Idoia’s mind, and since the story depends entirely upon her narration, her articulation of the plot invites a psychoanalytic analysis. The secret of Blanca’s instability, revealed in the final chapter, confers upon the entire narrative a psychic level of interpretation. The other

²⁵⁴ The open letter, which can be found at J. L. Mejuto’s blog, relies on a combination of personal anecdotal evidence and statistics about the cruelty of Obiang’s government drawn from Amnesty International.

²⁵⁵ [word for word, just as she narrated it to me]

²⁵⁶ As defined by Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: “For lack of better terms, I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms), *unreliable* when he does not.” (158-159)

characters, the Others of the text, are Blanca's own creation, and since in this case the Other is African – racially and culturally Other – her depictions contain far deeper implications of cultural representations of alterity. In this chapter, I focus on Gabriel Biné, the secondary protagonist, because the fact of his imaginary existence is implied, and yet it cannot be denied that – with an unreliable narrator such as Blanca – there exists the possibility that any of the pantheon of characters is an imaginary presence. In such a spectral examination, we find the ghost of the postcolonial and of Orientalist discourse, because, in her creation of the Other, it becomes possible to see that “[t]he concept of the phantom moves the focus of psychoanalytic inquiry beyond the individual being analyzed because it postulates that some people unwittingly inherit the secret psychic substance of their ancestors’ lives” (Abraham and Torok, editor’s note 166). Her psychic creations, and the depictions of the Other within the text rely on established tropes in representations of alterity – she draws from the Orientalist crypt for her narrative.²⁵⁷

The representation of the Other in Gamboa's novel conveys multiple implications. Perhaps the most appropriate is that Gabriel's appearance to Blanca is the result of her own trauma. In her narrative's first chapter, Blanca is arrested for traveling without papers and taken to the police station where she is beaten unconscious. Upon awakening, she is taken before Anastasio Mbá Nseng, the police captain, and on her way to his office she is led past a crowd assembled in the center of the police station's courtyard and

²⁵⁷ I rely on Abraham and Torok's theorization of the crypt and reality as found in their essays in *The Shell and the Kernel* and also David Punter's articulation that “[t]his ‘crypt’, according to Abraham and Torok, is the repository of the secrets of the past, it is the place where the memories of our parents and grandparents are buried, the site on which are stored all the stories which have been too painful, too embarrassing, too revealing to tell; it is in the crypt that the secrets of our own genesis may be buried, but we are ourselves unaware not only of its contents but of its existence or whereabouts, and even psychoanalysis, according to this theory, can exert only a limited influence over the crypt's role in psychic life, however much the psychoanalytic encounter seeks to replicate the conditions of any underlying dialogue with the dead.” (“Spectral Criticism” 263). The enduring power of Orientalist discourse can be understood as a haunting that continues to influence Western discourse in subtle and often unconscious ways.

discovers a group of soldiers brutally gang-raping a fourteen year-old girl. The scene horrifies her “hasta lo más profundo de mi memoria” (26)²⁵⁸ and she anticipates a similar fate for herself. Capitán Anastasio does physically and mentally abuse Blanca, but she avoids being raped. While Blanca never narrates explicitly that she was raped, a psychoanalytic reading of the text suggests the distinct possibility that she was indeed further mistreated and represses the memories/narration of such events. As Anne Whitehead notes: “The traumatic incident is not fully acknowledged at the time that it occurs and only becomes an *event* at some later point of intense emotional crisis” (6) and more explicitly, Whitehead draws on Cathy Caruth in articulating that:

The experience of trauma has not yet been assimilated by the individual and so cannot be possessed in the forms of memory or narrative. On the contrary, trauma assumes a haunting quality, continuing to possess the subject with its insistent repetitions and returns. (12)

In an understanding such as Whitehead and Caruth’s, the effects and articulations of trauma are deferred and “fully evident only in connection with another place and in another time” (12). There are intertextual parallels between Blanca’s trauma and that of Adela in the Marabar Caves in Forster’s *A Passage to India* (1924); the ambiguity of the narrative does not preclude omitted possibilities. In fact, further textual development of Blanca’s neurosis suggests them. In this encounter with Capitán Anastasio, the reader finds the first hints of Blanca’s mental instability and narrative unbelievability. Anastasio asserts that she was traveling alone when arrested, while Blanca believes that she was taking her housekeeper, Doña Margarita, to the Malabo hospital. Doña Margarita’s presence or non-presence functions as a convenient assertion for both parties, but in light

²⁵⁸ [to the most profound depths of my memory]

of the later revelation in regard to Blanca's propensity for imagination, her version is ultimately less reliable.

The encounter with Capitán Anastasio marks a dramatic moment that leads directly to Gabriel's appearance. Blanca is sent to another jail by truck along with other prisoners, and along the way the back door of the truck falls off and she escapes into the jungle, "sumergiéndome en las tinieblas" (40).²⁵⁹ At this next moment Gabriel appears as "una fuerte mano"²⁶⁰ that lifts her up and leads her into the dark and away from her captors. As Blanca thus enters the unknown darkness to escape Capitán Anastasio, she finds solace in Gabriel's apparition. He is, indeed, an archangel that appears and attends her.

Anastasio's direct relationship with Gabriel returns at the end of the novel. Blanca and Gabriel plan to blow up the cathedral where the Guinean president Teodoro Obiang Nguema and other political leaders will be attending the Misa de gallo on Christmas Eve. As Gabriel and Blanca plant explosives on the cathedral's roof, Anastasio confronts them/her and sardonically convinces her that she has been acting alone, is alone, and that Gabriel is a figment of her imagination. Blanca's realization of her solitude and possible lunacy stuns her. Gabriel, who had been a comforting presence – an *heimlich* companion – is converted into and transforms the entire text into something *unheimlich*.²⁶¹ Capitán Anastasio functions as a parenthetical mark to the beginning and end of her hallucinations. Fear of him instigates her imagination and later confrontation with him

²⁵⁹ [submerging myself in the darkness]

²⁶⁰ [a strong hand]

²⁶¹ As articulated by Freud in *The Uncanny*: "The German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich*..., meaning 'familiar'; 'native', 'belonging to the home'; and we are tempted to conclude that what is, 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar" (124).

dispels her *phantasy*.²⁶² Her cross-country flight is an escape from, specifically, Capitán Anastasio, and her flight is a repression of the earlier painful encounter, and even the possibility of other similar encounters.

In an interpretation such as this one, Gabriel is therefore a symptom of Blanca's psychosis, stemming from her trauma:

a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing what may have begun during or after the experience. (Caruth 4)

Gabriel's existence serves as a coping mechanism for Blanca; his presence numbs her distress. He appears when she feels alone, and the text subtly relates this coincidence of his appearance, or apparition, with her solitude. When he does appear, he threatens to leave her if she does not compose herself; his reassurances cause Blanca to reflect:

“[t]enía, definitivamente, el aspecto de alguien en quien se podía confiar” (43).²⁶³

Whenever Blanca lodges in the house of a local family, hides in a convent, or finds a hospital run by fellow countrymen, Gabriel disappears quietly, and yet when she finds herself alone on a dark beach feeling “abandonada” (103),²⁶⁴ Gabriel reappears from “un pequeño sendero [del pueblo] que no había visto” (105).²⁶⁵ As a symptom, he embodies the *repetition-compulsion* aspect of the uncanny (Freud 145); he appears and reappears at her time of need. When she returns to Spain and feels alienated from her friends and

²⁶² As defined in the entry “Phantasy (of Fantasy)” in *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* by J. Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis: “Imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfilment of a wish (in the last analysis, an unconscious wish) in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes” (314).

²⁶³ [he had, definitely, the aspect of someone in whom one could trust]

²⁶⁴ [abandoned]

²⁶⁵ [a small trail from the village that she had not seen]

family, alone in the midst of all that is familiar to her, “una sola persona acudió a [su] cabeza. / Un nombre. / Un hombre.” (287).²⁶⁶ This realization compels her to return to Equatorial Guinea in order to “rescue” Gabriel. The moment of Blanca’s auto-realization of this fear of being alone comes about when she is confronted with Gabriel’s non-existence by Capitán Anastasio. She asks herself: “¿Tanto había necesitado tener a alguien a mi lado?” (368).²⁶⁷ Gabriel represents an emotional need for Blanca; he accompanies her in her solitude and guides her over unfamiliar terrain.

Gabriel, in this sense, is the cathexis of Blanca’s anxieties. He is Other – racially, sexually, and culturally – yet familiar:

La cabeza afeitada y sus facciones firmes me recordaban extrañamente a las de mi padre, un conjunto de líneas rectas y ángulos enmarcando unos labios gruesos y unos ojos grandes y sinceros que emanaban confianza destacando en una piel de ébano. (43)²⁶⁸

He is phenotypically Other, and yet evocative of the familiar and specifically of the Father – psychically the giver of power, authority, and protection. His “piel de ébano” contrasts visually with that of the aptly named “Blanca.”²⁶⁹ His presence makes her feel secure; she does not feel isolated, and he serves as a bridge between her and the Others she encounters on her flight across Equatorial Guinea. He effectively functions as a “native guide” – a common trope in colonial, Orientalist literature – a local who accompanies the “European interloper through unfamiliar landscape” (Ashcroft 27), an

²⁶⁶ [a single person came to her mind. / A name. / A man.]

²⁶⁷ [Had I really needed someone by my side so much?]

²⁶⁸ [The shaved head and his firm features strangely reminded me of my father, a collection of straight lines and angles marking some thick lips and big, sincere eyes that emanated confidence shining in a skin of ebony.]

²⁶⁹ [White]

aiding and supportive presence who is there for the benefit of the naïve and uninitiated Westerner. His position in the text is that of a Sab, Uncle Tom, Mister Johnson, or Dr. Aziz²⁷⁰ in his essentially servile and accessorial role. Gabriel appears and accompanies when needed, he conveniently disappears when inconvenient. In this sense, perhaps Gabriel is not only Blanca's guardian angel, but, as an archetype, he is the West's. He is Other, and represented as what Marianna Torgovnick calls *primitive* – an exotic yet familiar presence.²⁷¹ Therefore, as a character in a Westerner's novel, and as the imaginary production of the European within that novel, we find that “[t]he primitive does what we ask it to do. Voiceless, it lets us speak for it. It is our ventriloquist's dummy – or so we like to think” (Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive* 9). We find this in Blanca's self-questioning upon her realization that Gabriel is imaginary: “¿Y todo lo que me había contado sobre Guinea? ¿Ya lo sabía?” (368)²⁷² Gabriel's voice was her projection all along; his role as “tour guide” of Guinea, and all of the political and cultural commentary that he provided, sprung from Blanca's psyche. The integrity of her representations of alterity is, therefore, impossible. Within the text, on more than one narrative level, all cultural, African Others are the creations of Western minds.

This double bind could be interpreted in at least two manners: first, in the naiveté of the author who fails to realize the inherent instability of his narrative's message. As noted above, assertions of verisimilitude and mimesis are undermined by the narrative tricks that engage and entertain. *Guinea* would, therefore, represent the work of an

²⁷⁰ As in Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841), Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* (1939), and E. M. Foster's *A Passage to India* (1924).

²⁷¹ Torgovnick's articulation of the term *primitive* is complex; the *primitive* is both “the sign and symbol of desires the West has sought to repress” (*Primitive Passions* 8) and “an exotic world which is also a familiar world” (*Gone Primitive* 8) that ultimately functions as a “precondition and a supplement to [the West's] sense of self” (*Gone Primitive* 246)

²⁷² [And everything he had told me about Guinea? I already knew?]

oblivious and blatantly biased author continuing a tradition of Orientalist narration. Second, and conversely, that what is at work is a conscious authorial manipulation of narrative levels that highlight the instability of narration, testimony, and representation, strategically undermining the Orientalist narration that is employed. In this second interpretation, the insertion of the uncanny – the spectral – into the text serves “to disrupt the binary logic on which colonialist, nationalist and patriarchal [read: Orientalist] narrative depends” (Whitehead 91). In drawing on the narrative legacy of Cervantes and by allusions to caricatured representations of colonial literary figures such as Sab, Uncle Tom, Mister Johnson, or Dr. Aziz, *Guinea* invokes an intertextuality that subtly subverts its own narrative. Whitehead suggests that this intertextuality “gives voice to these unrealised presences, and can powerfully disrupt perceived modes of thinking” (91). Whitehead further adds that intertextuality as a discursive strategy

produce[s] works which are highly self-conscious and self-reflexive...
intertextual fictions are ‘novels about novels, which problematise the
relation of fiction to the world’. For the postcolonial writer... such self-
consciousness can make a powerful political point. (92)

The fictional testimony, therefore, draws on the intimacy of the genre for its ability to create an “*impact* that dynamically explodes any conceptual reifications and any constative delimitations” (Felman 17) and combines with it the narrative techniques of fiction to create a text that engages, impacts, and forces reaction. Discourses of alterity are, at once, repeated and destabilized; Gamboa subtly undermines the process of creation of the Other by emphasizing the Westerner’s attempt to construct and give voice to their own reification of the African Other.

And yet, this is not the only possible interpretation of the Other from this text. The ambivalence that the narrative structure creates – examined above – lends itself to more than one possible analysis. Is the Other simply a symptom of trauma, an imaginary creation that serves to guide and help the hapless Westerner? What active qualities, if any, does the Other have in the text? Any further analysis must, of course, be tied to the initial consideration of the unreliable narrator, and yet in examining her stated motives and actions, in her projections, an alternate impression of the Other – of the African – can be formulated. Therefore, I would like to consider the erotic phantom of the Other and focus on the eroticized representation of this masculine African Other.

This interpretation is subtly different from the first – the Other as aide and passive companion – in that the erotic Other *seduces*. Inherent in this analysis is the trope of the erotic Other, drawing on the “Oriental clichés [of] harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys” (Said 190). Said observes that “the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe. Virtually no European writer who wrote on or traveled to the Orient in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself from this quest” (190). Therefore, Blanca’s psychic creation of Gabriel parallels Flaubert’s association of “the Orient with the escapism of sexual fantasy” (Said 190). From the moment that Gabriel grabs Blanca’s hand and leads her through the woods to safety, their companionship begins to develop towards an erotic relationship. Gabriel’s strength, confidence, and familiarity (noted above) draw Blanca to him. She begins to flirt with him early on, developing a camaraderie that leads her to eventually ask Gabriel if he is married or if he has a significant other. This conversation broaches

the possibility of their own romantic involvement and leads to their first kiss, and yet the power dynamics within this brief exchange are notable:

[Blanca:] -Tienes... quiero decir, tenías un buen empleo. Eres culto, inteligente, y no te falta atractivo. Y bueno, por lo que he visto en los meses que llevo en Guinea no parece difícil encontrar pareja.

[Gabriel:] -Quizá es porque soy algo exigente...

-¿Pero... te gustan las chicas?

-¿Me preguntas si soy homosexual?... ¿Doy esa impresión?

-No, qué va – aseguré –. Pero pensé que te referías a ello al decir que...

-Lo que quiero decir – aclaró – es que me atraen las mujeres valientes, inteligentes, con carácter... más o menos como tú – y sus ojos me miraron tímidamente. (235)²⁷³

Gabriel brings up his attraction to Blanca first; in this sense he is the pursuer, and yet his reticence and timidity also present him as the less assertive party, while Blanca's aggressive sarcasm asserts her verbal power, and thereby her cultural dominance. Even though Gabriel admits his attraction first, he is placed on the defensive – that is, the Other, even when assertive, takes the subservient role.

This Other, though secondary to the Westerner, may be passive in expressing emotions, but, in regards to physical seduction, he is active and irresistible. This Other

²⁷³ ["You have... I mean, you had a good job. You are educated, intelligent, and you're not lacking attractiveness. And well, from what I've seen in the months that I have been in Guinea it doesn't seem difficult to find a partner." / "Maybe it's because I'm somewhat demanding..." / "But... you do like women?" / "Are you asking me if I'm a homosexual? ... Do I give that impression?" / "No, not at all" I assured him. "But I thought that that's what you were referring to when you said that..." / "What I want to say" he clarified "is that I am attracted to brave and intelligent women, with character... more or less like you" and his eyes looked at me timidly.]

incites passion in Blanca; shortly after looking at her “tímidamente:”²⁷⁴ “Gabriel me tomó por la cintura... sus ansiosos labios se fundieron con los míos provocando una incontrollable marea de calor que recorrió arterias y venas hasta converger en el centro de mi sexo” (236).²⁷⁵ His raw, primitive, sexual power succeeds in dominating the “discourse;” where his words were pathetic, his sexual magnetism is potent.²⁷⁶ As their passionate kiss deepens, the jungle around them grows thunderous; in the heat of the moment, Blanca believes that “todo aquello... era producto de nuestra pasión” (237),²⁷⁷ but in reality it is a herd of jungle elephants charging through the woods and threatening to pummel the amorous couple in their stampede. While this is a humorous scene, the connection of these two events is worth considering. Blanca compares the passion she feels with Gabriel to the physical power and danger of the charging elephants. She is amazed by Gabriel’s sexual draw and also by the elephants’ raw beauty and strength. In essence, Gabriel and the herd of elephants share the same awe-inspiring qualities. This comparison ties the representation of Gabriel to the *primitive*, the animal, and also sets him up as an emblem for Africa, much as the jungle elephant is also in the popular imagination. Whether Gabriel exists or is a figment of Blanca’s imagination is irrelevant

²⁷⁴ [timidly]

²⁷⁵ [Gabriel took my by the waist... his anxious lips melted into mine provoking an uncontrollable wave of heat that surged through my arteries and veins until converging in the center of my sex.]

²⁷⁶ Marianna Torgovnick in *Gone Primitive* and *Primitive Passions* does an excellent study of the West’s fascination with the “primitive.” Most interesting are her insights that: “To study the primitive is thus to enter an exotic world... [that] is structured by sets of images and ideas that have slipped from their original metaphoric status to control perceptions of primitives – images and ideas that I call tropes... Primitives are our untamed selves, our id forces – libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous. Primitives are mystics, in tune with nature, part of its harmonies. Primitives are free. Primitive exist at the ‘lowest cultural levels’; we occupy the ‘highest,’ in the metaphors of stratification and hierarchy commonly used by Malinowski and others like him. The ensemble of these tropes – however miscellaneous and contradictory – forms the basic grammar and vocabulary of what I call primitivist discourse, a discourse fundamental to the Western sense of self and Other.” (*Gone Primitive* 8) and also: “Within Western culture, the idiom ‘going primitive’ is in fact congruent in many ways with the idiom ‘getting physical’. Freudian theory can help us understand the illogical congruence between the two idioms, though it does not originate with Freud.” (*Gone Primitive* 228)

²⁷⁷ [all of that... was a product of our passion]

for this point, her narrative inextricably links Gabriel with Africa, in a kind of reverse mythologization. That is, Marianna Torgovnick explains how Westerners have traditionally had

[t]he tendency to perceive primitive peoples or things through the lens of Western myths...: an African woman exhibited widely in nineteenth-century Europe was called the Hottentot Venus, Frobenius called Benin Atlantis; Freud invented his version of the primal horde with the Oedipus story in mind. Malinowski... called his book on Kula exchange *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, superimposing Greek myth on his ethnographic findings... Such crossing of Western Myths and primitive peoples or institutions creates a never-never-land of false identities or homologies...The tropes and categories through which we view primitive societies draw lines and establish relations of power between us and them, even as they presuppose that they mirror us.” (*Gone Primitive* 10-11)

Gamboa, instead of imposing myths *from* the West on the African Other, imposes the West’s myths *of* Africa on the African Other.²⁷⁸ This exoticization (through eroticization) reinforces images of the primitive and the distinct Otherness of the African. It also highlights how the West’s myths of Africa are powerful tropes in our perception and representation of the African Other. Both Africa and the African male become erotically powerful symbols in this interpretation.

²⁷⁸ There are, indeed, scenes that echo exactly what Torgovnick describes such as when Blanca is taken in by a pigmy tribe and she describes herself as “una especie de Blancanieves con mis siete pigmeos” [a kind of Snow White with my Seven Pygmies] (356-357) and also when she witnesses a hunt and imagines one of the pigmies as a torero “en traje de luces” [“in a suit of lights” (the traditional outfit worn by Spanish bullfighters)] and she even congratulates his kill with “un sonoro beso en la mejilla, [y] al pobre casi le da un síncope” [a loud kiss on the cheek that almost made the poor devil faint] (230).

Seduction by an African represents, for Blanca, a metaphor for her seduction by Africa. At the moment of her (imagined?) physical intimacy with Gabriel, she is overwhelmed by the intensity: “escapándose al control que hasta ese día me había acompañado en mis anteriores relaciones. Ahora estaba en África, en brazos de un africano...” (333).²⁷⁹ This encounter acquires deeper connotations upon considering the sexual act as being solitary – if Gabriel is indeed a creation of her imagination. Under this consideration, she is seduced by the idea of Africa not personified in a physical body. The intertextual allusions are strong, once again, with such texts as María Luisa Bombal’s *La última niebla* [*The House of Mist*]: an imagined lover, the cathexis of repressed desires; Gabriel the erotic, African phantom haunts Blanca.

Blanca draws on her postcolonial crypt to imagine him; her narrative is even explicitly nostalgic for the colonial era as she relates what an elderly Guinean man told her: “-Cuando yo era joven, teníamos electricidad, agua corriente, cines, hospitales, escuelas... éramos la envidia de África. Y mírenos ahora... / -Se refiere a los tiempos de la colonia, ¿no?” (322)²⁸⁰ Upon her return to Guinea to rescue Gabriel, Blanca also assumes the alias of Karen Blixen for her false passport, another clear intertextual reference to nostalgic colonial literature: “el falsificador [de pasaportes], con un peculiar sentido de humor, había decidido que me llamaría Karen Blixen; dando por hecho que el aduanero de turno nunca habría leído *Memorias de África*” (305).²⁸¹ This comical alias strengthens intertextual ties between *Guinea* and other (post-)colonial texts, such as

²⁷⁹ [losing the control that up to this day had accompanied me in my previous relationships. Now I was in Africa, in the arms of an African...]

²⁸⁰ [“When I was young, we had electricity, running water, cinemas, hospitals, schools... we were the envy of Africa. And look at us now...” / “You’re referring to the times of the colony, right?”]

²⁸¹ [the passport forger, with a peculiar sense of humor, had decided that I should be called Karen Blixen; assuming that the customs agent on duty would never have read *Out of Africa*]

Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*. Indeed, the fact that Karen Blixen used the pseudonym of Isak Dinesen and Blanca Idoia assumes the alias of Karen Blixen subtly hints at the confusing nexus between fiction and non-fiction. The historical Karen Blixen both created a fictional persona in Isak Dinesen and is turned into a fictional alias in *Guinea*. These textual layers draw attention to the narrative and question the veracity of that very narration.

Torgovnick's assertion that the primitive Other is "voiceless... [i]t is our ventriloquist's dummy" returns us to our initial consideration of *Africa the seducer* (Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive* 9). As examined above, Gabriel is verbally subservient to Blanca, and yet physically assertive, dominant even. An admittedly essentialist analogy of verbal:physical::high culture:low culture²⁸² highlights how these alternating dominances in the interaction between Blanca and Gabriel function to perpetuate "a discourse fundamental to the Western sense of self and Other" (Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive* 9). And yet, it must be emphasized that the self-conscious and self-reflexive narrative can also function to destabilize the very stereotypes and discourses that it appears to maintain.²⁸³ *Africa the seducer* is a trope found consistently in Western colonial and post-colonial literary traditions. Gabriel's physical seduction of Blanca represents the phantomatic seduction of the West by its historical, irresistible and essentially erotic Other.

²⁸² Drawn also from Torgovnick's observation that "Primitives exist at the 'lowest cultural levels'; we occupy the 'highest,' in the metaphors of stratification and hierarchy commonly used by Malinowski and others like him" (*Gone Primitive* 9).

²⁸³ In reading this novel I found myself asking whether Gamboa was indeed motivated by altruistic or commercial concerns, only to find that he reflects on these same competing dynamics within the text, giving a nod to my doubts: "[Gabriel] -¿Crees que ellos [la policía de España] trabajan por dinero, o por elevados conceptos de orden y justicia? / [Blanca:] -Pues... por ambas cosas, seguramente. Ya comprendo la analogía." ["Do you think that the Spanish police work for money, or for more elevated concepts of order and justice?" / "Well... for both, surely. Okay, I understand the analogy."] (343)

As noted above, Blanca's trauma and psychosis preface her creation of the Other, and Gamboa employs these narrative tricks to both establish and undermine archetypal representations of the Other. In these regards, Gamboa's manipulation of the narrative is subtle and nuanced, often intertextual and self-conscious. The Other, in *Guinea*, is not totalizable, but rather a complex and fractured conglomeration that can be analyzed on various levels and is ultimately based on "the European idea of the Orient" (Said 16), and all the more so since Gabriel is, potentially, an ideal creation of the protagonist.

In this relationship, real or imagined, between Blanca and Gabriel, there is also the metaphorical relationship of the West to Africa. Just as Europe relied on a relationship of "a strong and a weak partner" in East/West relations (Said 40), so does Blanca assume the role of initiation and aggression. However, her mental instability undermines her status as the strong partner and the West over East hierarchy is questioned as fictitious. Said asks: "the Oriental is *contained* and *represented* by dominating frameworks. Where do these come from?" (Said 40), and Gamboa responds by saying that they are created by unreliable narrators.

In closing, but not concluding an analysis of this novel, I would like to ultimately consider the suggestion of Abraham and Torok by asking if it is possible to "[d]eny the reality of the trauma by turning it into mere fantasy? Would this not in fact confer on it, by dint of its very negation, an additional and absolutely insurmountable status of reality?" (161) What happens when we confer textual reality on Gabriel, when we take him out of Blanca's psychosis and consider that he was not a figment of her imagination, but rather a flesh and blood companion to her?

This consideration would not drastically change many of the conclusions reached thus far. However, it would subtly affect the reading of Gabriel's animus and textual autonomy. It is necessary to entertain this possibility because the ambiguity that the text offers reflects Freud's articulation of the uncanny. In citing Jentsch, Freud points out that

In telling a story, one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton; and to do it in such a way that his attention is not directly focused upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be urged to go into the matter and clear it up immediately, since that, as we have said, would quickly dissipate the peculiar emotional effect of the thing. (132)

The ambiguity that Gamboa creates is, indeed, uncanny – it is effective in instilling narrative doubt, and in provoking the reader's reaction. If read literally, *Guinea* is a novel that relies on Orientalist clichés in representing the African Other. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that Gamboa's narrative choices – “style, figures of speech, setting...” (Said 21) —force the reader to reflect on the text, to question its realities and its assertions. By saving the uncanny plot twist for the end, Gamboa makes the reader re-evaluate what s/he has already received; nothing presented can be taken for granted and this is a powerful effect.

Considering Gabriel as “real” adds another narrative layer to the text, further complicating and destabilizing totalizing conclusions. Just as Karen Blixen is Isak Dineson and Blanca Idoia is Karen Blixen, Gabriel is potentially ideal or real within the text. This instability undermines the process of representation of the Other, highlighting

the subjective and unreliability of narration. *Guinea* is open to possibility, to interpretation; just as the African Other is at the mercy of the Western author and the Western psyche. By drawing on subtle allusions to the colonial literary canon, Gamboa self-consciously questions his own project of representation, as well as that of the authors who precede him. Gamboa himself, ultimately, is haunted by the specter of colonial literature, Orientalist discourse and the inheritance of representations of the Other. By explicitly involving this tradition in his work, *Guinea* conjures the ghost and questions his inheritance. What on the surface may appear as a glib hollywood-esque novel made for the silver screen, in actuality undermines previous superficial representations. What reads as an entertaining story, analyzes as a phantomatic parody that does indeed “make a powerful... point” (Whitehead 92).

Is Gabriel a flesh-and-bone Guinean with voice? Is he Blanca’s erotic African ghost? Is he her guardian angel – or perhaps the West’s? If we close the book with a certain amount of confusion then Gamboa has achieved no small task in forcing the reader to question “reality” and ultimately to question how s/he sees the Other. For these reasons, Gamboa’s *Guinea* is a powerful example of a nuanced representation of Africa and the African Other. It both relies on and undermines the Western ideas of Africa, showing that these enduring specters are persistent yet unreliable. The image of Blanca Idoia making love to an imaginary African is retroactively converted from a sensual, interpersonal encounter to a comical, self-pleasuring fantasy. Perhaps this is Gamboa’s ultimate message, as Orientalist discourse has been justified as beneficent and objective, *Guinea* reveals that it is nothing more than the West’s own comical, self-pleasuring fantasy and that it “has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world” (Said 12).

III. INVOKING SHAHRAZAD, REVOKING ORIENTALISM: THE OTHER RESPONDS IN MONTSERRAT ABUMALHAM'S *¿TE ACUERDAS DE SHAHRAZAD?*

O my sister, an thou be not sleepy,
relate to me some new story,
delectable and delightsome, the
better to speed our waking hours.
And I will tell thee a tale which shall
be our deliverance, if so Allah
please, and which shall turn the King
from his bloodthirsty custom.
—Scheherazade (*The 1001 Arabian
Nights*)

Montserrat Abumalham Mas is of Lebanese origin, but was born in Tétouan, Morocco, and she is currently a professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Philology Department at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Roldán). The novel considered here, *¿Te acuerdas de Shahrāzād?* (2001), is her first work of fiction. Her academic work, however, is extensive, including some thirty plus articles and the book *El Islam* (1999). Her articles focus on issues of Islam and Arabic in a variety of issues from poetry to immigration, and she has also published on Judeo-Arabic and the Arabic-Christian Bible.²⁸⁴ Pedro Martínez Montávez, in the prologue to the novel, praises Abumalham's academic work as insightful and illuminating and her fiction as “bien concebido, dispuesto [y] graduado”²⁸⁵ and drawing masterfully on the tradition of Arabic literature (9-10).

¿Te acuerdas de Shahrāzād? reflects the academic work of Abumalham in drawing on a variety of literary traditions from the traditional tale of *The 1001 Arabian Nights* to the Egyptian writer Tawfik al-Hakim's play *Shahrāzād* (1934) and contemporary Lebanese literature by authors such as Yubran Jalil Yubran, Mijail Naima

²⁸⁴ See bibliography for a sampling of some of Abumalham's most recent and most relevant articles.

²⁸⁵ [well-conceived, organized, and composed]

and Iliya Abu-Madi (Martínez Montávez 7, 10). The novel shares the epistolary genre with Spanish authors such as Carmen Martín Gaité's *Nubosidad variable* (1992) and Olga Guirao's *Carta con diez años de retraso* (2002), among others,²⁸⁶ and similarities can also be seen in Abumalham's work and other contemporary Hispano-Moroccan literature such as Ahmed Daoudi's *El diablo de Yudis* [*The Devil of Yudis*] (1994), Mohamed Bouissef Rekab's *La señora* [*The Woman*] (2006), and Larbi el-Harti's *Después de Tánger* [*After Tangier*] (2003), which were published after Abumalham's novel. Thematic similarities between Abumalham and these other Hispano-Moroccan authors partially justify my analysis of her novel within this study. Though Abumalham is of Lebanese heritage, she grew up predominantly in Morocco and Spain,²⁸⁷ and her primary language of professional and literary expression is Spanish. She represents a growing group of authors from Arabic backgrounds that choose to write in Spanish and for a predominantly Western audience.²⁸⁸ As Abumalham draws on Arabic literary archetypes and stories, and expresses them in Spanish, her representation of this cultural (and literary) Other contributes directly to the current study.

¿Te acuerdas de Shahrazad? contributes to this chapter specifically in its invocation and representation of the literary archetype of Shahrazad.²⁸⁹ As the central

²⁸⁶ Also relevant is Rueda's work *Cartas sin lacrar* [*Unsealed Letters*] (2001) which examines the tradition of literary epistolarity during the Spanish enlightenment.

²⁸⁷ Monterrat Abumalham's father is Nayib Abumalham, credited as the first person to translate Cervantes' *Quijote* into Arabic. He emigrated to Morocco in 1937 and worked for High Commisary in the administration of the Moroccan Protectorate, received a doctorate from the University of Granada, and served as a professor at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Charia).

²⁸⁸ This group of authors has been examined and documented in the anthology *Calle del Agua: Antología contemporánea de Literatura Hispanomagrebí*, edited by Manuel Gahete, et al. and also in Rueda's *El retorno/El reencuentro: La inmigración en la literatura hispano-marroquí*.

²⁸⁹ Shahrazad is the story teller of *The 1001 Arabian Nights*, folk tales originating in the Middle East and South Asia during the Islamic Golden Age (circa 750 CE to 1250 CE). In the stories, she marries the king Shahryar who executes each wife the dawn following the wedding night and marries a new virgin. Shahrazad is able to stall her own execution by entertaining the king with a continuous story that creates

female protagonist of the novel, and as a literary and cultural Other, this representation of the mythical Arabic storyteller will serve for an analysis of the writing of gender and the Other in Spanish letters by a Moroccan-born author. Additionally, one of the most apparent characteristics of the novel warrants a preliminary justification: this novel never explicitly locates itself geographically. Neither does Shahrazad as narrator divulge her location or telling details about her identity. This geographical ambiguity continues the literary tradition of Shahrazad as pan-Arabic rather than belonging to one specific country or people. In *Scheherazade Goes West*, Fatema Mernissi talks at length about “Scheherazade” and *The 1001 Arabian Nights*, how it has been adopted by individual storytellers throughout its history as an orally passed story. Mernissi’s grandmother, and various translations, place it as originating in Basra and Baghdad and also occurring in lands that have been interpreted as East Africa, “the land of the Amazons,” the “Seychelles, Madagascar, or Malacca, and still others situate it in China or Indonesia” (Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West* 5-7). To further contribute to the ambiguous geographicality of Shahrazad, the first editors of a written version of *The 1001 Arabian Nights* were French (1704) and the first edition in Arabic came from Calcutta, India, more than a hundred years later in 1814 (Mernissi 56).

Indeed, Shahrazad has, for centuries, fascinated and seduced the West.²⁹⁰ As a literary archetype, she represents the erotic allure of the Muslim woman. Mernissi describes this seduction as an erotic and spiritual weapon that overcomes the West:

suspense. He ultimately spares her life (“Scheherazade,” “One Thousand and One Nights,” “Islamic Golden Age”).

²⁹⁰ The general anglicized spelling is “Scheherazade” and the hispanicized is “Shehrezada,” but for consistency purposes and fidelity to the author’s specific orthographic choice, here I will use the spelling found in the text: “Shahrazad.”

Scheherazade [achieves] what the Muslims who had fought the Crusaders failed to do: She ravished the Christians, from devout Catholics to Protestants and the Greek Orthodox, using only words: “Versions... appeared in England, Germany, Italy, Holland, Denmark, Russia, and Belgium...”... The subjugation of Christian souls by Scheherazade’s tales was so satanically pervasive that ensuing translations... reached a staggering number. (61-62)

Shahrazad, therefore, represents, and has represented for centuries, a cultural and religious Other that has both tempted and corrupted Western hegemonic morality. As this geographically ambiguous Other, she belongs as much to the oral tradition of the Maghreb as she does to Mesopotamia and Southern Asia. Additionally, by employing the figure of Sharazad and not explicitly locating the narrator or the space within the text, Abumalham participates in a tradition common to other recent works by Hispano-Moroccan authors. Ahmed Daoudi’s novel *El diablo de Yudis* occurs in an invented land—the island of Yudis and the continent of Burwilasch and has a street story teller at its center, Mohamed Bouiseff Rekab’s *La Señora* is a figure that echoes the erotic qualities of Shahrazad’s tales, and Larbi el-Harti’s *Después de Tánger* contains “la sensualidad de *Las mil y una noches*” (Castillo 8).²⁹¹ Abumalham’s text shares much in common with these other contemporary Hispano-Moroccan authors, and represents the important distinction of also being the work of a female author. Not only does

²⁹¹ [the sensuality of *The Thousand and One Nights*]

Abumalham represent a cultural Other but also a gendered Other within a canon of predominately male voices.²⁹²

In returning to the idea of Shahrazad as a Maghrebi literary archetype, the question of the ambiguous geographical location within the novel and also its timelessness becomes relevant to this study for its very quality of ambiguity. *¿Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?* contributes specifically to this study on works about Africa as a work by a Hispano-Magrebi author invoking Arabic literary archetypes, writing in Spanish, and de-emphasizing the specific geography of the plot.²⁹³ The Maghreb, Spain, Europe, and the Middle East are all implicitly invoked while none is privileged. Arabic literary ideas written in a European language merge Same and Other into a single narrative. This singularity makes Abumalham's novel a necessary inclusion in this study. *¿Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?* is a novel that overturns the hegemony of Orientalist discourse; the Western and the Oriental are melded into a masterful, intercultural text that gives voice to the cultural Other and speaks to a Western public.

In its short 65 pages, the archetype of Shahrazad is the (almost) sole narrative voice. It is an epistolary novel and comprised of 46 letters written by the presumed Shahrazad. These letters are prefaced by a two page narration that recounts in brief the story of Shahrazad as found in *The 1001 Arabian Nights* and offers context for the letters that follow. The recipient of the letters is described as “un hombre que no era rey, pero

²⁹² I refer here to the limited canon examined within this dissertation, namely of contemporary Spanish and African authors, writing in Spanish about Africa.

²⁹³ *¿Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?* was published as a part of the Casa de África collection by SIAL Ediciones. This serves to show that even if Abumalham's novel is not representative of the Maghreb or Africa in and of itself, for the Spanish reading public and specifically the SIAL Ediciones publishing house, it belongs to a collection of works thematically dealing with Africa.

vivía en un reino tan lejano como las últimas brumas del alma humana” (13).²⁹⁴ He is sad, lonely, and lovelorn and

Cuando el colmo de la desesperación anegaba ya los últimos pisos de su corazón y él estaba a punto de ahogarse en su propia angustia, abrió el buzón de su casa y encontró una carta. Una letra desconocida le asaltó desde el sobre. (13)²⁹⁵

At first, he is unsure of what to do with these letters from an unknown writer; they are neither provocative nor remarkably comforting:

No era una carta larga ni corta. Era una carta ni concisa ni prolija. No era respetuosa ni atrevida. Tampoco era extravagante ni vulgar. No supo qué pensar de aquella carta que no era ni anónima ni de firma conocida. Al final del texto sólo aparecía un nombre: Shahrazad. (14)²⁹⁶

The letters that comprise the novel are only those of Shahrazad; the man’s responses—if he wrote any—are not included. The unnamed narrator employs the first person in the final paragraph of this introduction, as is common with the epistolary genre, to take credit for the organization of the text: “Este libro se compone de las cartas de Shahrazad al hombre triste. Las he ordenado según sus fechas. Como sólo figuraba el día y el mes, pero no el año, es posible que haya algún error de orden,”(14)²⁹⁷ and asserts an attempt at

²⁹⁴ [a man who was not a king, but lived in a kingdom as far away as the final mists of the human soul]

²⁹⁵ [When the limit of desperation overwhelmed the final floors of his heart and he was at the point of drowning in his own anguish, he opened the mailbox of his house and found a letter. An unknown handwriting assaulted him from the envelope.]

²⁹⁶ [It was neither a long nor a short letter. Neither was it concise nor protracted. Neither was it respectful nor daring. Nor extravagant nor vulgar. He didn’t know what to think about that letter that was neither anonymous nor from known signature. At the end of the text appeared only a name: Shahrazad.]

²⁹⁷ [This book is composed of the letters from Shahrazad to the sad man. I have organized them according to their dates. Since they only contain the day and the month, but not the year, it is possible that there is some error in their order.]

fidelity to the “propósito que las generó” (14).²⁹⁸ The first of these semi-anonymous letters is dated April 27th and they are dated approximately eight days apart each, covering a year and five months with the penultimate letter dated September 8th and the final letter “Sin fecha” (78).²⁹⁹ These unrequested letters become very meaningful to the recipient, even as he is unable to respond because there is no return address included. The narrator notes that the “hombre triste... conservó esas cartas hasta el fin de sus días, que murió abrazado a ellas, que desde que empezó a recibirlas no volvió a pensar en aquella otra mujer amada e inaccesible y que fueron rescatadas de sus dedos rígidos por alguien” (14).³⁰⁰

The choice of the epistolary genre contributes to the narrative’s effect in a number of ways. It contributes a sense of intimacy to the narration—the letters are ostensibly meant for the eyes of the “hombre triste” alone. As Rueda notes, in “El poder de la carta privada,” “la producción epistolar problematiza las dicotomías entre ficción y realidad, espacio privado y público, falsedad y verdad, pasado y presente, personaje y autor” (376).³⁰¹ In addition, the very concept of a text composed of letters implies a sense of distance between letter-writer and recipient, what Rueda calls “la distancia epistolar” (378).³⁰² Abumalham appears cognizant of these generic qualities, and exploits their potential actively. In the initial chapter introducing the letters, she begins retelling the story of Shahrazad with the line “Una vez había un rey que vivía en un reino tan lejano

²⁹⁸ [purpose that generated them]

²⁹⁹ [undated]

³⁰⁰ [sad man... conserved these letters until the end of his days, that he died holding them, that since he began to receive them he did not return to think about that other inaccessible and beloved woman and that they were rescued from his stiff fingers by someone]

³⁰¹ [epistolary production problematizes the dichotomies between fiction and reality, private and public space, truth and falsity, past and present, character and author]

³⁰² [epistolary distance]

como los más profundos pliegues del corazón humano” (13).³⁰³ A couple of paragraphs later, as the narrator describes the sad man who receives the letters, he is depicted as living in “un reino tan lejano como las últimas brumas del alma humana” (13).³⁰⁴ Shahrazad’s first letter emphasizes that “Vives demasiado lejos. Tu reino está demasiado lejos” (15),³⁰⁵ and her letters repeatedly employ adjectives of distance, both literal and metaphorical.

Abumalham’s narration is ambiguous, as the epistolary genre is also in its false intimacy, reality, etc. It contains descriptions that are full of *neither... nor*—“ni serio ni riendo a carcajadas...” (19)³⁰⁶—or unimportant conjecture—“Cada cual ponga la excusa que mejor le parezca; era tímido y no se atrevía a decirle nada... o mil y una posibilidades más” (13).³⁰⁷ And in the second paragraph of the first letter, Shahrazad writes that “Siempre existen diferencias entre la realidad y la ficción” (15).³⁰⁸ Past and present become confused as Shahrazad retells memories from her childhood, and as the editor of the text admits that complete fidelity to the order of the letters is impossible due to their lack of the year. Montserrat Abumalham effectively exploits the characteristics of the epistolary genre to establish a narrative ambiguity and to imbue the text with a sense of geographical distance and personal solitude.

This imbued sense of distance also subtly implicates Otherness within the text. Shahrazad is an Other literary archetype, emblematic of the Orient. Abumalham’s Shahrazad makes allusions that invoke non-European characteristics or sources. She

³⁰³ [Once there was a king that lived in a kingdom as far away as the most profound folds of the human heart.]

³⁰⁴ [a kingdom as far away as the final mists of the human soul]

³⁰⁵ [You live too far away. Your kingdom is too far away.]

³⁰⁶ [neither serious nor laughing out loud]

³⁰⁷ [Each one can put the excuse that seems best to them; he was timid and did not dare to say anything to her... or a thousand and one other possibilities.]

³⁰⁸ [There are always differences between reality and fiction]

casually mentions wearing a veil in her youth (16); she tells the tale of a woman “tan negra como [la noche]” (18),³⁰⁹ and she references “los poetas orientales” (21).³¹⁰ Her emphasis on the distance that separates her from the sad man also implies that he is Other, from a different “kingdom.” The description of his kingdom as being “tan lejano como las últimas brumas del alma humana” (13)³¹¹ juxtaposes an indecipherability from obscuring mists and also an emphasis on shared human qualities in the soul. The reader can assume that Shahrazad is Other, but there is no way to know exactly from where she writes. Neither is the identity of the man clear aside from his residence in a “faraway kingdom.” This absence of explicit geographical referents avoids privileging one culture over its Other, while admitting that Otherness is an element of this interchange. While there are hints that Shahrazad is Oriental or African, the reader cannot know with certainty.

In fact, by employing Shahrazad as the main narrator, Abumalham effects a subtle coup over the hegemonic paradigm of West/Other. The tale of the mythical/traditional Shahrazad is fraught with nuances, and Mernissi describes one such “subversive,” nuanced coup that her tale implies:

If we admit that Shahrayar and Scheherazade represent the cosmic conflict between Day (the masculine as objective order, the realm of the law) and Night (the feminine as subjective order, the realm of desire), then the fact that the King does not kill the queen leaves Muslim men in unbearable uncertainty regarding the outcome of battle. “By allowing Scheherazade to stay alive, the King suspends the law he established himself,” writes

³⁰⁹ [as black as the night]

³¹⁰ [the Oriental poets]

³¹¹ [as far away as the final mists of the human soul]

[Abdesslam] Cheddadi. Paradoxically, it is Shahrayar, the male, who becomes paralyzed, by granting Scheherazade the right to live, speak, and thrive. (52-53)

The traditional Shahrazad has been analyzed as a powerful figure that subverts male hegemonic power and overturns the male/female hierarchy through her cunning manipulation of Shahriar. Abumalham's Shahrazad also beguiles a male subject—not only is he her gendered Other, he is also her cultural Other, an inhabitant of the faraway kingdom.

In addition, Mernissi's dichotomy of "the masculine as objective order, the realm of law" and "the feminine as subjective order, the realm of desire" echoes Orientalist discourse of the "Oriental character" as one defined by "Oriental despotism, Oriental sensuality, and the like" contrasted to the rationalism of the West (Said 203). Mernissi's dichotomy can easily be paraphrased as "the *West* as objective order, the realm of law" and "the *Orient* as subjective order, the realm of desire," and this platitude is found repeatedly in Said's *Orientalism*:

On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things. (49)

Abumalham effectively extends the discourse for Otherness from one of gender relations to one of cultural Otherness. Just as the Shahrazad of *The 1001 Arabian Nights* threatens hegemonic masculinity through subtle feminine agency, so does Shahrazad of *Te*

acuerdas de Shahrazad? speak as a cultural Other, displacing the narrative authority of the West.

The power of Shahrazad's voice is amplified through the generic convention of the epistolary novel. The sad man has no voice; his letters are not included, and the geographical anonymity of Shahrazad also robs him of his opportunity to respond. This narrative dominance, however, is unassuming and subtle. The effect is that this voice of the Other does not wish to silence response, but rather create its own space for expression. The narrator of the first chapter, after mentioning that the sad man did not have an address to which respond, also suggests that this did not, perhaps, stop the man from responding, but alas "Tampoco dejó ninguna carta no enviada que respondiera a las que recibía" (14).³¹² In addition, while the letters do not leave textual space for a response, the narrator—Shahrazad—leaves temporal space for a response by invoking the nightly stories of the original Shahrazad. Each letter concludes with a variation of "Amanece y debo callar. Si mi señor lo estima oportuno, mañana continuaré..." (18).³¹³ As Mernissi notes, in the quotation above, the night is Shahrazad's and the day is left for a response. This allusion to the original Shahrazad also emphasizes that this process of expression, writing the letters, is a matter of extreme importance—as the original Shahrazad employed her story-telling to delay her own execution. As for Abumalham's Shahrazad, she also lives through her words, and it is not a desire to silence her Other, but to assert her own existence. The final letter and the novel itself conclude with the following lines:

³¹² [Neither did he leave any unsent letter that responded to the ones he received]

³¹³ [It dawns and I should be quiet. If my lord esteems it appropriate, I will continue tomorrow...]

No obstante, he vivido y he muerto varias veces. Pero, sobre todo, he vivido. Mi vida ha sido plena y lo ha sido más gracias a ti. Yo inicié estas cartas pensando darte la vida, ¡vanidad mía! y la vida me la has dado tú. Mientras aliente, mi soplo de vida será siempre tuyo, porque mía es la palabra, única razón de vida, y porque tuyo es el silencio y, sin silencio, no existe la palabra.

Ya no importa si vuelven otros amaneceres, ya Shahrazad no tiene que pelear por conservar la vida, la ha ganado. Shahrazad está viva, aunque muera... (78)³¹⁴

Shahrazad's opportunity to speak to her Other validates her efforts. Her words gave her a "razón de vida" and they were deeply meaningful to the sad man who died holding her written words close. It is also significant that she abandons the first person voice, emphasizing that the process of letter writing ensures survival by suggesting that Shahrazad will live forever, or at the very least outlive the epistolographer.

Indeed, the novel functions as a call for attention, to hear the voice of this cultural Other. From the title, which is a direct question, to the repetition of "¿Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?" in the initial chapter and as the first line of the first letter, the text asks for recognition of this Oriental archetype from its Western, Spanish-speaking audience. The first letter even gives the sad man directions on how to read the letter and what to expect: "Seré breve... Te contaré... Es posible que en alguna carta llore... Pero deberás ser

³¹⁴ [However, I have lived and I have died various times. But, above all, I have lived. My life has been full and it has been thanks to you. I started these letters thinking about giving you life, what a vanity of mine! and life you have given to me. While I breathe, my breathe of life will always be yours, because mine is the word, the only reason for life, and because yours is silence and, without silence, the word does not exist. / Now it is not important if there are other dawns, now Shahrazad does not have to fight to save her life, she has won. Shahrazad is alive, even if she dies...]

paciente y constante. No debes saltar sobre las líneas. Debes leer cada una de las letras, porque no hay letra ociosa” (15).³¹⁵ It offers a gentle, coaxing voice that offers to guide rather than forcefully demanding recognition. The letters also question the authenticity of this Other voice:

¿mi nombre soy yo, yo soy un nombre? Si me llamara árbol, ¿sería un árbol o seguiría siendo una mujer? Si soy Shahrazad, ¿soy una mujer, una voz, una palabra, un sueño, una imaginación de tu mente? ¿Soy yo la que te escribe o eres tú mismo que finge escribir una carta y luego leerla como proveniente de lejos, obligándome con tu ficción a ser, sin que yo sea?

¿Es esto literatura? (33)³¹⁶

The text self-referentially questions whether it is an authentic voice of this cultural Other, or another creation of the Orient by the West. By questioning the authenticity of its own voice, the novel avoids the trap of making this specific representation authoritative. Its self-questioning both speaks for the Orient, and subtly suggests that the process of representation is problematic and authenticity is difficult to achieve and/or verify.

This narrative humility, and daily self-silencing (“Amanece y debo callar”³¹⁷) is a subtle power play. Shahrazad’s demure narration is also a strategy of seduction. By ending each letter *in media res*, she employs the same element of suspense that the historical literary Shahrazad used to prolong her life. In this sense, her feigned humility represents the personal agency and affective power of the narrator over her audience.

³¹⁵ [I will be brief... I will tell you... It is possible that in some letter I cry... But you should be patient and constant. You should not skip over lines. You should read each one of the letters, because there are no idle letters.]

³¹⁶ [Am I my name, am I a name? If you call me tree, will I be a tree or will I keep being a woman? If I am Shahrazad, am I a woman, a voice, a word, a dream, a figment of your imagination? Am I the one who writes to you or is it yourself that pretends to write a letter and later reads it as if it came from afar, forcing me with your fiction to be, without me actually existing? / Is this literature?]

³¹⁷ [It dawns and I should be quiet]

Strategic use of seduction and suspense functions to engage the narrator's target audience. In this, Abumalham draws directly on the example of the original Shahrazad.

These two narrative characteristics also leave (metaphorical) space for an Other to speak, and they refrain the text from serving as an authoritative view of an essentialized Other. Primarily, they serve to counter-balance the geographical non-specificity of the novel, which could be interpreted as a universalized representation of the West's Other. By not specifying Shahrazad's location or origin, there is the danger that she comes to represent and speak for a more generalized population. The functioning dynamic of such an interpretation would therefore be an essentialized binary between the West and the Orient, or, drawing on the analyses of *The 1001 Arabian Nights*, the binary of men and women. Chandra Mohanty notes the problematic nature of such reductive reasoning in gender studies, as Daniel Varisco does in Said's work, and both agree that such "simplistic formulations are historically reductive... All they do is reinforce binary divisions between men and women [or the West and its Other]" (Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders* 31). However, Abumalham and her Shahrazad both seem to be aware of these dangers and therefore take steps to avoid a totalizing narrative. Just as Shahrazad questions who is the true diegetic author of the letters, so does she continually recognize inconsistencies and Others within herself:

Quizá algún día, tenga el valor necesario para... reconocer a la persona que fui o que vivió dentro de mí.

No sé si tú has vivido una experiencia semejante. Tal vez tú seas siempre alguien distinto de quien eres ante ti y estés acostumbrado a convivir con un otro yo diferente que actúa autónomamente.

Yo, siempre creí ser yo misma. Aunque la verdad, ¿quién soy, sino un nombre, una palabra independiente y libre, sobre un papel, a la que yo identifico, o tú, como mi nombre? (33)³¹⁸

She recognizes the Other within herself, and furthermore, questions the very constructions of West and Orient:

Los niños de Occidente sueñan con que los Magos de Oriente les colmen de bienes. ¿Qué sueñan, entre tanto, los niños de Oriente? ¿Están ellos más cerca de la fuente que colma la sed que producen los deseos? ¿Están tan cerca de esa fuente que no pueden verla, no saben que existe? En fin, una pregunta clave ¿dónde está el Oriente, si en cada tierra, que vive ignorando a las demás tierras, hay un Este y un Oeste? ¿Quién sabe dónde está su Oriente de donde vienen los Magos que colman los deseos? Y ¿los deseos de los que han dejado de ser niños...?

Yo tengo mi Este, mi Oriente... (42)³¹⁹

Shahrazad individualizes conceptualizations of the West and the Orient. Even though Shahrazad as an archetype invokes generalizations of the emblematic and seductive storyteller, reductively representing the Orient, and the geographic non-specificity of the novel also universalizes the potential representative power of her voice, Abumalham's

³¹⁸ [Maybe one day, I will have the strength to... recognize the person that I was or that lived inside of me. / I don't know if you have lived a similar experience. Maybe you are always someone different from who you are before you and you are used to co-existing with an other different I that acts autonomously. / I, I always believed that I was myself. Even though it's true, who am I but a name, an independent and free word, on a paper, to which I identify, or you, as my name?]

³¹⁹ [The children of the West dream that the Magi from the East fill them with gifts. Meanwhile, what do the children of the East dream? Are they closer to the fountain that quenches the thirst that produces desires? Are they closer to this fountain that they can't see, that they don't know exists? In short, a key question: where is the Orient, if in each land, that lives ignorant of the other lands, there is an East and a West? Who knows where their Orient is and from where come the Magi that satisfy desires? And the desires of those that are no longer children...? / I have my East, my Orient...]

Shahrazad is conscious of the subjective nature of such representations and addresses them directly.

Just as the traditional Shahrazad both embodies and subverts hegemonic binary divisions – on the one hand by employing the seductive female archetype and on the other by simultaneously breaking the “law of the father” (the king) in liberating all women from their death – so does Abumalham’s narrator assume a role yet nuance its implementation. Abumalham’s Shahrazad questions her own existence—“¿Soy yo la que te escribe o eres tú mismo que finge escribir una carta y luego leerla[?] (33)³²⁰—she also questions the existence of the recipient of her letters:

¿Hombre o fantasma de mi imaginación? Aún así, decirte querido no es ninguna ficción. Si existes o si no, no tiene importancia. Te amo, porque mi mente te ha hecho, mi escritura de cada día te da realidad, te convierte en un otro al que hablo y concedo esa existencia.

Es posible que seas mi invención y por ello te amo como me amo yo misma. Tal vez no me amo y por eso necesito sacarte de mí para poder amarte y amar en ti lo que en mí se me hace insoportable. (62)³²¹

This “fantasma”³²² seduces her in one of her letters and she revels in “la gracia creadora de la palabra” (53).³²³ Just as her literary predecessor, this Shahrazad understands the power of words. For this reason, she fills her narration with ambiguity and self-reflection, constantly questioning her own authenticity and authority to represent.

³²⁰ [Am I the one who writes to you or is it yourself that pretends to write a letter and later reads it?]

³²¹ [Man or ghost of my imagination? Even so, to call you beloved is no fiction. If you exist or not, it is not important. I love you, because my mind made you, my writing of each day makes you real, it converts you into an Other to whom I talk and I concede existence. / It is possible that you are my invention and for that I love you as I love myself. Maybe I don’t love myself and for this I need to pull you out of me to be able to love you and to love in you what in me I can’t stand.]

³²² [ghost]

³²³ [the creative grace of the word]

Abumalham's *Shahrazad* is Other in both gender and culture, and yet the external reader is left unknowing whether she is an authentic spokeswoman for these Others, or whether she is a creation of the Western mind. The generic convention of the epistolary novel promises intimacy and confession, and what is subtly confessed is an inability to write objectively. Words are powerful tools; for the original *Shahrazad*, they hold the power of life and death. For this *Shahrazad*, they are potent tools of creation that must be wielded with caution. Abumalham's text invokes many things—questions of gender, culture, interpersonal relationships, the act of writing—but it maintains a tone of ambiguity that rejects supreme authority over any grand narrative.

As a novel by a Hispano-Libano-Moroccan—a Mahgrebi—author, ¿*Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?* does represent the voice of a cultural Other speaking to a Western audience. Abumalham's *Shahrazad* does not assume this task lightly. The use of letters as a novelistic format inherently leaves open the possibility for response, for communication and exchange between cultures and individuals. But this is *Shahrazad*'s opportunity to speak (more specifically, in this case to write), and her words do not seek to merely create a “simple *inversion* of what exists” by establishing predominance over the Other (Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes” 79). Instead, *Shahrazad* opens a nuanced “dialogue” that privileges neither and is cautious in its own assumptions. The reader is introduced to the text through a question—¿*Te acuerdas de Shahrazad?*—and at the end the question remains unresolved. The Western reader is presented with a complex, compassionate, and unassuming Other that speaks forcefully and carefully. Abumalham's text is masterful in its nuance, effectively undermining the power of Orientalist discourse by giving written, and therefore legible and enduring, voice to *Shahrazad* and by avoiding the pitfalls of a

potential reverse Orientalism. If the novel occasionally seems too ambiguous to say anything, Shahrazad reminds the reader that: “Si te lo dijera estaría contándote una historia y además interpretándola como hace todo el mundo. ¿Caeré algún día en esa tentación?” (44).³²⁴

³²⁴ [If I told you I would be telling you a story and furthermore interpreting it like everyone does. Will I give in to that temptation one day?]

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has examined questions of gender and its nexus with the literary representation of Africa and the African Other. The question of gender and representation contributes a valuable perspective to the overall project at hand, as traditional, conceptual hierarchies of male and female are often parallel to ones of the West and its Other. As they parallel one another, so they also occasionally overlap or replace one another in metaphorical usage. Dueñas, Gamboa, and Abumalham each offer a unique interpretation of this relationship between gender and writing the Other, with surprising results.

Dueñas' debut novel reveals the pernicious and enduring power of Orientalist discourse. It effectively entertains, but ultimately fails to repudiate the tradition of Orientalism as it relies on gender stereotypes and literary tropes. Africa is, once again, a playground for the Westerner and a source of economic potential, a representation that is as old as the colonial vision itself. The commercial success of the novel shows that these tropes are still popular in the collective imagination, and suggests that not only is the economic potential of Africa for the Westerner a literary trope, but it is still a literal reality.

The novel itself is well-written, engaging, and pleasant to read, at least for myself as a Westerner. The very attraction that the novel's prose exerts, while simultaneously hiding underlying tones of Orientalism, highlights the enduring, insidious power that Orientalist discourse holds over the West. Africa is not a contestant with its own agency in this novel, but rather a passive presence that is subtly and perniciously exploited by the West. What Dueñas accomplishes in the triumph and liberation of her female protagonist Sira Quiroga, she does not equally accomplish in her writing of Africa.

Guinea, conversely, offers a powerful indictment of the West's attempts to portray its African Other. I am still unsure as to whether Gamboa intended to create a text as rich and provocative as the one that he produced, but the novel itself is a powerful testament of the West's capacity to write the African Other. The novel both employs stereotypes and tropes of the African Other, and undermines their veracity. By reifying the trope of the eroticized African male, and then rendering it phantomatic, Gamboa plays with concepts of conceptualization and representation. The effect is both entertaining and upsetting, but ultimately serves to undermine and destabilize the West's authority to represent its African Other, directly challenging the myth of Orientalism's objectivity.

Abumalham's work is a masterfully nuanced text that teases and seduces, in true Scheherazadian fashion. Its ambiguity is its strength as it both avoids and undermines Orientalist discourse about Same and Other. The epistolary genre is extremely effective in establishing the dichotomies of difference (epistolographer versus recipient) and geographical distance, among others, and yet the narrative voice actively writes against strict demarcations that divide Same from Other through an self-questioning narrative full of ambiguity. By invoking the archetype of Shahrazad, questions of gender permeate the work, and yet the narrative offers a nuanced narrative that privileges neither male nor female nor West nor Other. If Orientalism is a distinct viewpoint of Same and Other, Abumalham's text counters that vision with a powerful consideration of the relativity of perception and description.

These three works dramatically differ in their writing of gender and Africa, and yet they each represent distinct connections between the two. Dueñas invokes the trope of

Africa as an exotic place of potential, a trope that is often metaphorized in the feminine, and yet, as she overturns traditional gender stereotypes, she fails to upend Orientalist ones. Gamboa fully employs the power of the trope, by writing a stereotypical, erotic, African male and then questioning that very creation. Abumalham invokes one of the most famous feminine archetypes in *Shahrazad*, giving her a powerful and nuanced voice that counters the arguments of Orientalism through the use of a powerful, legible, feminine, and Othered voice. Each of these authors employs gender in writing Africa, showing that the two still retain affective power in their union, and yet also showing that Orientalism persists (Dueñas) and that authors are employing differing strategies to respond to its pervasive power (Gamboa and Abumalham).

CHAPTER FOUR.
THE TOURIST, THE NOMAD, AND THE IMMIGRANT: TRAVEL AND THE
ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER

In the two hundred years since Domingo Badía y Leblich donned his alter-ego of Alí Bey and traveled through North Africa attempting to pass as Muslim, many Spanish writers have traveled through and written about travels in the continent. From Alí Bey on up to contemporary travel writing on Africa as in Javier Reverte's *Caminos perdidos de África* (2004), *Vagabundo en África* (2005), and *El sueño de África* (2007), there is a rich collection of travel writing with Africa as the topic in Spanish letters.³²⁵ And yet it would be remiss to limit a consideration of travel in the Spanish novel to only explicit travel narratives. Therefore, my examination of texts will not adhere to a strict definition of travel writing, but will instead seek to consider the dynamics of travel within a variety of fictional texts.³²⁶ Travel writing cannot be confined to the personal memoir or the explicit travel narrative; Jan Borm suggests that mimetic faithfulness is a mistaken attribute of travel writing (21) and it is much more rewarding to include all genres or expressions because travel writing should represent “multiple crossings from one form of writing into another and, given the case, from one genre to another” (26).

An inclusive understanding of travel literature permits consideration of José Cadalso's *Cartas marruecas* (1789) or Ramón Sender's *Imán*, and it is such an understanding that will most effectively illuminate the dynamics of representation of the Other within the texts here. As various critics have noted, and as Georges Van den

³²⁵ See Carrasco González for an extensive consideration of the Hispano-African colonial novel, which includes aspects of the travel book

³²⁶ Jan Borm, in her article “Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology” offers this insight: “The point to determine, therefore, is whether *travel writing* is really a genre at all. I shall argue here that it is not a genre, but a collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fictional and non-fictional whose main theme is travel” (13).

Abbeele has so clearly theorized, travel is more than just a verb – an action – it is also, quite often, a metaphor. The “theme of the voyage” (Abbeele xiii) serves not only as a space upon which narrative action occurs, but also as a realm of possibility, an opportunity for loss or gain – “a zone of potential loss or profit” (Abbeele xvi). Within this zone, the capacity for – or exertion of – physical movement displays nuanced representations of privilege, power, and culture. The representation of the traveler is laden with significance and metaphor. Van den Abbeele notes that “Western ideas about travel and the concomitant corpus of voyage literature have generally – if not characteristically – transmitted, inculcated, and reinforced patriarchal values and ideology from one male generation to the next” (xxvi), and I would add that, parallel to the preservation of the patriarchal paradigm, Western ideas about travel have often perpetuated Orientalist stereotyping of the Other. It is this metaphor of travel that will serve as the analytical lens for this chapter as I examine three novels: Javier Reverte’s *El médico de Ifni* (2005), Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa’s *Los ojos del Tuareg* (2000), and Donato Ndongo’s *El metro* (2007). A consideration of these themes in these three works will articulate my thesis, that contemporary Spanish authors are moving beyond traditional Orientalist discourses and writing new ways of representing the encounter with the African Other.

This chapter specifically examines three recurrent themes in contemporary Spanish novels that deal with Africa. These themes are archetypes of travel: tourism, nomadism, and immigration – the first representing a traditionally more Western phenomenon while the second is stereotypically Other, and the last is an often polemic issue diametrically opposed to the luxury of tourism. The intersections between these

voyagings³²⁷ often define Spanish conceptualizations of Africa. This chapter will rely on the work of Georges Van den Abbeele and his contention that Western travel writings often do little more than reinforce and preserve hegemonic paradigms of cultural value. This study specifically examines to what extent the contemporary Spanish novel continues to transmit this Occidental hegemony or ventures in an expansion of this paradigm. Van den Abbeele theorizes that the place considered as home – the *oikos* – can potentially shift and change through time, travel, and experience, thereby offering the opportunity to examine whether the *oikos* of Spain as a starting, ending, and favored point for the Spanish author and traveler, has indeed shifted or evolved in the narratives of Africa, or whether it remains emphatically indifferent to the movement and passage of time. Travel will also be understood as making possible what I will call the *encounter* with the Other, and the dynamics of these encounters will be analyzed to illuminate representations of the Other and whether or not they perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes.

Orientalism and exoticism of the Other have a long tradition in Spanish letters. Antonio Carrasco González's extensive study of the Hispano-African Colonial novel traces this history across Africa. Alterity and the filter of the "carácter europeo"³²⁸ form an integral part of the colonial narrations: "esa manera de narrar sobre países alejados sin pertenecer al pueblo natural de ellos y con un sentimiento o mentalidad, mayor o menor, de alteridad, es literatura colonial" (9).³²⁹ Carrasco González traces this tendency back to the fifteenth century and the exotic representation of the Arabic past on the Iberian Peninsula (11). In his study, he asserts that the exoticism was often more evident than

³²⁷ See Abbeele: "VOYAGE... transport of a person from the place where one is to another place that is far enough away" (Epigraph).

³²⁸ [European character]

³²⁹ [this manner of narrating about distant countries without belonging to their natural community and with a feeling or mentality, greater or lesser, of alterity, is colonial literature.]

actual literary quality (28).³³⁰ These observations emphasize the importance of a critical analysis on the current Hispano-African literary production. I find that the authors under consideration here do not follow the exotic fascination of their colonial, literary predecessors. As mentioned before, Said affirms that “Orientalism depends for its strategy on [a] flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the upper hand” (7), and while a certain “carácter europeo” may persist in the narration, neither Reverte, Vázquez-Figueroa, nor Ndongu suggest any inherent superiority of the West over its African Other. Their break with a sustained tradition of representation marks the diminishing power of the Orientalist discourse that has dominated Hispano-African literature for centuries.

Due to Africa’s geographical separation from Spain, travel becomes an almost inherent aspect of any work about Africa from a Spanish viewpoint – to an extent that a Spanish novel about Africa that lacked this component, whether it be physical or figurative travel, would indicate a glaringly unique example. The early travels were clearly of colonizing intent: information gathering (spying or anthropological) expeditions, war and evangelical missions. Carrasco González outlines the predominance of colonial and war literature throughout the nineteenth century; previously largely ignored, “La guerra de África [1859-60] avivó, sin duda, el interés por Marruecos en la novela española” (36).³³¹ The beginning of the twentieth century offered a brief respite

³³⁰ “Generalizando, hay en la novela colonialista más de pintoresquismo, de crónica turística, de asombro fácil en el viajero burgués que llega al mundo salvaje, que de calidad y trabajo en el contenido y en la complejidad del relato.” [In general, there is more quaintness, of tourist chronicles, of easy astonishment for the bourgeois traveler that arrives in a savage world in the colonial novel, than there is of quality and work on the content and in the complexity of the story.]

³³¹ [The War of Africa aroused, without a doubt, interest in Morocco in the Spanish novel.]

from the war novel, focusing instead on “unos relatos de gusto exótico, orientalistas en la terminología clásica de Said” (61).³³² Expansion, war, and colonization again predominate the Hispano-African narrative throughout the wars of the early twentieth century,³³³ and the period of the Moroccan Protectorate and Guinean colony. It is not until the late twentieth century, however, that the balance between colonizing/war travel and pleasure travel shifts to more (presumably benign) tourist trips.³³⁴ Javier Reverte provides an example of the tourist in *El médico de Ifni* (2005). In this novel, privileged, Westernized tourism and contact with the African Other drastically change what Van den Abbeele’s conceptualizes as *oikos* and redefine assumptions of Same and Other. Questions of financial and cultural mobility and privilege intersect with a reconceptualization of the African Other, inviting us to question whether this reconceptualization is subversive to Orientalist discourse or whether it continues the legacy of patronizing representations.

Any examination of the theme of travel in these novels cannot exclude the North African reality of the nomad – the permanent traveler – as evidenced in the Saharawi, Bedouin, Berber, Tuareg, and other tribes. The nomadic lifestyle is a repeated motif in novels by Javier Reverte, Ramón Mayrata, and Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa as a symbol of the distinct Otherness of the African reality. The presentation of the nomad vacillates between one of idealization (even idolization) and enigma to vilification and revulsion. As Spanish novelists attempt to understand and represent these indigenous African tribes through their own understandings of travel, I will trace how certain Orientalist

³³² [some stories of exotic taste, Orientalist in the classical terminology of Said]

³³³ The most famous examples being Sender, Díaz Fernández, and Barea, but including many others.

³³⁴ See Reverte’s travel and historical novel *El sueño de África: En busca de los mitos blancos del continente negro* which details European exploration and visitation of Africa from David Livingstone in the mid-nineteenth century up to the author’s own travels.

stereotypes play out, and how others are surpassed. The nomad, like the traveler, frequently represents a highly respected free spirit, physically powerful yet often politically marginalized. Van den Abbeele's theorization of the *oikos* and travel, combined with James C. Scott's articulation of local knowledge – *mētis* – versus technical knowledge – *techne* – in *Seeing Like a State*, serve to analyze Vázquez-Figueroa's narrative as one that emphasizes Western hubris while offering a re-evaluation of the West's interaction with and portrayal of the nomadic cultural Other.

Contemporary Spanish authors such as Reverte and Vázquez-Figueroa often compare their European protagonists to the nomads of North Africa. Such comparisons can very easily fall into the Orientalist pitfall of essentializing or patronizing, but occasionally open the door into new representations of this Other. And so it is with Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa's *Los ojos del Tuareg* (2000). It is a delicate balance any time a Western voice attempts to speak for its Other, and the manner in which these novels attempt to do so must be examined closely in order to understand how contemporary Spanish authors conceptualize their relationship to Africa, be it the geographically proximate North Africa, the historically connected former colonies, or the zones of adventure traced by explorers and thrill seekers.

The third archetype of travel that will contribute to my analysis is that of the immigrant. Immigration is a deeply polemical political topic at the moment, one which at times dominates national discourses in both Europe and the Americas. The immigrant is marginalized on a number of levels – politically, legally, financially, among others – and yet represents an essential component of the modern, globalized, neoliberal economy. Political and popular discourses against immigration often seek to represent the

immigrant as a threatening, inhuman Other, carrying out an invasion of the Western *oikos*.³³⁵ As Leo Chavez notes in *The Latino Threat*, these caricatures serve to erase the humanity from these cultural Others, thereby justifying inhumane actions against them (6). Most appropriate for my analysis of the immigrant is Donato Ndongo's 2007 novel *El metro*, which chronicles the journey of a Cameroonian man across Africa and to Spain. This novel goes beyond the unidimensional, popular image of the immigrant, and will serve to contribute an understanding of the voyage of immigration within this study. Rueda and Martín's *El retorno/el reencuentro: La inmigración en la literatura hispano-marroquí*, Michael Ugarte's *Africans in Europe*, and works by Oladele O. Arowolo and others, will provide a theoretical framework of the migrant's experience. The migrant's experience shares much with Van den Abbeele's theory of travel, but is specifically marked by "desigualdad y dependencia del más poderoso, por lo que deberá enfrentarse a los choques entre las dos culturas e identidades, la del origen y la adoptiva" (Rueda 50).³³⁶ It is this marginalized position that makes the immigrant an appropriate contrast to the consideration of the privileged tourist.

I have divided this section into a trichotomy – that of the tourist, the nomad, and the immigrant – for a very specific reason. I considered expanding the categories to include the soldier or the missionary, among others, and yet I find that the tourist, nomad, and immigrant³³⁷ can serve as powerful archetypes for the study at hand. The tourist represents a dominant and imposing force with (post)colonial tones; it is a penetrating

³³⁵ See Chavez, 6.

³³⁶ [inequality and dependence on those more powerful, thereby s/he must face the clashes between the two cultures and identities, that of the original and the adopted.]

³³⁷ In the third section of this chapter, I specify my use of the terms migrant, immigrant, and emigrant. Here, I use the term "immigrant" to emphasize the destinator nature of the migrant's travel and to differentiate the archetype from the perpetually mobile nomad.

force in foreign lands. On the other hand, the nomad is the indigenous, migrant force that inhabits and roams, often with a very intimate relationship with the geographical space through which s/he moves. The immigrant falls somewhere in between, with little social or financial capital, and little to no personal knowledge of the terrain s/he traverses; the immigrant actively travels for the potential gain of which Van den Abbeele writes. For these reasons, I find that the umbrella terms of “tourist,” “nomad,” and “immigrant” serve to encapsulate various other dynamics at play in literary representation. This brief clarification attempts to avoid the pitfalls of both essentializing and also of being overzealous in reach within this work, and it serves to establish the parameters of analysis that will be most useful in examining the literary encounters between the West and Africa. I hope to show that Reverte, Vázquez-Figueroa, and Ndongo are writing in ways that prove the essentializing demarcations of “Same” and “Other” limiting in scope.

These three novels not only offer considerations of distinct archetypes of travel, but also represent distinct literary genres. *El médico de Ifni* can be described as a crime novel, while *Los ojos del Tuareg* is an adventure novel, and *El metro* is, at heart, a Bildungsroman. As examples of literary genres that can often be formulaic in structure and content, with clear lines of protagonist versus antagonist, Reverte, Vázquez-Figueroa, and Ndongo are careful not to draw these distinctions along solely cultural lines. Reverte develops his characters and “criminals” to problematize motives and reverse preconceptions of Same and Other. Vázquez-Figueroa employs the adventure novel genre to criticize the West’s corrupt neo-capitalism that disregards other cultural lifestyles and values and reconsiders the West’s understanding of the “terrorist” label. Ndongo’s protagonist learns to see past general stereotypes to appreciate individuals. The value of

these three novels extends beyond their literary genre; that is, irregardless of the chosen genre of expression, Reverte, Vázquez-Figueroa, and Ndonge reconsider any presumed Western “*positional* superiority,” offering more nuanced narratives (Said 7). At the very least, these three generically different works suggest that the influence of Orientalist discourse is waning throughout contemporary literary production.

When Van den Abbeele in *Travel as Metaphor* discusses the essential product of travel, he describes it as a loss or gain of value. If we bring Said’s *Orientalism* into our consideration, this initially economic term acquires cultural, racial and personal nuances. *Travel – voyaging*³³⁸ – can serve as a way to establish superiority, support cultural value, and concede or deny value to Others, or to acquire value³³⁹ and recognition. A more equitable approach would avoid assumptions of cultural superiority and “reductive polarizations” (Said xxiii) in characterizing the Other, because Orientalism is based on an unequal consideration of cultures – “the apparent ontological inequality of Occident and Orient” (Said 150). A less imbalanced approach should include a consideration of the transculturation that cultural contact brings with it. As Bronislaw Malinowski and Fernando Ortiz coined the term “transculturation” to avoid the pitfalls of “acculturation,” it is apparent that they recognized the dialectical contributions of two cultures in contact, as opposed to a one-sided, hegemonic influence.³⁴⁰ Mary Louise Pratt’s more recent theorization of transculturation in her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and*

³³⁸ Van den Abbeele’s assertion that travel (voyaging) “necessarily implies a crossing of boundaries or a change of places. A voyage that stays in the same place is not a voyage. Indeed, the very notion of travel presupposes a movement away from some place, a displacement of whatever it is one understands by ‘place’” (xiv) suggests both physical displacement and also the potential for ideological “movement.” This “topos” of the voyage can (and perhaps should) serve to question “the status of literary discourse itself” (xiv).

³³⁹ A value that could be economic as in the hopes of the immigrant, or a value of sustenance as in the case of the nomadic lifestyle.

³⁴⁰ See Santí for a useful study of Malinowski and Ortiz’s development and theorization of the term, especially pp. 204-210.

Transculturation (1992) will also serve as a guide as I consider whether these three novelists approach Africa as Orientalists, or whether they are open to the transcultural possibilities.

Transculturation, transcultural valoration, can only occur in a zone of intercultural contact. Same and Other must come face to face and participate in an exchange. I define here this moment of the *encounter* as an unmediated, physically proximate, interpersonal exchange between two or more individuals. This specific term is borrowed from Louis Althusser, as outlined in his essay “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,” described through the imagery of atoms, and building on Epicurus’ thesis. The *encounter* begins with isolated entities that are brought into contact through chance (the *swerve* or *clinamen*) and their physical concurrence precipitates a new reality from two formerly distinct atoms. Mary Louise Pratt describes the spaces for the potential encounter as

“contact zones,” social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today. (4)

In more interpersonal terms, it is an understood prerequisite in the humanistic philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, specifically in his book *Humanism of the Other* (1972), and also in *The Other* (2008) by Ryszard Kapuściński, which builds on Levinas’ writings. Travel brings the traveler into close physical proximity with his Other, and it is this encounter between distinct cultural, racial, and personal entities that is at the heart of my analysis of the representation of the Other. Travel makes possible this encounter and the literary

representations which result from it can tell us much about the status of Orientalist discourse in the contemporary Spanish novel. The encounter is a moment of interaction – interpersonal, intercultural, and interactive – within the voyage that will illuminate the dynamics of representation at play within these texts.

A consideration of the tourist, the nomad, and the immigrant will offer the opportunity to examine the contemporary realities of the traveler, as portrayed in the novel. Javier Reverte, Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa, and Donato Ndongo represent three contemporary Spanish authors that offer new considerations of Spain's African Other. Their contributions represent a variety of viewpoints and genres, suggesting that Orientalism's omnipresence in Spanish letters is waning. With the theoretical guides of Said, Levinas, Kapuściński and others, this chapter hopes to serve as a critical voyage through these novels, touring the sites, and the ruins, of Orientalist discourse.

I. THE TOURIST: FROM TOURIST TO TRAITOR IN JAVIER REVERTE'S *EL MÉDICO DE IFNI*

What cannot be shown... is the concomitant temporalization of space affected by travel, so the home that one leaves is not the same as that to which one returns.
—Georges Van den Abbeele (xix)

A menudo, en un mundo como el nuestro, abundan las razones para hacer el mal y escasean las que te llevan hacia el bien.³⁴¹
—Javier Reverte (*El médico de Ifni* 236)

Javier Reverte's long career includes many years as a journalist, a dozen travel books, as well as at least nine novels, among other writings. His travel books include a *Trilogía de Centroamérica* [*Trilogy of Central America*], three books published between 1986 and 1992 covering his travels in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Honduras and his *Trilogía de África* [*Trilogy of Africa*] which was written between 1998 and 2002 and includes the titles: *El sueño de África: En busca de los mitos blancos del continente negro* [*The Dream of Africa: In search of the White Myths of the Black Continent*], *Vagabundo en África* [*Vagabond in Africa*], and *Los caminos perdidos de África* [*The Lost Trails of Africa*]. More recently, he has published a collection of poems titled *Poemas africanos* [*African Poems*] (2011) and a book published in the fall of 2011, *La canción de Mbama* [*Mbama's Song*] (Reverte, Personal Interview).

His 2005 novel, *El médico de Ifni*, takes up the issue of Western Sahara (formerly the Spanish Sahara), and the messy final years of Spanish occupation (1960-1976) and subsequent withdrawal from the region (1976), a move precipitated by the death of Franco, the Moroccan Green March (6 November, 1975) and effective takeover of

³⁴¹ [Quite often, in a world such as ours, reasons to do evil abound and few are those that lead you towards good.]

Spanish Sahara.³⁴² The drama unfolds primarily in the present day as the protagonist Clara Canabal seeks clues to uncover the story of the father she never knew, a former Spanish soldier in Africa who became a renegade and defected to the Saharawi Polisario fight for independence. The narration is in a third person omniscient voice, with sections that include the poetry,³⁴³ letters, and journal of Clara's father, Gerardo Canabal. The storyline progresses primarily along a simple chronological development, aside from the temporal jumps of the journals and letters, and except for the first scene which begins *in media res* with an uncontextualized narration of a murder scene. The reader is not returned to this moment until the final pages of the novel, when context is introduced. The reader discovers that the murdered couple of the initial pages is the presumed murderer of Clara's father – his former best friend, and in many ways his rival or amoral double.

Clara had thought her father dead for the majority of her life; at the very least, she believed that he had abandoned her and her mother and therefore wanted nothing to do with him. When a representative of the Saharawi Polisario informs her of his death in the Saharawi refugee camps in Ausserg, Algeria, she begins to learn more about the man who was her father, and she discovers that she has a Saharawi half-brother and family. In her search to uncover the past, Clara travels to Ifni and meets her half-brother's aunt; she also

³⁴² See Hodges for a complete history of the Western Sahara region. In brief, Spain controlled the now contested territory in various manifestations from 1884 to 1976. In the early 70s, amid a popular Saharawi push for independence, Spain was in the process of granting autonomy to the region. Both Morocco and Mauritania also claimed governing rights over the territory, and King Hassan II organized the unarmed march of Moroccan civilians into Spanish Sahara on 6 November, 1975. Franco died shortly thereafter on 20 November, 1975 and the following political crisis in Spain led to the literal abandonment of Western Sahara in Moroccan hands. The Saharawi independence organization (the POLISARIO) was forced to flee to refugee camps in Algeria, but continues fighting for international recognition to this day. Western Sahara remains one of the few remaining non-self-governing territories in the world. For a more recent examination of the Saharawi political struggle for recognition, see Mundy.

³⁴³ Many of the poems found in *El médico de Ifni* are compiled in *Poemas africanos*.

travels to the refugee camps in Algeria, meeting her half-brother and his family and learning the mysteries of her father's life and death.

Even though the novel centers on uncovering the truth about Gerardo Canabal's renegade life, Clara is the focal point of the narration as she seeks to understand his apparent abandonment of her and his nation. It is, in essence, an examination of why her father chose to embrace the African Other and to reject his own culture and country. As Clara retraces her father's route, her travel – as her father's before her – leads her to reject her own Same and embrace her cultural, African Other. Same and Other remain as distinct demarcations, and yet Reverte shows that they can be overcome through personal, intercultural encounters. *El médico de Ifni* recognizes the stereotypical divisions between the European and the African, and simultaneously emphasizes the fact that they are social constructs that can be challenged and exchanged. While this is not necessarily a new trope, since it can be found in works such as Cervantes' "La gitanilla" (1613) or in the *novelas moriscas* of the 16th century,³⁴⁴ Reverte's narrative does depart from the tradition of Orientalism that dominated Western discourse about the African Other throughout the frenetic centuries of European colonial expansion, specifically during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The clearest markers of Otherness are evident in the travel undertaken by the respective cultural representatives. Clara, as the main, Western protagonist, travels frequently and for pleasure; she is able to engage in tourism on a whim. Her relative wealth can afford her a certain caprice when it comes to mobility. She and her partner, Beatriz, regularly vacation on the Greek island Kastellorizo, and Clara's own trajectory

³⁴⁴ The "novelas moriscas" are a literary genre from 16th century Spain (though experiencing a revival in the Romantic Movement of the 19th century). They typically employed Muslim protagonists and idealized the portrayal of the relationship and interaction between Moors and Christians ("Novela morisca").

takes her from Morocco to Greece two weeks later. She also contemplates a last minute trip to New York in the near future. Clara's frequent travel is made possible through her personal affluence, and even as the trips to Morocco and the Saharawi refugee camps become less touristically motivated, she is capable of making these trips because of her status as an economically privileged European. It is clear that Clara views travel as "exciting and interesting, as liberating, and as what 'opens up new horizons'" (Abbeele xv). In her travels, Clara is in search of answers and adventures that will liberate her from her ambiguous personal history; in "open[ing] new horizons," she hopes to uncover her family history. In fact, Beatriz attempts to challenge Clara's romantic obsession with travel during their vacation to Kastellorizo:

[Beatriz:]-Durante los días que estuviste en Marruecos no me llamaste más que una vez.

[Clara:]-Olvidé mi vida anterior, todo lo que es normal.

-Eso es lo malo: que yo pertenezca a eso que llamas tu vida normal.

-¿Hay algo de malo en la vida normal?

-Que es destestable.

-¿Por qué?

-Es monótona, aburrida. Y tú eres para mí, precisamente, el lado contrario de la puta normalidad, la otra cara de todo lo que me abruma, de lo que me aburre y de lo que detesto.

...

[Clara:]-No les des tantas vueltas a las cosas... Más allá – y señaló a su derecha – está el desierto.

-Y más acá – Beatriz se llevó la mano al pecho – la normalidad, ¿no? Eso es una putada, ¿no crees? (94)³⁴⁵

In this exchange, Beatriz attempts to convince Clara that her *oikos*, or home, is to be found in their comfortable, domestic relationship, not in the obsessive movement that Clara wishes to undertake. And yet her argument is not convincing, as Clara operates under what Van Den Abbeele calls “The dearest notions of the West nearly all appeal[ing] to the motif of the voyage: progress, the quest for knowledge, freedom as freedom to move, self-awareness as an Odyssean enterprise, salvation as a destination to be attained by following a prescribed pathway” (xv). By reminiscing about the early days of Clara and Beatriz’s partnership, the text suggests that Clara’s ability to undertake these trips is a result of her profitable business, an art gallery she co-owns with Beatriz: “Beatriz y ella comenzaron a trabajar juntas. Muy pronto, vinieron los viajes y el dinero pareció caer de los árboles y salir bajo sus pies” (122).³⁴⁶ Clara’s social and cultural privileges enable her to engage in this self-revelatory act of travel, a voyaging which she

³⁴⁵ [[Beatriz:] —While you were in Morocco you didn’t call me more than once.

[Clara:] —I forgot about my previous life, everything that is normal.

—That’s what’s so bad: that I belong to what you call your normal life.

—Is there something bad about normal life?

—That it’s detestable.

— Why?

—It’s monotonous, boring. And you are for me, precisely, the opposite of fucking normalcy, the other face of all that overwhelms me, of what bores me and what I despise.

...

[Clara:] —Don’t overthink things... Out there—and she pointed to her right—is the desert.

—And over here—Beatriz brought her hand to her chest—normalcy, right? That’s a bitch, don’t you think?

³⁴⁶ [She and Beatriz began to work together. Very soon, trips came and money seemed to fall from the trees and appear beneath their feet.]

hopes will bring her knowledge, help her to feel free, and offer her a deeper self-awareness.

This privilege of travel that is afforded to the Westerner is contrasted with the travel of Clara's father (also a Westerner), and most important, with the forced travel of the Saharawi exiles. Gerardo's travel is distinct from his daughter's in that his is not a travel for pleasure or personal gain; it is the travel of the soldier. He first went to the then-Spanish Sahara as a soldier, a military doctor, and found his way to the Algerian refugee camps as a deserter and renegade. His status as a doctor hints at his complicated identity within established paradigms; he is not the archetypical soldier sent to engage in violence, but rather one who heals. This nuance establishes Gerardo's uniqueness within the conformity of the military. His individuality is later asserted in the cultural sphere as he becomes a renegade. Gerardo's rejection of his nation and army, and his acceptance of life as a political exile with the Saharawi, also suggest his explicit rejection of financial stability and/or lucrative wealth that could have been his, a wealth and opportunities that were offered to him by his friend turned enemy Alberto Balaguer. In this sense, he willingly turns his back on the underlying conditions that make possible Clara's freedom of movement: cultural/political dominance as an identified Westerner and financial wealth. He is forced into his renegade status by the decision to collaborate with the Saharawi cause and the refusal to cooperate completely with his longtime friend and nemesis Alberto Balaguer. In fact, Gerardo is caught in between the machinations of Balaguer and the Saharawi Polisario, as his old friend Salek reveals to Clara and her half-brother Omar. Gerardo died believing that his greatest moment of treachery was of his own making, but Salek confides in Clara and Omar that Gerardo "hizo lo que pudo por

nosotros mientras pensaba que nos traicionaba” (206);³⁴⁷ he was, effectively, unknowingly used by both parties for their own ends. Gerardo, in this sense, is little more than a puppet manipulated by those around him. The underlying message is that his motivations for travel may have been superficially driven by ideals of right and wrong, justice, or the search for adventure, but he was, at times, no more than a naïve pawn compelled by a movement greater than him.

Gerardo’s traveling is also less linear than a traditional voyage; it is a more muddled process. This supports Van den Abbeele’s assertion that “The ‘place’ of the voyage cannot be a stable one” (xv), and also calls into question the idea of a “fixed point of reference” an *oikos* for the voyage (xvii). Omar describes his father as “un hombre sin un lugar, alguien que no pertenecía a ningún sitio” (155),³⁴⁸ and Gerardo himself contemplates a return to Spain in his journals but concludes that “Detesto la *hamada*, pero he dejado de pertenecer a España. Creo que no formo parte de ningún sitio de la Tierra... Por eso, porque me muevo por los espacios de la nada, el desierto es la única posible patria para mí” (185).³⁴⁹ Gerardo is a tortured pariah. He cannot return to Spain; he is never able to embrace the Saharawi Other completely, to become transculturated, and the novel’s title ascribes to him a belonging that he cannot achieve either, due to Morocco’s control of Ifni. These compounding points emphasize his physical loss of the *oikos*, and yet his repeated use of Spain as a fixed point of reference indicates that it is still a psychic referent. For Gerardo, Spain is a point of departure, and a point to which return is impossible. In fact, as Van den Abbeele notes: “The concept of a home is

³⁴⁷ [did what he could for us while he thought he was betraying us]

³⁴⁸ [a man without a place, someone who didn’t belong anywhere]

³⁴⁹ [I hate the *hamada*, but I have stopped belonging to Spain. I don’t think that I am a part of any place on the earth... For this reason, because I move in the spaces of nothing, the desert is the only possible fatherland for me.]

needed... only *after* the home has already been left behind” (xviii). The dynamics of Gerardo’s travel are distinct from those of his daughter Clara, and yet they both operate with Spain as an *oikos*, a point of reference that is psychologically important for them both.

The other travelers of the novel are the Saharawi, the nomadic soldiers and exiles, dispersed throughout North Africa, and, within the novel, primarily found in Ifni and the refugee camps in Algeria. Their travel is a forced exile, driven out of their homeland, their *oikos*, by the occupying Moroccan forces. However, as nomads, they still inhabit a familiar geography, that of the desert, and therefore, while they are exiled from the epicenter of their *oikos*, they still travel within a generalized area of that space. It is not a luxurious lifestyle or a capricious travel that they experience. In fact, Fatma, Omar’s mother and Gerardo’s first love, tells him (relayed through Gerardo’s journals): “Yo vengo de la soledad y del exilio y mi sangre se forjó en un desierto, estoy acostumbrada a una vida dura” (168).³⁵⁰ As Clara contemplates from her departing airplane window the refugee camps, she also expresses the sentiment that

La inmensidad de la nada crecía en el desierto descarnado, dibujaba su faz como un vacío exento de piedad que servía de hogar sin techo a unos cuantos miles de seres humanos maldecidos por el mundo, expulsados de cualquier espacio amable de la Tierra al que pudieran llamar patria.
(220)³⁵¹

In this sense, travel for the Saharawis in *El médico de Ifni* is more of what Ryszard Kapuściński envisions in expressing, “When I say travel, naturally I do not mean tourist

³⁵⁰ [I come from solitude and exile and my blood was forged in a desert; I am accustomed to a hard life.]

³⁵¹ [The immensity of the nothing grew in the barren desert, it drew its face like a void exempt from piety that served as home without roof to some thousands of human beings cursed by the world, expelled from any hospitable space on the Earth that they could call fatherland.]

trips. In a reporter's understanding, a journey is a challenge and an effort, involving hard work and dedication; it is a difficult task, an ambitious project to accomplish" (16).

Obviously the Saharawi are not engaged in the same travel as Kapuściński in his role as reporter, but their voyaging is more similar to his in its difficult nature, as opposed to the frivolous, diversionary travel of the tourist. This distinction in travel dynamics contributes to the Otherness of the Saharawi, an Otherness that also distinguishes them from the Moroccans who are not traditionally nomadic. In fact, Suelma considers this unique identity (the complete Otherness of her people) in an attempt to theorize the nomad to Clara:

-Es raro de entender, incluso para mí, que apenas me he movido en mi vida: yo creo que mi alma sigue siendo nómada y ésta es la única manera con que puedo explicarme mis sentimientos. Los nómadas están acostumbrados a hundirse en el desierto, a seguir la lluvia y no tener un lugar estable donde vivir porque nunca es el mismo lugar donde se encuentra agua. Por eso nos llaman "los hijos de las nubes" y nuestra patria no es la tierra, sino el agua. Estamos hechos para vagar, porque el desierto es un duro lugar.

-Suena poético.

-No nos gusta ir de un lado a otro, no creas, querríamos habitar una patria estable, como todo el mundo. Pero la necesidad hace que tengamos fe en el desierto y que lo llevemos metido casi en el corazón: porque es un lugar que parece no existir y, al mismo tiempo, es tan real como la

piedra... Vivir en un desierto exige conocerlo. ¿Comprendes lo que te digo?

-No lo sé; pero no tiene importancia.

-Tal vez yo nunca vaya a vivir a nuestro desierto, pero quiero creer que los hijos de Omar volverán, o los hijos de sus hijos, porque viajarán como la lluvia, como las nubes. Y nadie nos quitará nunca más el desierto porque sólo nosotros lo comprendemos. A los que hoy lo ocupan, el mismo desierto los expulsará: porque ellos no lo comprenden ni han aprendido a amarlo. (68-69)³⁵²

Therefore, in Reverte's representation, Saharawi nomadic identity is auto-conceptualized as a unique identity, a completely Other identity. Even though it is expressed through a Saharawi character in the novel, as an actor in a Westerner's plot line, these words are more representative of how the West views the Saharawi Other than how they conceptualize themselves. It is, perhaps, a romanticized view, but at least it is not derogatory. It neither functions on tropes of paternalistic representation nor offers a valorization of the lifestyle for better or for worse. It emphasizes the Saharawi's

³⁵² [—It is difficult to understand, even for me, who has barely moved in my life: I believe that my soul continues being nomadic and that is the only manner in which I can explain my feelings to myself. Nomads are accustomed to submerging themselves in the desert, to following the rain and to never having a stable place to live because it is never the same place where water is found. For this reason they call us 'children of the clouds' and our country is not the land, but the water. We are made to roam, because the desert is an inhospitable place.

—That sounds poetic.

—We don't like to go back and forth, strangely enough, we would like to inhabit a stable fatherland, just like everyone. But necessity gives us faith in the desert and we carry this faith almost in our hearts: because it is a place that seems not to exist and, at the same time, is as real as a rock... To live in a desert requires understanding it. Do you understand what I'm telling you?

—I'm not sure; but that's not important.

—Maybe I will never travel to our desert, but I want to believe that Omar's children will return, or his children's children, because they will travel like the rain, like the clouds. And no one will ever take the desert away from us because only we understand it. Those who occupy it today, the desert will expel: because they do not understand it nor have they learned to love it.]

understanding of the unique desert landscape, a localized knowledge that James Scott calls *mētis*.³⁵³ The concept of *mētis* in regards to the Saharawi offers a localized privilege to the desert nomads. It establishes and recognizes the otherness of the Saharawi, based on their travel catalysts, and this geographic-specific aspect of Saharawi identity emphasizes the importance of the desert as a perceived *oikos*.

Omar, son of Gerardo and Fatma and Clara's half-brother, forges his identity through his nomadic travel. In contrast with Clara and Gerardo, he feels a very deep tie to the geographical space of his *oikos*:

Gracias a [las estrellas] puedo caminar sobre la tierra, encontrar mi sitio en estos desiertos, conocer quién soy y lo que significo. No podría irme a ningún otro lado porque me perdería y no sería jamás alguien que pudiera reconocerse a sí mismo... Si sacara a mis hijos del Sahara, acabaría convirtiéndolos en unos extraños de la tierra que pisan... Yo no sería nada sin el desierto. (155)³⁵⁴

While Gerardo is exiled from his home and Clara is continuously uneasy with her natal culture, Omar has a physical tie with and a localized knowledge of his psychic home; he inhabits its space and moves within its confines. However, complicating his intense self-identification as a “son of the clouds,” is the fact that he is ethnically interstitial, the son of a Spanish father and Saharawi mother, racially neither Same nor Other. His racial

³⁵³ In *Seeing Like a State*, Scott defines the term “*mētis*” as skill relevant to a specific situation, offering the example of “When a large freighter or passenger liner approaches a major port, the captain typically turns the control of his vessel over to a local pilot, who brings it into the harbor and to its berth... This sensible procedure... reflects the fact that navigation on the open sea (a more ‘abstract’ space) is the more general skill, while piloting a ship through traffic in a particular port is a highly contextual skill... Much of this knowledge would be irrelevant if he were suddenly transposed to a different port” (316-317).

³⁵⁴ [Thanks to [the stars] I can walk across the earth, find my place in these deserts, know who I am and what I mean. I couldn't leave for any other place because I would lose myself and I could never again be someone that could recognize himself... If I took my children out of the Sahara, I would end up converting them into strangers of the land that they walk upon... I would be nothing without the desert.]

hybridity and identification with a physical *oikos* – when contrasted with the racial homogeneity of Gerardo and Clara and their detachment from their geographical *oikos* – indicates that conceptualizations of belonging and lines of Same/Other are social or psychic constructs. When Suelma says that the desert will expel its current occupiers because “ellos no lo comprenden ni han aprendido a amarlo” (69),³⁵⁵ lines of racial difference are blurred as she perhaps unintentionally suggests that *difference* can be overcome by learning to understand and to love. That is to say, the tourist, the renegade soldier, and the nomad may travel for distinct purposes, but *El médico de Ifni* does not leave it as an irreconcilable difference. There still exists the hope of meaningful exchange between Same and Other, made possible by travel. So it can be understood that the differences established in the nature of travel serve to establish Same/Other distinctions that, upon further analysis, the encounter can undermine.

In addition, Reverte’s racially mixed protagonists offer a racial hybridity that undermines essentialized demarcations of Same and Other. The miscegenation of the novel explicitly destabilizes the totem of any homogenous Western identity and authority. Therefore, not only are psychic constructs of Same and Other rendered arbitrary, but so is physical (i.e. ethnic) difference shown to be an reconcilable one.

Reverte accomplishes this subversion by subtly shifting lines of Otherness from phenotypical difference to more ideological distinctions. Clara’s search to uncover her past and familial history is a search for her identity. Throughout her life, she has felt an emotional distance from her closest family members and acquaintances. This emotional distance is made clear to her as she undertakes physical travel. When she thinks about her first failed marriage and her failing relationship with Beatriz, she describes the failings in

³⁵⁵ [they do not understand it nor have they learned to love it.]

terms of distance: “Ambos le parecían lejanos. Deseaba de pronto apartar a Beatriz, como apartó a Jorge” (118).³⁵⁶ Clara’s relationship with her biological mother is strained. The mother as a psychic provider of home – *oikos* – is unstable; Clara resents her mother for betraying her father, even when Clara knows very little about their relationship. She always viewed her mother as cold and emotionally distant, and these differences are contrasted with her warm reception by the sister of her father’s first wife, Suelma, in Ifni, with whom she shares an instant personal bond and later a physically intimate bond, and with her half-brother Omar in Ausserg as he welcomes her into his home. Clara feels an almost immediate affection for both Suelma and Omar, a familial connection that she never felt with her biological mother. Their cultural differences are not obstacles to the formation of relationships. Conversely, Clara does not feel any significant ties of loyalty or identification with her cultural, racial, or even biological Sames. By problematizing Clara’s relationship with these Sames, Reverte effectively destabilizes justifications of Same/Other as nothing more than artificial constructs.

This reduction in the importance of phenotypical Otherness versus ideological otherness is further supported in Clara’s relationship with Beatriz; that is, in the realm of interpersonal relationships, superficial differences – be they gender, race, or others – are supplanted in importance by character traits, be they congeniality, shared concerns, or other emotional bonds. In discounting the prominence of physical difference, Reverte’s novel emphasizes a shared humanity that avoids a hegemonic Orientalist discourse of the Other; one that denies the “ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and... ‘the Occident’” (Said 2). The intercultural demarcations of “the

³⁵⁶ [They seemed so distant from one another. All of a sudden she wanted to separate herself from Beatriz, as she separated herself from Jorge.]

Orient” and “the Occident” are reduced to irrelevancy, empathy and interpersonal congruence trump cultural difference.

Clara’s traveling, analyzed above as a luxury afforded to her as a Westerner, still provides the opportunity for her to question established precepts of Same and Other. It takes her into direct contact with a distinctly different culture, and ultimately leads her to reject her own cultural heritage and to prefer the newly discovered one. Her travels bring her face to face with her Other, an Other that is also tied to the Same through her father’s relationship with Fatma and the son Omar born from it. These face-to-face encounters actualize a recognition of shared bonds that transcend cultural Otherness. Levinas describes this encounter in saying

I find myself facing the Other. He is neither a cultural signification nor a simple given. He is, primordially, *sense* because he lends it to expression itself, because only through him can a phenomenon such as signification introduce itself, of itself, into being. (30)

The intimacy of the *sensory* experience of the Other – Clara’s physical approximation to Suelma and Omar (one which does lead to a literal *sensual* experience with Suelma) – preempts and overrides the cultural narratives that a traveler metaphorically carries in her journeys. The immediacy of the sensorial has the power to disrupt inherited preconceptions. The encounter is therefore a necessary step towards a reconceptualization of Same and Other.

Clara’s first trip to Morocco and Ifni, to investigate the existence of her father’s first son and her own possible extended family, brings her into contact with Suelma, the twin sister of her father’s Saharawi lover. Her encounter with Suelma is initially mediated

by a group of Moroccan men who help her to locate Suelma and act as translators for the exchange. There is an instant intimacy between the two, “Suelma le dirigía ocasionales miradas que a Clara le parecieron teñidas de cordialidad” (62),³⁵⁷ even though relatively little practical information is relayed. As the Moroccan men conclude the conversation and leave, Clara notices that Suelma is following her back to the hotel, staying out of sight of the Moroccan translators. Upon being discovered, Suelma approaches her and asks:

-¿Quieres venir a casa?

-Hablas español.

-Desde luego. Y bastante mejor que Mustafá y todos esos marroquíes. Pero no me gusta que se den cuenta, no me gusta que ellos sepan mucho sobre mí. ¿Te queda tiempo para venir a mi casa y charlar? Cenaremos algo juntas. (64)³⁵⁸

Unmediated, Clara and Suelma are able to have a meaningful encounter. Suelma reveals to Clara part of the family history that Clara desperately sought. Their few days together ends in a sensual evening together, and the dynamics of this encounter are worth noting:

Suelma le quitó el cepillo de la mano mientras se volvía y lo dejó caer a un lado, sobre la alfombra. Sus ojos centelleaban y sus mejillas enrojecían sobre su sonrisa grande.

-¿Quieres? –susurró Suelma.

³⁵⁷ [Suelma occasionally looked at her with what seemed to Clara to be glances filled with warmth.]

³⁵⁸ [—Do you want to come to my house?

—You speak Spanish.

—Of course. And much better than Mustafá and those Moroccans. But I don’t want them to realize it, I don’t like for them to know much about me. Do you have time to come to my house and talk? We’ll eat some dinner together.]

Clara afirmó con un movimiento de la barbilla. Y ofreció su boca
entreabierta a la de Suelma. (87)³⁵⁹

Suelma's agency initiates the physical exchange; she is the pursuer in this scene, a scene which both alludes to the erotic Oriental female as a powerful motif in Orientalist discourse³⁶⁰ and yet also subverts the motif in making a female Other the initiator and dominant force within the exchange, overturning the Orientalist hierarchy of West over Other and countering Said's assertion that "There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated" (36). This relationship is initiated by Suelma, but predicated on an extended offer – "¿Quieres?" – to which Clara affirmatively responds. In this intimate exchange, this act of "facing the Other" (Levinas 30) leads to a moment that transcends the hierarchy of Same over Other and male over female; Clara and Suelma's sensual encounter is an intercultural exchange where the Oriental is the agent of instigation within a sphere deprived of both Western and (the often concomitant) masculine privilege. The encounter leads to a reduction of this Other to "*sense*" (Levinas 30), a moment that reduces the Other to Same through common sensorial capacity. Thus, what is at play in the romantic moment between Clara and Suelma is a dynamic that does not privilege Same over Other, but moderates these distinctions through a biological commonality, deemphasizing cultural or phenotypical distinctions.

³⁵⁹ [Suelma took the brush from her hand as she turned around and let it fall to the floor on one side, over the rug. Her eyes twinkled and her cheeks blushed over her large smile.

—Would you like to...?—Whispered Suelma.

Clara nodded with a small movement of her chin. And offered her open mouth to Suelma's.]

³⁶⁰ See Said and Mernissi. Said examines the image of the erotic Oriental female in *Orientalism*, noting that "Woven throughout all of Flaubert's Oriental experiences, exciting or disappointing, is an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex" (188). Mernissi discusses the powerful images of Muslim artists in depicting highly erotic, voluptuous, and active female figures, contrasting their representation with the passive nudes of Matisse, Ingres and Picasso (14-15).

The ease with which Clara is able to interact with Suelma is contrasted with the tension of her relationship with Beatriz or her mother back in Spain. Suelma's intimacy causes Clara to reconsider her own conceptualization of her *oikos*, and her relationship to her Same and Other. Clara's awareness of the Others she comes across in her travels evolves through her intimate encounter with Suelma and her newfound family. Whereas her trips to Kastellorizo exclude the Greek Other almost completely, her trips to Ifni and Ausserg highlight her growing interest in knowing her cultural Other. As she learns about and meets her extended, formerly unknown family, she begins to fantasize about moving to

El Aaiún con ellos... con Omar, Muluma y los niños; y también que Suelma fuera desde Ifni a unirse con ellos. Empezar allí una vida nueva sin odios y sin rencores. Y regresar algún día a Ausserg, junto con su hermano Omar, y recoger los restos de su padre, para enterrarlos al lado de los de Fatma en el oasis perdido.

¿Qué haría en Madrid? (220)³⁶¹

She dreams of establishing an *oikos* in Western Sahara with her newly discovered family, an *oikos* bolstered by the proximity of her father's grave, reuniting the family that might have been possible in a hypothetical "homeland" – made even more hypothetical by the fact that Clara never personally visits the Western Sahara territory within the text.

Like Clara's encounter with Suelma, her meeting with her half-brother Omar in the refugee camps in Ausserg also hints at dynamics that disrupt Orientalist discourse and

³⁶¹ [El Aaiún with them... with Omar, Muluma, and the children; and also that Suelma would come from Ifni to join them. To begin there a new life without hate or rancor. And to return one day to Ausserg, together with her brother Omar, and recover the remains of her father, to bury them next to those of Fatma in the lost oasis.
What would she do in Madrid?]

a reconceptualization of the *oikos*. Clara appears to take Omar literally when he welcomes her into his *jaima*³⁶² saying “Bienvenida a tu casa, hermana” (150).³⁶³ In fact, this encounter with Omar in many ways is nuanced as an approximation to her father. Clara does, in fact, come to know the father she never met through Omar, and her half-brother assumes a metaphorical position as a father figure to Clara through his knowledge of Gerardo. Omar’s role as a father figure is supported in several admissions from Clara. Omar provides a sense of protection, “Omar puso la mano sobre la de ella y la apretó. Y Clara tuvo una sensación nueva: que alguien la protegía” (145);³⁶⁴ she is envious of the affection Omar shows towards his own daughter, “Clara percibió cómo renacía un olvidado anhelo infantil: que unos brazos vigorosos la sujetaran contra el torso fornido de un hombre. Envidió por un instante a su sobrina” (151),³⁶⁵ and she feels submissive in his presence, “Clara asintió con un movimiento leve de la barbilla. Percibía una extraña sensación en presencia de Omar: su instinto de rebelión se dormía ante él, como si la presencia de su hermano despertara en ella cierta sumisión” (153).³⁶⁶ In both the seductive “¿Quieres?” of Suelma and the moment of submission to Omar, Clara responds with a light movement of her chin: “Clara afirmó con un movimiento de la barbilla” (87); “Clara asintió con un movimiento leve de la barbilla” (153).³⁶⁷ She is rendered voiceless in front of her supposed Other. She respects their authority in ways that surprise her, because she never felt such respect in the presence of her Same. The West’s hegemony is

³⁶² The *jaima* is a tent that is used by many of the nomadic peoples of North Africa.

³⁶³ [Welcome to your home, sister.]

³⁶⁴ [Omar put his hand over hers and squeezed it. And Clara felt a new sensation: that someone was protecting her.]

³⁶⁵ [Clara noticed how a forgotten infantile yearning reemerged: that strong arms would hold her tight against the solid torso of a man. For an instant she envied her niece.]

³⁶⁶ [Clara nodded with a small movement of her chin. She felt a strange sensation in the presence of Omar: her rebellious instincts calmed in front of him, as if the presence of her brother awoke in her a certain submission.]

³⁶⁷ [Clara nodded with a movement of her chin”; “Clara nodded with a light movement of her chin.]

undermined by these personable and familiar Orientals. As Clara learns about her estranged father, finds paternal authority in her half-brother and (complicated) maternal warmth in Suelma, she reevaluates her own *oikos*. As Clara interacts with her cultural Others, she reorients her loyalties and reconceptualizes her ideas of Same and Other. The encounter serves as a powerful moment of transcultural exchange that takes Clara beyond being a mere tourist, operating in an economic sphere of relation to the Other, to an interpersonal exchange that recognizes the humanity of the Other.

Clara's personal submission is perhaps better understood as an awakening of empathy. A basic definition of *tourism* emphasizes the "practice of traveling for pleasure" (*The American Heritage Dictionary*), a pleasure that is intended to benefit primarily the tourist. Dean MacCannell offers a more theorized definition, summarized as "travel against the space/time divide opened by modernity: a quest for an escape from the separation of work from leisure and the compartmentalization of land, a search for an experience that would allow one to touch the 'authentic' in order to 'reconstruct a cultural heritage or a social identity,' now removed in time (to history) or in space (to natural, 'primitive' or exotic destinations)" (Afinoguénova xi-xii).³⁶⁸ The pursuit of pleasure posits the tourist in a range of primarily economic transactions with the Others encountered in travel, and MacCannell's definition emphasizes the project of tourism as a search for difference. By traveling "against the space/time divide," *tourism* effectively functions on an Orientalist base of exotic and primitive difference. Yet, as Clara validates the personhood and authority of Omar and Suelma through her submissive response, she responds to the affective power of the encounter. Her empathetic attachment to Omar and

³⁶⁸ Afinoguénova and Martí-Olivella's summarization represents a more concise articulation of the theoretical definition of "tourism" that Dean MacCannell further (and originally) elaborates in *The Tourist*, 9-16.

Suelma overturns the tourist dynamic of her previous (Other-less) trip to Kastellorizo, as she engages in the interpersonal exchange of humans and not merely the economic relationship of the tourist. Omar and Suelma are valued as family and companions, not exotic relics of a lifestyle incompatible with Western modernity.

Clara's encounter with Suelma and Omar also leads her to question her relationship with her own Same, with the Spanish and the West.³⁶⁹ As she learns more about her father, through his own journals that Omar lends to her, Clara comes to understand the military renegade whom she never knew. What she learns solidifies her newfound identification with the Saharawi cause, and her repulsion at the actions of her own relatives in Spain. She bears intense anger towards her mother for never revealing the truth about her father to her; she despises her father's brother Juan for his cowardice, and she plans to assassinate Alberto Balaguer, the man who was her father's best friend and later arch-enemy and rival and her mother's lover. Clara's newfound allegiances highlight how Reverte subtly emphasizes the importance of ideological differences over more superficial phenotypical otherness. Clara realizes that she holds little in common with her fellow countrymen, and more in common ideologically with the extended family she has just met. Reverte considers how phenotypical, cultural difference is often the most obvious when Suelma relates to Clara the story of her father and Fatma, Suelma's sister:

-No me gustó que Fatma se enamorase de él, pero casi se volvió

loca de amor. Y yo pensé desde el principio que eso sería fatal para ella.

-¿Por qué?

³⁶⁹ In this sense, the novel explores the complex historical relations between Spain and the Arab world through a suggestion of the ethnic ties that form a basis for modern Spanish identity. This complicated history is examined in Martin-Márquez, see specifically Chapter 1 (12-63).

-Porque pertenecían a dos mundos distintos. Por un lado, el de los españoles, gente que se consideraba superior, aunque ése no era el caso de tu padre... Pero de todos modos, a pesar de que él trató de casarse con Fatma, nuestro padre se opuso: no consintió una boda con alguien por cuyas venas no corría sangre saharawi. (70-71)³⁷⁰

Evident in this admission from Suelma is both the colonial discourse of cultural superiority on the part of the Spaniards, and a concern for racial purity on the part of the Saharawi; both of these concerns implode in the relationship that covertly continues between Gerardo and Fatma. Gerardo is not concerned with the pervasive ideas of cultural hegemony that he, as a colonialist soldier in 1970s Spanish Sahara, is ostensibly sent to enforce, and Fatma is unconcerned about the mixing of blood as is proven with the birth of Omar. Their encounter is intimate and personal, unmediated by hegemonic ideas of cultural or racial superiority. Even though intercultural relationships abound in the Spanish colonial history, and at times form the basis of conquest, this is a relationship that leads Gerardo to reject and be rejected by the colonial paradigm due to the subversive political activities of the Saharawi. It is an encounter which leads Gerardo to question his own ties with his cultural Same and assume the role of a military renegade, supporting the Saharawi cause for independence.

Clara's loyalties shift so dramatically that she ends up assassinating Alberto Balaguer, the man she suspects was responsible for her father's death. She commits this

³⁷⁰ [—I didn't like it that Fatma fell in love with him, but she almost went crazy with love. And I thought from the beginning that it would be fatal for her.

—Why?

—Because they belonged to two different worlds. On one side, that of the Spanish, people who considered themselves superior, even though that was not the case with your father... But anyways, despite the fact that he tried to marry Fatma, our father was opposed to it: he would not consent to a wedding with someone through whose veins Saharawi blood did not run.]

crime under the assumption that he is the one ultimately responsible, however it is never confirmed that Gerardo's death was murder; it remains a distinct possibility that he died of purely natural causes. The essential analysis of this final, violent act that Clara commits is that she follows her father's renegade path in rejecting her cultural Same to a point where she commits treason against her own nation. Alberto Balaguer is an unscrupulous politician, closely affiliated with both parties, depending on which is in power. His political stances are ideological only in the sense that they shift and align with the controlling ideology. In this understanding, Reverte sidesteps accusations against specific political philosophies by criticizing the abuse of power in general. Balaguer represents all that is devious and manipulative about the Spanish political system, and her crime against him is both a personal act of revenge for the death of her father, but also a political response to the Spanish betrayal of the Saharawi people, personified in the political history of Balaguer. Balaguer's assassination is Clara's decisive rejection of the Spanish political paradigm; it is a treasonous crime that highlights her personal and political sympathies.

Her crime is first prefaced in the novel's initial pages, opening with Alberto Balaguer's assassination and returning to the scene in the final pages. This parenthetical narrative device emphasizes the plot's development towards a known climax.

Considering *El médico de Ifni* as an example of the crime novel, these first few pages function to establish the crime initially and then explain the motives and execution behind the act. However, as I mentioned in the introduction, the literary genre does not limit the narrative's reach, but rather opens the text to additional insights. Within the current analysis, the crime (the murder of Alberto Balaguer) represents not only Clara's

vengeance for the death of her father, but also the culminating moment of her rejection of the Same for the African Other. The initial pages gain this nuance retroactively as the novel develops and Clara's motives are made clear. Both narratively and theoretically, this is an engaging device; plot development justifies both Clara's desire for vengeance and her realigned loyalties. That is not to say that the novel justifies murder, but Reverte effectively destabilizes the West's moral high-ground through the under-handed political dealings of Alberto Balaguer and Spain's abandonment of the Saharawi territory and people. The reader is forced to reevaluate the "crime" of the first few pages with all of the background information provided through the plot development.

The murder of Alberto Balaguer reinforces the idea that knowing the Other, encountering the Other face-to-face, has the power to cause reverse polarization in preconceptions of Same and Other, effectively rendering the cultural Same into a strange and revolting Other. Ultimately, Clara's betrayal of her cultural Same, in the assassination of Alberto Balaguer, causes her to simultaneously alienate her partner (and enlisted co-assassin), Beatriz. Clara effectively uses Beatriz's skills as a markswoman to commit the crime, even though she has emotionally distanced herself from Beatriz. In the final pages, Clara contemplates her physical distancing from Beatriz and a return to Suelma in Morocco, thoughts which stir in her "un latido de aventura, un fulgor épico" (251).³⁷¹ Momentarily, she hears "un ruido en la acera contraria" and she sees "una sombra [que] se proyectaba sobre la plana pared de un feo edificio" and "sintió enseguida que un pavoroso trueno estallaba dentro de su cabeza" (251).³⁷² Despite the veiled narration, the reader can reasonably assume that Beatriz has learned of Clara's planned

³⁷¹ [a throbbing of adventure, an epic glow.]

³⁷² [a noise on the opposite sidewalk... a shadow [that] projected itself on the flat wall of an ugly building... she then immediately felt a terrifying thunder exploding inside her head.]

departure and exacted her own revenge, shooting her lover on the doorstep of her apartment. The reader is led to assume Beatriz's guilt in much the same way that Clara accused Balaguer of her father's death.

This climactic conclusion is effective on a number of levels. The first being its dramatic and shocking twist of the plot in the final lines. Secondly, within a text that has diminished the importance of phenotypical difference and emphasized the importance of ideological otherness, it is, perhaps, metaphorical that Clara meet her end with a "terrifying thunder exploding inside her head" (251). The psychic site of identification for Clara is pierced by a bullet, destroyed. In choosing the bullet placement for this final shot, the choice of the head over the heart lends an important element to the narration. As the metaphysical locus of reason, as opposed to the heart as a locus of emotion, her betrayal of Beatriz and her cultural Same, elicits a violent response that is a direct shot to metaphorical reason. That is, Clara fully accepts the Other and rejects the Same, recognizing the superficiality of Western distinctions of Same and Other and the instability of perceived Western cultural superiority. This cultural "betrayal" is met with Beatriz's vengeance as she directs her fatal shot at Clara's site of ideological formation – the brain.

The third level of interpretation stems from the ambiguity of the narration. The reader can reasonably assume that Beatriz has exacted her revenge on Clara by shooting her, and yet this is not explicitly conveyed. Similarly, the reader is led to understand that Alberto Balaguer is responsible for Gerardo's death, even though explicit linkage to the crime is never made. These two crimes subtly imply that life and death decisions are often made on incomplete evidence; passion is the culprit of both crimes and encounters,

and it is a fickle impetus. Throughout the novel, interpersonal communication is strained between Clara and her cultural Sames; in such a setting stereotypes and hegemonic discourses are able to flourish in a space lacking authentic communication. Interpersonal communication offers the potential to break down walls of difference as evidenced in Clara's interactions with Suelma and Omar. The implication is that interpersonal/intercultural communication overcomes the stereotypes and discourses that inhabit a place of communicative and narrative ambiguity.

Reverte's *El médico de Ifni* offers a reconsideration of Same and Other – a consideration where the Same becomes Other and Other, Same. As Neal Ascherson notes in the introduction to Kapuściński's *The Other*, “the recognition of selfhood... can only be brought about by contact with and recognition of the Other” (8). Clara's travels bring her into contact and exchange with her Others, forcing her to reflect on her own conceptualizations of familiarity and the unknown. Reverte examines and emphasizes what Kapuściński calls the “problem... [of] this relationship existing within each of us, between the person as individual and personality and the person as bearer of culture and race” (14), ultimately choosing to approach and know the Other as individual and personal. Clara's voyaging “displace[s] the home,” and her crime effectively “prevent[s] any return to it,” an activity that “undermin[es] the institution of that economy” (Abbeele xx). The metaphor of travel as economy is posited on a return to the *oikos*, a fixed point of reference, and yet, Clara's conceptualization of this *oikos* is interrupted by her interaction with Suelma and Omar, and her preconceived route is shifted as her ideas about the Other are changed. This unsettling of the *oikos* can be theorized to also represent the preconceptions of the Other with which one begins the journey, and so, the

re-positioning of the *oikos* for Clara suggests an undermining of these previous stereotypes and discourses of the Other.

What her physical travel does support is the “Western metaphysics to privilege presence over absence... the near over the far” (Abbeele xx) and her voyage, as she physically approximates to the Other, causes her to shift cultural dynamics of privilege in a parallel movement. This shift of privilege also causes an ideological exchange of valoration for Clara (as her *oikos* is relocated), such that when she physically returns to Spain it does not revert; she values the far over the near. This new stance reflects her shifting loyalties and expresses the fact that “the identity of the home is breached by the very movement that constitutes it” (Abbeele xxiii). Clara does find a familial bond in Africa, which offers empathetic support to her reconceptualization of Same and Other, but aside from this, her shift is drastic and perhaps somewhat excessive. The best response to incredulity at Clara’s repositioning of her loyalties is found in the humanism of Levinas. The face-to-face encounter with another human being is a powerful moment of self-reflection. Reverte narrates the power of this encounter to radically reimagine discourses of Same and Other, subverting hierarchies of privilege that Orientalist discourse has long promulgated.

The African Other of *El médico de Ifni* is not a subjugated, second-class human, nor a noble savage, s/he is a warm and personable human being. Additionally, ties of blood and history provide indelible links between Spain and its African Other. What superficially appears Other, shares much in common with the Occidental subject. Reverte’s novel effectively destabilizes euro-centric narratives of exceptionalism and authority, and for this Reverte represents an author writing his African Other in new and

engaging ways that deviate from the Western Orientalist tradition. In short, the tourist loses her privileged authority when she comes into unmediated contact with her Other.

II. THE NOMAD: NAVIGATING THE DESERT BY CAR OR CAMEL IN VÁZQUEZ-FIGUEROA'S *LOS OJOS DEL TUAREG*

Pues ya va siendo hora de que alguien lo vea como es en
realidad.
—Vázquez-Figueroa (*Los ojos del Tuareg* 170)³⁷³

Little critical attention has been paid to the work of Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa, despite the fact that he has published over forty novels since 1975, nine of which have been adapted to film, and he was awarded the Premio de Novela Histórica Alfonso X El Sabio in 2010 for his novel *Garoé* (2010). His book-jacket and personal website biography credit him as “uno de los autores españoles contemporáneos más leídos en el mundo;”³⁷⁴ his global book sales top 25 million copies, and his work has been translated into more than 30 languages.³⁷⁵ His prolific publications spanning more than a quarter of a century deserve a closer critical look, one which has been sadly missing.³⁷⁶

His work is important for this project specifically as he consistently returns to the theme of Africa for inspiration. A quick review of his published novels shows that several of them take place in or focus directly on Africa, among them: *Ébano* [*Ebony*](1975), *Tuareg* (1980), *África llora* [*Africa Cries*](1996), and *Los ojos del Tuareg* (2000). His abundant literary production, his focus on the African continent, and his status as a popular, contemporary Spanish author make him an ideal author for this study, and his portrayal of the African Other offers a valuable example for this analysis.

Vázquez-Figueroa's first biographical novel *Arena y viento* [*Sand and Wind*] (1953), which deals with his family's flight from the Canary Islands to the Spanish

³⁷³ [Well, it's about time someone sees how it really is.]

³⁷⁴ [one of the most widely read contemporary Spanish authors in the world]

³⁷⁵ Vázquez-Figueroa has both an official Spanish and English website.

³⁷⁶ In my interview with Vázquez-Figuera, he made it clear that he had no use for an academic critique of his works. He specifically writes for a wide, popular audience without concern for the critical value of his novels.

Sahara during the Spanish Civil War and his later novel *Ébano* (1975) show that he has been considering the themes of Africa and the African Other throughout his career, but more important that the breadth of his literary production straddles the monumental publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. For this reason, it is pertinent that Vázquez-Figueroa's recent works be examined for their current treatment of the Other within the contemporary Spanish literary canon. He falls squarely within the scope of this dissertation as an author who is actively portraying the African Other in his current literary production, and his portrayal offers a nomadic Other that serves as lens through which to critique the West.

I will be focusing on Vázquez-Figueroa's 2000 novel *Los ojos del Tuareg*, which is a loose sequel to his 1980 *Tuareg*.³⁷⁷ It follows the family of Gacel Sayah, son of the protagonist of *Tuareg* (also named Gacel Sayah), as they flee the dramatic events of the first novel which led to the patriarch Gacel's death, and search for a new life deep in the Saharan desert.³⁷⁸ They are both fleeing as political exiles and also fulfilling the lifestyle of dedicated Tuareg nomads.³⁷⁹ The first chapter opens on the immediate flight of the family, now led by the eldest son, as they search for a remote oasis that will sustain them. They find an isolated oasis and begin to dig a well. The second son, Ajamuk, is killed by a cave-in during the process, and yet, against the odds, the family succeeds in digging a barely functioning well on which they survive. In the space of a few paragraphs, years

³⁷⁷*Tuareg* was made into a movie in 1984; directed by Enzo G. Castellari and starring Mark Harmon, Luis Prendes and Ritza Brown. Original title: *Tuareg: Il guerriero del deserto*, English title: *Tuareg: The Desert Warrior*.

³⁷⁸In *Tuareg*, Gacel Sayah the senior finds himself at odds with the government when he offers traditional Tuareg hospitality to political renegades that stumble upon his encampment. His showdown with the government authorities eventually leads to his death. *Los ojos del Tuareg* begins shortly after his death.

³⁷⁹The family's status as "self-exiled" is significant in that it marks them as even more marginalized. This added marginalization does force the nomadic lifestyle upon them, and yet the narrative emphasizes their participation in the long tradition of Tuareg nomadism rather than their politically motivated flight.

pass; the matriarch, Laila, “comenzó a envejecer;” Suleiman, the younger son, “se hizo aún más fuerte;” Aisha, the daughter “se convirtió en una espléndida mujer,” and Gacel Sayah, oldest son of the family, “cada día se parecía más... a su difunto padre” (32).³⁸⁰ They live in the oasis cut off from the rest of the world for those years, isolated from almost all contact with other families or society at large, until one day an airplane flies overhead, circles the oasis, and leaves.

A few days or possibly weeks later they spot dust trails on the horizon. A rally car approaches and asks for water, which they provide. In conversing with the European rally car drivers, Gacel and his family learn that the airplane from earlier had been mapping the rally car race route and had incorrectly labeled their meager oasis as a different, more plentiful water source.³⁸¹ This mistake is proven when a second rally car shows up and the driver demands water to clean his car. The Tuareg family refuses his wasteful request, and in a fit of rage the driver dumps motor oil into their well and leaves abruptly.

The plot hinges on this unforgivable act. Gacel and his family offer reasonable hospitality to the driver, one Marc Milosevic, and his malicious actions betray the honored Tuareg rules of hospitality, as well as permanently contaminating the only water source for a family and their livestock. Gacel proceeds to take the next few rally car “visitors” hostage, and demands, not money or ransom of some sort, but rather the return of the criminal, promising to cut his hand off as effective retribution in accordance with

³⁸⁰ [began to grow old]; [became even stronger]; [became a splendid woman]; [each day he looked more... like his deceased father.]

³⁸¹ While no explicit ties are made between the text and the race or specific organizers, this is a rally that has taken place under the auspices of various groups and names since the 1970s. The most famous race is the Dakar Rally (*Dakar*) and there also currently exists the Trans Sahara Run (*Trans Sahara Run*). The year *Los ojos del Tuareg* was first published (2000) marks the first and only time that the race extended from Dakar to Cairo (previously it traced a north to south route such as Paris to Dakar), a route which is reflected in the novel. Also, in 2008, the race was canceled due to “fears of terrorist attacks” and has since been relocated to South America (“Dakar Rally”).

tribal laws. Gacel's family flees to a remote mountainous area with its prisoners as the rally organizers attempt to deal with the situation. Gacel refuses any financial remuneration, and the organizers are unwilling to hand over a European to a small band of Tuaregs for such a gruesome punishment. The desperate solution that the trans-Saharan rally organizers implement is to hire a team of vicious mercenaries and air drop them into the desert to quickly and quietly take out Gacel and his family, and possibly (but not necessarily) to rescue the hostages.

In this showdown, Gacel and his brother Suleiman outsmart and overpower the mercenaries. Gacel has a change of heart in his plans to dismember the man who poisoned his well, and he sets the hostages free. Two points of note punctuate the conclusion, the first is that helicopter pilot Nené Dupré, who also functions as the appointed mediator by the rally organizers, gives Gacel (against Gacel's wishes) the one million francs at his disposition to offer as a ransom.³⁸² The second is that one of the hostage's fathers has ties to the Mafia underworld and arranges to have Marc Milosevic brought clandestinely to Gacel for vengeance. Gacel has mercy on the man, leaving him nothing more than a scar on his hand, but the mafioso captors decide to leave Milosevic stranded in the desert to die. The novel ends with Milosevic stumbling across a discarded aluminum can that he believes was his own trash from a few weeks prior, and then discovering his car tracks and following them. His fate is unknown as the book closes, open to interpretation or perhaps a continuation of the story in a future book. This brief plot summary serves to introduce a novel that contains a trove of encounters between Same and Other, encounters which I analyze in the pages that follow.

³⁸² Gacel adamantly refuses the "bribe," but Nené drops the bag containing the cash from his helicopter as he flies away, yelling "¡El que ríe el último ríe mejor!" ([He who laughs last, laughs best!]) (312).

This fast-paced adventure novel, written by a white, European author and unfolding in the Saharan desert, offers a consideration of the encounter between the West and its African Other. Western sport, in particular the rally race car driver, literally collides with the nomad protagonist. Generalizations of the Occidental Same and its Other are generalized in the motives and modes of travel through the barren expanse. Vázquez-Figueroa does fall into Orientalized descriptions of the nomad and the African terrain; the former is occasionally presented as a noble savage and the latter often “[wears] away the European discreteness and rationality of time, space, and personal identity. In the Orient one suddenly [confronts] unimaginable antiquity, inhuman beauty, [and] boundless distance” (Said 167). And yet, this novel offers surprising considerations that also undermine traditional Orientalist rhetoric, explicitly subverting Orientalist rhetoric that considers geographical knowledge as “the material underpinning for knowledge about the Orient” (Said 216). In short, *Los ojos del Tuareg* does represent a break from a history of representation of the Other that is unequal and essentializing; Vázquez-Figueroa’s Other is human – different and mysterious, yes, but very human nonetheless. Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa, in his overall project with this novel, goes beyond simple Orientalist representations of the African Other and offers a nuanced consideration of the encounter between disparate cultures.

It is, perhaps, best to begin with a consideration of the title itself. As a sequel to his 1980 *Tuareg*, *Los ojos del Tuareg* begins with a humanization. The title no longer refers simply to the ethnic heritage of the protagonist, but emphasizes a common human characteristic, the eyes. The reader is offered a *visage*, and Levinas’ theorization of the face offers a useful interpretation: “The nudity of the face is a stripping with no cultural

ornament – an absolution – a detachment of its form in the heart of production of form” (32). These titular eyes are modified by the adjectival phrase of culture, and yet humanity is emphasized in the title. The reader confronts another human, not simply an ethnically charged noun that encompasses an entire people group. The image that it creates is also one of presence; the face – the eyes – are made present in the title and so it alludes to an encounter with the Other: *Los ojos del Tuareg* contains a subtle intimacy in its phrasing that is lacking in the concise *Tuareg*. Levinas’ articulation of the encounter with the Other, which was useful in the previous section of this chapter, can serve as a starting point for my analysis here: “I find myself facing the Other. He is neither a cultural signification nor a simple given. He is, primordially, *sense* because he lends it to expression itself, because only through him can a phenomenon such as signification introduce itself, of itself, into being” (30). An encounter with the Other, a recognition of the humanity of the Other, can produce far greater considerations than a mere cultural evaluation that reinforces “belligerent collective identity” (Said xxii); it can offer the opportunity for ontological reflection “understanding and intellectual exchange” (Said xxii). Just as textbook Orientalism “has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world” (Said 12), so does a less hegemonized encounter with the Other offer a critical lens through which to see the Same. In this sense, the Other routinely serves as a refracting lens, but the valorization of this Other within the textual context, the evaluation of the discourse at play, is key to avoiding Orientalist platitudes and portrayals.

In Vázquez-Figueroa’s depiction of Same and Other, the lines are clearly drawn. The European – the Same – is wealthy, capriciously traveling across the Saharan expanse in a foolhardy race, while the nomad explicitly rejects the actions and values of these

Westerners. Gacel and his family repeatedly state that they have no use for money, for Western-sanctioned “justice,” and that they cannot comprehend the motivation that would compel men to risk their lives in a sporting event such as the rally. These distinctions are clear, and yet comparisons are made that link the two sides. Westerners undertake “el lujo de despilfarrar... dinero y... esfuerzo en un empeño tan ridículo como atravesar África de lado a lado por el simple capricho de llegar en primer lugar a El Cairo” (75),³⁸³ while the nomad undertakes similar risky ventures, however without the luxury of options; desert travel is inherently risky – “[ú]nicamente un targui sería tan loco como para lanzarse a la aventura de intentar encontrar agua en tan remoto lugar del desierto, pero quizá por ello los tuaregs habían sido, desde que se tenía memoria, dueños y señores de ese desierto” (22)³⁸⁴ – and yet, “[l]os tuaregs habían sido siempre, y por gloriosa tradición, un pueblo eminentemente nómada” (11).³⁸⁵ But there remain few other options as Gacel notes “Nadie nos quiere en ninguna parte... Pero sí podemos obligar al desierto a que nos acepte, aunque sea profundizando en él hasta que lleguemos a su mismísimo corazón” (15).³⁸⁶ The two cultural spheres are ideologically distinct, and yet compared equally in their willful confrontation with the hostile desert. In writing the Tuareg, Vázquez-Figueroa establishes a parallel Other, different in almost every way, but justified and valued. While the two cultures set out across the desert, the Westerner is motivated by whim and adventure, and the Tuareg does so out of necessity.

³⁸³ [the luxury of squandering... money and... effort in an undertaking as ridiculous as traversing Africa from side to side for the simple caprice of arriving first to Cairo.]

³⁸⁴ [only a Tuareg would be so crazy as to embark upon the adventure of attempting to find water in a such a remote part of the desert, but perhaps for this reason the Tuaregs had been, since memory existed, masters and lords of the desert.]

³⁸⁵ [the Tuaregs had always been, and by glorious tradition, an eminently nomadic people.]

³⁸⁶ [No one wants us anywhere... But if you can force the desert to accept us, even if we must delve into it until we reach its very heart.]

The metaphor of travel underpins the novel. The nomad is, by definition, one who wanders as a lifestyle, and Vázquez-Figueroa contrasts this traditional desert lifestyle with the trans-Sahara rally, a sporting event that is undertaken voluntarily. These contrasting motives represent the largest distinction between the West and its Other, and Vázquez-Figueroa aptly uses the Tuareg protagonists to examine and criticize the vapid Western consumerist worldview and culture. Since the Westerners embark on their race voluntarily and seeking adventure, it will be more concise to distinguish them here as tourists since they travel for pleasure, and in this dichotomy of the tourist and the nomad can be found the dynamics at play in the encounter between cultures.

It is also important to highlight the distinction between tourist and nomad here because this Westernized travel-for-pleasure/thrill-seeking carries with it a blatant disrespect for the indigenous cultures of the land they traverse and an exploitation of scarce desert resources. This thrill-seeking tourist represents Said's Orientalist *par excellence*. The brazen arrogance of Alex Fawcett, the public relations manager for the rally, is posited on his own perceived authority over the indigenous, African Other. Further, his and the rally's focus on the media representation of the race to the Western world reflects the exteriority of the concerns and motivations behind the organization and participants.³⁸⁷ These are deeply critical representations of the West, and specifically the evils of neo-Capitalism, and therefore Vázquez-Figueroa's narrative, primarily sympathetic with the Tuareg, undermines the Western moral authority through this

³⁸⁷ See Said, 19-21, where he discusses Western *authority* and *exteriority* as fundamental elements of Orientalism.

characterization.³⁸⁸ “The West,” exemplified in the arrogance of Alex Fawcett, holds no narrative privilege.³⁸⁹

For Alex Fawcett and the corporate sponsors of the rally, the bottom line is a financial one. Fittingly, as we previously saw, Georges Van den Abbeele, theorizes travel – the voyage – as a “zone of potential loss or profit” (xvi). There is an economy at play in all voyaging, be it nomadic or touristic. The profits can be cultural or financial, among other possibilities, and the losses can be fatal or monetary. It is these “profits” that motivate travel, and also reveal distinctive catalysts that lead individuals to voyage. In *Los ojos del Tuareg*, the desert race for the Westerner is a zone of adventure and personal profit. The rally car drivers are able to undertake the race because they have vast personal wealth or significant corporate sponsorship. Additionally, the winners can relish in the glory of having “conquered” the vast Saharan expanse with their technology and skill. Vázquez-Figueroa reduces this space, the desert, to a zone of loss that only local knowledge, the knowledge a Tuareg inherits and acquires, can navigate. James C. Scott in *Seeing Like a State* elaborates on the importance of “local knowledge” for navigating specific environs. Scott draws from the Greek in calling it “*mētis*,” literally wisdom, skill, or craft. Scott’s *mētis* is “vernacular and local, keyed to the common features of the local ecosystem” (312), just like the Tuareg’s ability to survive for generations in the desert. In Vázquez-Figueroa’s depiction of “un auténtico tuareg,” *mētis* is an indispensable quality:

Para un auténtico tuareg, morir de sed no significaba tan sólo la
última de las tragedias, sino sobre todo una inaceptable afrenta.

³⁸⁸ But not necessarily “The Westerner,” as I examine below, Vázquez-Figueroa offers a more nuanced presentation of the individual.

³⁸⁹ See MacCannell, 9-10, for a consideration of the negative stereotype of the tourist. Many similarities can be found to Vázquez-Figueroa’s depreciative portrayal of this arrogant, completely exterior Western stereotype.

Cuando un tuareg moría de sed estaba aceptando que no había aprendido las enseñanzas de generaciones de antepasados que durante siglos se mantuvieron orgullosamente en pie en el más desolado de los paisajes del planeta... permitir que la sed le derrotara era tanto como reconocer que nunca se había sido un auténtico miembro del «Pueblo del Velo», «la Espada» o «la Lanza». (18)³⁹⁰

This is perhaps a romanticized vision of a Western author, but it emphasizes the indigenous and *local* source of knowledge that the Tuareg wields, contrasted with the imported, technology-supported cars of the European ralliers. Western corporations – Western media outlets, car and weapons manufacturers, among others – finance this “auténtico «circo romano»” (170),³⁹¹ pitting the capital of the Occident against the brutality of the desert, with the indigenous residents as the collateral victims and, in this case, unexpected rivals.

Within Van den Abbeele’s framework of travel, the *oikos*³⁹² operates as a spatialized relation which “defines or delimits the movement of travel” (xviii). Since “travel” necessarily involves movement towards or away from locations, the *oikos* functions as a reference point for understanding the profit or loss such travel provides. This concept is complicated in the case of the nomad. Since a nomadic lifestyle consists in a constant change in what Western conceptualizations would call the *oikos*, I suggest that for the purpose of this analysis the *oikos* be linked to Scott’s *mētis*. *Mētis* is spatially

³⁹⁰ [For an authentic Tuareg, to die of thirst not only signified the ultimate of tragedies, but above all an unacceptable affront.

When a Tuareg died of thirst he was accepting that he had not learned the lessons of generations of ancestors that for centuries had proudly maintained a foothold in the most desolate landscapes of the planet... to allow thirst victory was almost like recognizing that one had never been an authentic member of the “Tribe of the Veil,” “the Sword,” or “the Spear.”]

³⁹¹ [authentic “roman circus”]

³⁹² As examined previously, “the Greek for ‘home’ from which is derived ‘economy’” (xviii).

located because “much of his [the indigenous subject] knowledge would be irrelevant if he were suddenly transposed to a different [location]” (Scott 317). For example, in the initial pages Gacel and his family dig a well “en mitad de la nada” (23),³⁹³ confident that their inherited knowledge of the desert – “«sabían»” (23)³⁹⁴ – would guide them to water. The nomad travels, yes, but within a locality that is familiar in a broad sense. The Western tourist, upon leaving home on his voyage, must rely on the Greek concept of *techne*³⁹⁵ to navigate the unfamiliar. Thus, it can be understood that Vázquez-Figueroa, while writing two types of travelers, distinguishes them in their reliance on *mētis* versus *techne*: “Where *mētis* is contextual and particular, *techne* is universal” (Scott 320). The Westerner sets out across the Sahara armed with science and technology (*techne*), and his worldview is one that supports his confidence in his ability to conquer unknown geography with superior geographical knowledge provided by technology. This is a distinctly Orientalist mindset as Said notes that “Geography was essentially the material underpinning for knowledge about the Orient” (Said 216). Through the novel, Vázquez-Figueroa undermines this mindset, and chips away at the Orientalist confidence and prowess, rendering it helpless in the face of the Tuareg’s *mētis*.

This previous complication of the term *oikos* in relation to the nomad does not detract from the analysis at hand, it is simply a clarification of the limits of the theory as it pertains to a non-Western subject. The nomadic, self-exiled family of *Los ojos del Tuareg* physically moves within the narrative, and is fully conscious of the risks of travel and life in the desert. In the beginning, when they flee society into the desert and search

³⁹³ [in the middle of nothing]

³⁹⁴ [they ‘knew’]

³⁹⁵ Scott defines *techne* as follows: “*techne* represented knowledge of an order completely different from *mētis*. Technical knowledge, or *techne*, could be expressed precisely and comprehensively in the form of hard-and-fast rules (*not* rules of thumb), principles and propositions” (319).

for water, they undertake an itinerary full of risks and dangers, in fact losing the middle son in the process. Van den Abeele does posit that “the very activity of traveling may also displace the home... thus undermining the institution of that economy and allowing for an infinite or unbounded travel” (xx) which would appear to solve the problem of an unfixed *oikos*, and yet, the Tuaregs of this novel never leave a geographical space to which they do not feel indigenously tied, that is, their movement is contained within a familiar zone. Even if the specific locations are unfamiliar, their *mētis* is still relevant. This is not the case for the ralliers; they have transported themselves beyond a range where tradition and experience can guide them and must therefore rely on their *techne* – both their technology and their book knowledge – and in this scenario they are fitting portrayals of the arrogant Orientalist or colonizer, setting out to conquer, confident that their knowledge is geographically transferable and universal.

In fact, Milosevic’s poisoning of the family well represents the extremes of Orientalist arrogance contrasted with the tempered existence of the nomadic Other. Prior to dumping the motor oil into the well, he attempts to wash the dust from his car, an action which horrifies the Tuaregs in its blatant waste of precious resources. His subsequent rash action threatens the nomad’s very survival. Milosevic essentially acts under the “universal,” Western conception that water is plentiful, an example of a non-transferable mindset that, when transposed to the desert setting, threatens survival. This opposition of “knowledges” is the central conflict of the novel.

The Tuareg’s relationship with the desert, his familiarity with the terrain, undergirds the novel. Vázquez-Figueroa portrays this relationship as intrinsic in the

Tuareg being. In their search for water, Gacel compares the Tuareg existence to that of a desert palm:

Si las palmeras han conseguido [encontrar agua], nosotros también.

-¿Cómo puedes estar tan seguro?

-Porque el día que un *imohag*³⁹⁶ no sea capaz de hacer lo que es capaz de hacer una palmera, nuestra raza estará condenada a desaparecer de la faz de la tierra. Y aún no ha llegado ese momento.

-Pero una palmera tiene raíces y nosotros no.

-Las raíces de nuestro pueblo son más profundas y están más firmes asentadas en esta tierra que las de la más alta de las palmeras – intervino su madre con voz pausada –. Eso es algo que tu padre me enseñó y que tú tendrás que enseñar a tus hijos. (16)³⁹⁷

This representation is not one of the simplistic and naïve “noble savage;” there is little naiveté in Gacel and his family. Instead it serves to emphasize the Westerner’s failure to understand its African Other, an Other which is both this nomadic family and the desert. This tie to the land supports the interpretation that the Tuaregs, even though they travel as a mode of life, remain consistently within a defined space that can be understood to be their *oikos*. This *oikos* is inherently dangerous, and they are subject to the same potential for loss or profit that other travelers are, and yet their familiarity with the terrain makes

³⁹⁶ *Imohag* and *Inmouchar* are other terms for “Tuareg” – “como solían llamarse a sí mismos los tuaregs” / “as the Tuaregs were in the habit of calling themselves” (Vázquez-Figuera, *Los ojos del Tuareg* 9)

³⁹⁷ [—If the palms have been able [to find water], we can also.

—How can you be so sure?

—Because the day that an *Imohag* is not capable of doing what a palm can, our race will be condemned to disappearing from the face of the earth. And that moment has not arrived yet.

—But a palm tree has roots and we do not.

—The roots of our people are deeper and more firmly grounded in this earth than those of the tallest palms – interjected his mother with a deliberate voice. —This is something that your father taught me and that you will have to teach to your children.]

for successful navigation of the same. Lacking this territorial familiarity, the traveling ralliers must rely on their *techne*, which ultimately fails in the crucial moments of crisis within the novel. In this sense, Vázquez-Figueroa's novel "has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (Said 12). Therefore, Gacel Sayah's fight is not against individuals, but rather against a worldview that assumes control over a foreign territory on the basis of superior technology and capital (neither of which hold any effective power in the desert). Vázquez-Figueroa uses the Tuaregs to examine and criticize the corrupt and vapid Western consumerist worldview and culture.

In this sense, Vázquez-Figueroa exploits the archetype of the nomad as an esperpentic lens through which to return the gaze upon the West. I would hesitate to suggest that Vázquez-Figueroa penetrates the ethos of the Tuaregs in his portrayal of them; his use is perhaps more appropriately symbolic. *Los ojos del Tuareg* is a somewhat simplistic novel, in that it is more interested in working a thesis than creating a moving literary piece. That said, intentionally or not, the narrative suggests a cultural awareness on the part of the author to write against Orientalist discourse. His use of the Tuaregs still achieves a narrative that is counter to traditional Orientalism.

Therefore, in this confrontation between the Tuaregs and the West, Gacel Sayah and his family are forced to engage with the rally car drivers and, by extension, the rally organizers. The nomads effectively face off against the powerful corporate sponsorship of the race that is in close partnership with global media to promote sales. This global media and financial structure has little to no concern for the inhabitants of forgotten corners of the desert. The nomads are marginalized and ignored because they have no effective purchasing power, and yet conversely, the backdrop of the desert – suggesting adventure

and the prowess of Western technology when corporate logos are foregrounded in the global media – is a profitable motif for international advertising.

Within this indifference to the inhabitants of the desert, the person of the Other is consciously manipulated by the West, specifically through the character of Alex Fawcett. Fawcett has at his disposal access to and certain power over media outlets around the world. He is the one who is ultimately responsible for the media coverage of the race, a race that is supported by advertising money and which depends on adherence to a certain Westernized script. After learning of the hostages and meeting with Gacel, Alex Fawcett is counseled by his associate, Yves Clos:

-Nos estamos convirtiendo en esclavos de un maldito «índice de audiencia» que marca hasta el momento en que tenemos que cagar.

-¿Cuál es la diferencia de precio entre un anuncio emitido a esa hora y otro a media mañana? – quiso saber Fawcett.

-Diez a uno por término medio.

-Pues sin esa publicidad no somos nada, porque en el fondo, ¿a quién coño le importa que un fulano del que nunca ha oído hablar gane una etapa automovilística que acaba en un rincón de África del que tampoco ha oído hablar?

-A nadie.

-Tú lo has dicho: a nadie. Pero tu departamento es el encargado de crear esa «inútil necesidad» procurando que nuestras imágenes se emitan cuando un montón de gente aburrida se encuentra sentada frente al

televisor, porque éstos serán los que comprenden los productos que nuestros clientes anuncian. (149)³⁹⁸

This conversation betrays the dynamics that undergird the race: 1) it is dependent upon Western capital, and 2) it is a televised spectacle that has little to do with Africa and everything to do with the spectacle of televised adventure. Vázquez-Figueroa highlights the West's ultimate disinterest in Africa. The interest is on the Westerner's exploits occurring at previously scheduled, broadcast moments that conform to audiences' and advertisers' preconceived expectations. The novel focuses on the way that perceptions are molded by the media and controlled by capital. The Other is who big money finds it most beneficial to be. This truth is made even more explicit as Nené Dupré discusses with Hans Scholt – an Austrian reporter who seeks to write a piece that undermines the race's official narrative – the ultimate importance of positive publicity over all else:

[Nené Dupré:]...mi intención es resolver este asunto sin derramamiento de sangre, pero tengo la impresión de que a ellos no les importa que corra con tal de acabar con el problema de una vez por todas. Si los rehenes mueren se limitarán a hacer unas cuantas fotografías y entregárselas a la prensa como prueba irrefutable de que 'unos desalmados

³⁹⁸ [—We are becoming slaves of a damned 'rate of viewership' that marks up to the moment when we have to take a shit.

—What is the difference in price between a commercial at this time and another one tomorrow?' Fawcett wanted to know.

—Ten to one on average.

—Well without this publicity we are not anything, because at the heart of it, who the fuck cares that some so-and-so that they've never heard of wins a section of a car race that occurs in a corner of Africa of which they also have never heard of before?

—No one.

—You said it: no one. But your department is in charge of creating this 'useless necessity,' ensuring that our images are emitted when a ton of bored people are seated in front of the television, because these will be the people who buy the products that our clients advertise.]

bandidos' asaltaron, robaron y asesinaron a unos inocentes deportistas que ningún daño les habían hecho.

[Hans Scholt:]-Pero ésa no es la verdad.

-Será 'su verdad' y no creo que dejen con vida a quien pueda ofrecer una versión diferente. (201)³⁹⁹

Vázquez-Figueroa highlights this battle over the power to represent: who has the power to represent the Other?

This question on representation is considered from various angles. The Austrian reporter, Hans Scholt, writes an exposé of the race that presents Alex Fawcett in unflattering terms, and yet Fawcett is so well connected that Scholt's boss sends him a transcript of the article and promptly fires Scholt from his position on Fawcett's request. Fawcett tells Scholt that he was able to accomplish this by "Recordándole a su director que sin nuestra colaboración ningún periodista del mundo podrá cubrir esta información. Y... que la mayor parte de 'sus clientes' pueden serlo gracias a la publicidad que les proporcionan 'mis clientes'" (189).⁴⁰⁰ Vázquez-Figueroa also flirts with the consideration that the catch-all term of "terrorist" is a construction of the Western world that benefits the West by never offering a voice to the Other. Gacel's request of Milosevic's hand horrifies the Western sensibility. In a reunion of Tuareg leaders (which does not include

³⁹⁹ [[Nené Dupré:] —...my intention is to resolve this matter without the shedding of blood, but I also have the impression that they don't care whether [blood] flows or not so long as this problem is taken care of once and for all. If the hostages die they will be satisfied with taking some photographs and giving them to the press as irrefutable proof that some 'heartless bandits' assaulted, robbed, and murdered some innocent athletes who had done no harm to anyone.

[Hans Scholt:] —But that is not the truth.

—It will be 'their truth' and I don't think that they will leave alive anyone who can offer a different version.]

⁴⁰⁰ [reminding his director that without our collaboration no reporter in the world would be able to cover this information. And... that the majority of 'his clients' are able to be such thanks to the publicity that 'my clients' offer him.]

Gacel Sayah or his family) with a representative of the rally, they consider the possibilities of organizing and fighting against the injustice perpetrated on their land and people:

-[Debemos ordenar] a todos los *imohag*... que impidan a cualquier precio el paso de vuestros coches, vuestras motos y vuestros camiones.

-Eso suena a terrorismo.

-¡No! ¡En absoluto! No intentes confundir los términos. El terrorista es un ser deleznable que ataca a traición escudándose en el anonimato. Lo nuestro es una declaración de guerra, y en la que el enemigo no se oculta. El enemigo es la nación tuareg en peso.

-¿Estáis dispuestos a matar?

-En toda guerra hay muertos. (144)⁴⁰¹

This popular resistance is effective in disrupting the race, and yet, Fawcett maintains the power of representation to the world press and is able to portray the *Imohag* as little more than roving bandits and stereotypical “terrorists.” That is, the West’s *techne* may not serve to guide them in navigating the desert, but it does connect them with the West and afford them the power of representation to the West. As Fawcett uses his power to manipulate the international discourse, ignoring local realities, the novel questions which is more horrifying: a Tuareg seeking the hand of a man who attempted to kill him and his

⁴⁰¹ [— [We should order] all of the *imohag*... to impede at whatever price the passage of your cars, your vehicles, and your trucks.

—This sounds like terrorism.

—No! Not at all! Do not try to confuse the terms. The terrorist is a despicable creature that attacks by betrayal hiding in anonymity. Ours is a declaration of war, one in which the enemy does not hide. The enemy is the Tuareg Nation in force.]

—Are you prepared to kill?

—In any war there are deaths.] See footnote 392 for a definition of *imohag*.

family by contaminating their water supply? or the acts that are carried out in the name of Western industrialism and capitalism which cause untold damage and cruelty?

This explicit question comes as Hans Scholt reveals his investigations to Nené Dupré, showing him photos of children missing limbs from land mines fabricated by the very companies that sponsor the race: “tres de las marcas de automóviles que más contribuyen al presupuesto de esta ‘prueba deportiva’ se dedican también a fabricar armas, y una de ellas está especializada en el tipo de minas que mata o mutila cada año a miles de niños, no sólo de África, sino de todo el mundo” (169).⁴⁰² Sponsorship and capital motivate every Western action, however, money is shown to be a false motivation in life and death situations such as the final showdown in the desert. Gacel Sayah never has any interest in what money can afford him; Alex Fawcett has millions at his disposal and yet cannot accomplish his goals easily. Bruno Serafian, a mercenary sent to attack Gacel, realizes that he would return “todo [el dinero] que nos han pagado con tal de no encontrarme aquí arriba” (305).⁴⁰³ Ultimately, the Westerners are at the mercy of capital and Western society. Comparatively, the nomadic Tuareg is at the mercy of the desert. The juxtaposition of these two colliding worldviews in the diegetic space of the novel offers up the intriguing metaphor that modern, Western society is nothing more than a bleak desert – both *techne* as well as money are superficial resources for navigating it in a meaningful way.

Vázquez-Figueroa strips away the Western might of technology in favor of the interpersonal encounter. He admits the power of the media in controlling representation

⁴⁰² [three of the car manufacturers that most contributed to the budget of this ‘sporting trial’ also manufacture weapons, and one of them specializes in the type of mines that kill or mutilate thousands of children each year, not only in Africa, but all over the world.]

⁴⁰³ [all [of the money] that they have paid us in order to not find myself in this place.]

of the Other: “El espectáculo es inhumano, pero colorido y brillante, por lo que consigue cada año una tasa de millones de telespectadores que ni siquiera se detienen a pensar en que al contemplarlo están permitiendo que salga al exterior ese pequeño fascista que todos llevamos dentro” (170).⁴⁰⁴ And yet he finds a more honest approach in the face-to-face exchange of two individuals. Nené Dupré forms a friendship with Gacel Sayah, and the first rally car drivers to stop at the oasis establish a cordial relationship with the Tuareg family also. Even the hostages and the mercenaries learn to respect Gacel Sayah because he treats them humanely. Within the text, interpersonal interaction leads to mutual respect for the Other, whereas personal isolation (and interaction with the forms of media) leads to paranoia and fear, as in the case of Alex Fawcett. There is no cultural high-ground afforded the West. Through the trope of travel, Vázquez-Figueroa shows the limited utility of the West’s accumulated knowledge in practical situations. He still admits the power of portrayal that the West’s media controls, a power which allows the West to classify persons as “terrorists” or “heroes,” and yet he holds that

-... ya va siendo hora de que alguien lo vea como es en realidad.

Se suele bromear asegurando que este rally es como un circo, pero a decir verdad no es un inocente circo de payasos y funambulistas, sino un auténtico ‘circo romano’ en el que los emperadores han sido sustituidos por cámaras de la televisión, los rugientes leones por rugientes vehículos

⁴⁰⁴ [The spectacle is inhuman, but colorful and brilliant, and for this reason each year it attracts millions of tele-spectators that do not even pause to think that by watching they are permitting the emergence of this small fascist that we all carry within.]

lanzados a toda velocidad... y los ‘cristianos’ por pobres nativos a los que de tanto en tanto aplasta un coche. El espectáculo es inhumano... (170)⁴⁰⁵

Los ojos del Tuareg offers this subversive alternative to the popular media, and therefore represents a significant deviation from historic Orientalist discourse.

This subversion, however, is not the only merit to the novel. I have examined how Vázquez-Figueroa establishes a parallel Other, distinct from the Westerner, with its own system of values and beliefs. These two worlds collide, resulting in conflict; a conflict which unravels through exchange, through the encounter.⁴⁰⁶ While Vázquez-Figueroa does occasionally poeticize his portrayal of the nomadic Tuareg, he stops short of romanticizing this Other into either a noble savage or a symbolic martyr. He does not even go as far as Levinas in “proclaiming praise for and the superiority of the Other” (Kapuściński 35), but he does emphasize the value of the personal encounter between individuals for furthering understanding of the Other. As Gacel Sayah holds several ralliers hostage, they come to respect one another. Even the mercenaries that are sent to exterminate the nomads find mercy from and respect for their adversaries. Nené Dupré forms a close friendship with Gacel, and Gacel ultimately shows mercy on Milosevic, who insulted his family in the first place. That is, through interpersonal interaction a common humanity is realized and valued. Gacel ultimately places this recognition of shared humanity above the upholding of traditional laws – the Tuareg laws which demand the hand of Milosevic – and when Milosevic is delivered to Sayah for his punishment, Sayah

⁴⁰⁵ [...it is about time that someone sees how it really is. It is usually joked that this rally is like a circus, but to tell the truth it is not an innocent circus of clowns and tightrope walkers, but rather an authentic ‘Roman circus’ in which the emperors have been substituted for television cameras, the roaring lions for roaring vehicles launched at full speed... and the ‘Christians’ for poor natives who from time to time get run over by a car. The spectacle is inhuman...]

⁴⁰⁶ See Kapuściński, 20-25, where he discusses conflict and exchange as the two primary modes of historical interaction between cultures.

lets him go with only a small scratch on his hand saying: “Ya ha habido suficiente dolor... Lo único que deseo es que cada vez que contemples esta cicatriz recuerdes la magnitud del mal que causaste y reflexiones sobre las consecuencias de tus actos” (323).⁴⁰⁷ This physical mark on flesh, therefore, forces Milosevic to recognize the Other through a recognition of his own skin. Gacel Sayah’s evolution from hard-line fundamentalist to merciful humanist is a dialectical process that evolves as he dialogues with his hostages, Nené Dupré, and Hans Scholt. The ultimate recognition of shared humanity arises from the face-to-face encounter unmediated by the media. As Kapuściński paraphrases Levinas in saying: “Stop... There beside you is another person. Meet him. This sort of encounter is the greatest event, the most vital experience of all. Look at the Other’s face as he offers it to you. Through this face he shows you yourself” (34). This is why the title *Los ojos del Tuareg* is apt to emphasize the personal encounter that transcends stereotyping and cultural narratives of the Other. It reaches beyond the spectacle, showing those representations to be unreliable, and considers the implications that dialog can bring.

While Vázquez-Figueroa’s presentation of the Tuareg Other may not be entirely realistic, it engages with the question of reality behind the spectacle that the media offers and considers the human that is called Other. In focusing on the struggles of the individual Gacel Sayah and his family, the novel avoids grand stereotypes of what it means to be “African,” a “nomad,” “Muslim,” or other categories that are so common, and it is able to focus on a family’s fight for recognition in a world that wants to fit them into a clearly marked category and exploit them. While the other Tuareg tribes do stand

⁴⁰⁷ [There has already been enough pain... The only thing I desire is that each time you contemplate this scar you remember the magnitude of evil that you caused and reflect on the consequences of your actions.]

in solidarity with Gacel against the international ralliers, there is no physical contact between Gacel's family and them and this support is more symbolic than reinforcing. The dramatic conflict plays itself out between Gacel and the international ralliers and their mercenaries. Gacel and his brother single-handedly decimate a team of highly trained and supplied hired guns; it is an individual fight against the corporate power of Western capital. Even though Gacel's demand for vengeance horrifies the Western sensibility, Vázquez-Figueroa shows that Western capitalism and the media are the true horrors unleashed upon the world that cause untold damage and cruelty.

In adhering to the generic conventions of an adventure novel, every clue throughout the plot development builds toward the moment when Gacel Sayah will chop off the hand of Marc Milosevic and receive his vengeance. When Gacel chooses not to follow through, he undermines the expectations placed on him throughout the narrative due to his cultural heritage as a Tuareg. As he rejects the readers' expectations, so does Vázquez-Figueroa reject the mantle of Orientalist discourse that would resolve such a story in easy cultural platitudes. What the reader is left with at the end is not a flat representation of an emblematic Other; Gacel Sayah is an individual with the ability to deviate from hegemonic narratives of representation that would trap him in models of tradition or acculturation. I hesitate to term his stance at the end of the novel "transculturation" because there is no hybridized culture that develops, and yet, through his encounter with the European Other, Gacel Sayah recognizes a shared humanity that transcends his own traditional views and is also ignored by the corporate West with whom he is at war. It is a neutral third ground that recognizes humanity first above culture, tradition, and difference. This is the most subversive element of Vázquez-

Figuerola's novel, and the one which explicitly deviates from the traps of Orientalism. Vázquez-Figuerola offers a place beyond the binaries of Occident and Orient that emphasizes the encounter of human-before-human, and while the binaries exist in the background, the encounter provides an opportunity to step beyond the limits of group identity into the moment of interpersonal contact.

In concluding this analysis of *Los ojos del Tuareg*, it serves to return to Said and the consideration of travel. Said briefly discusses travel in *Orientalism*. He offers two situations: "One is when a human being confronts at close quarters something relatively unknown and threatening and previously distant," or conversely "A second situation [relies on] the appearance of success" (93). Both options juxtapose textual information versus reality: "Many travelers find themselves saying of an experience in a new country that it wasn't what they expected it to be, meaning that it wasn't what a book said it would be" (93), and they also both support the idea that "the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes" (93). Vázquez-Figuerola undermines both of these Orientalist approaches to travel writing, albeit through a text. In the first case, he offers an encounter with an Other ("relatively unknown and threatening and previously distant"), and builds on the readers' expectations throughout the novel – that Gacel will demand the hand of Marc Milosevic in revenge – ultimately to deny the readers' expectations in the final pages, showing that not only is the narrative different from "what [the reader] expected it to be" but also that the book itself is admitting that it wasn't what it "said it would be." It destabilizes readers' expectations, simultaneously destabilizing the Orientalist tropes on which it occasionally relies.

In considering the second option that Said offers,

the textual attitude is the appearance of success. If one reads a book claiming that lions are fierce and then encounters a fierce lion... the chances are that one will be encouraged to read more books by that same author, and believe them. (93)

Said discusses that this appearance of success can lead to the expectation of the fierceness of lions, thereby increasing their perceived fierceness. According to Said, then, the text serves to strengthen preconceived notions of the Other (in his example of a lion), exaggerating essentialist observations. Vázquez-Figueroa's conclusion avoids this textual attitude by admitting in the final pages that cultural expectations are unreliable. By denying the readers' expectations, Vázquez-Figueroa relinquishes his authority on the Other by offering the consideration that the rules of representing the Other are not hard and steadfast. These characters are not just flat, cultural stereotypes, but individuals with the power to support or desert hegemonic norms as they see fit.

In *Los ojos del Tuareg*, Vázquez-Figueroa effectively destabilizes his own authority over representation, employing the adventure novel genre and yet also departing from a conventionally anticipated climax. His emphasis on the personal encounter between the European and the African avoids grand narratives of Otherness and finds a common point of relation and understanding between the two. The theme of travel – the rally drivers versus the nomads – serves to underpin this interaction, highlighting the cultural differences that thrust competing cultures into contact. As a result, the mechanized Westerner with his *techne* collides with the indigenous African and his *mētis*. These contrasts establish the difference that the personal encounter overcomes. The novel

offers the consideration that, despite the Otherness of the Other, a face-to-face encounter reduces these difference to unimportance.

III. THE IMMIGRANT: FROM OTHER TO INDIVIDUAL IN DONATO NDONGO'S *EL METRO*

I preferred not to say the rest that had come to my mind:
that just like us they are born and die, and in the journey
from the cradle to the grave they dream dreams some of
which come true and some of which are frustrated; that
they fear the unknown, search for love and seek
contentment in wife and child; that some are strong and
some are weak; that some have been given more than they
deserve by life, while others have been deprived by it.
—Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 3

Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo is one of the most outstanding Hispano-African literary voices currently writing. He was born in Neifang, Spanish Guinea in 1950, and, in addition to his novelistic production, worked as a journalist and held the position of director for *Nuestra Señora de África de Madrid* and the *Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano de Malabo*. His novels include *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987) a finalist for the premio Sésamo, *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997), and the object of the current study, *El metro* (2007). Ndongo has also compiled an anthology of Equatorial Guinean literature (*Literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial – Antología*, 2000) with Mbaré Ngom, and analyzed the relationship between Spain and Equatorial Guinea in *Historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial* (1977), *El comercio español con África: Especial referencia a Guinea Ecuatorial* (1980), *España en Guinea: construcción del desencuentro: 1778-1968* (1998) with Mariano L. de Castro Antolín, and *De colonia a estado: Guinea Ecuatorial, 1955-1968* (2002) with Alicia Campos Serrano, among others. His work has garnered significant critical attention as well as a biography by Joseph-Désire Otabela Mewolo, *Entre estética y compromiso: La obra de Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo* (2008) and *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* was translated into

English in 2007 by Michael Ugarte. Ndongo currently lives in Murcia, Spain, unable to return to Equatorial Guinea for political reasons.

His most recent novel, *El metro*, offers a narrative of the e/im-migrant's journey from Cameroon to Spain.⁴⁰⁸ In his own words, the novel “surg[ió] de la necesidad de reflexionar sobre el fenómeno de la emigración africana hacia Europa y otros continentes” (“Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo: ‘Escribo para comunicar’” 4).⁴⁰⁹ For this reason, *El metro* provides an opportunity for critical reflection on the traveling archetype of the e/im-migrant. Donato Ndongo's status as one of the pre-eminent Hispano-African authors also contributes a valuable authorial viewpoint, extending the critical examination beyond Caucasian, Western authors. As a post-colonial subject, writing in the colonial language – Spanish – an examination of his work will complement the other authors already examined.

The immigrant's travel experience is perhaps the one most predicated on the “potential [for] loss or profit” (Abbeele xvi). It is a travel fraught with danger and hardship, contrasted with the financial luxury of tourism. It also lacks the popular mythical image of the nomad archetype. The immigrant is not in close harmony with his environs; on the contrary, s/he must subsist in an inhospitable geography, passing through unknown territories in search of the promised land. Immigration is also distinct within this trichotomy of travel in that, by its very definition, it is often a search for a new *oikos*,

⁴⁰⁸ The terms *migrant*, *emigrant*, and *immigrant* require some preliminary disambiguation. At the root of each of these terms is physical movement, *migration*. The prefixes *e-* and *im-* emphasize focal points within the trajectory of travel, but the process of human migration is a combination of each of these derivatives. In this study, to emphasize the dynamics of migration under analysis, I will predominantly use the term *immigrant*, focusing on the protagonist's travel towards an imagined “Promised Land” (350). Occasionally I may use one of the other terms within specific contexts. See Ugarte, 1-17, for a similar theorization and disambiguation of the terms exile, emigrant, and immigrant.

⁴⁰⁹ [arose from the necessity to reflect on the phenomenon of African emigration to Europe and other continents.]

an *oikos* that is perhaps temporary until sufficient funds are earned to enable return, but there is a distinct complication of the travel trajectory in the immigrant's experience.

Rueda notes that

El viaje que emprende el emigrante se desvía, por tanto, del concepto del viaje como forma canónica de la literatura occidental, puesto que ni culmina en el arribo a un destino, donde para el emigrante sólo empiezan otras pesadillas, ni se le da cierre al viaje en un sentido escritural, ya que la distancia que sigue a la salida de la patria sólo parece agrandarse.

(51)⁴¹⁰

Very often, for the immigrant (in direct contrast with *the exile*), the “home(land) [that] must be posited from which one leaves... and to which one hopes to return” is left behind with no intention or possibility of return (Abbeele xviii).⁴¹¹ The immigrant's voyage is in search of an imagined, idealized *oikos* – the promised land.⁴¹² S/he has little, if any, political or financial capital at his/her disposal, and no appreciable localized knowledge of the geography s/he traverses, therefore lacking the advantage of either *techne* or *mētis*. A doubly marginalized figure, the immigrant exists in an unofficial realm,⁴¹³ often a dehumanized subject (cf. Chavez 6).

⁴¹⁰ [The trip that the emigrant undertakes diverges, therefore, from the concept of travel as a canonical form in Western literature, due to the fact that neither does it culminate in the arrival at a destination, where only more nightmares begin for the emigrant, nor does the travel come to a close in a written sense, since the distance that accumulates from the departure of the fatherland only seems to grow larger.]

⁴¹¹ See Arowolo for his study on the difficulties of the “return migration” and Ugarte's chapter on the “emixile” where he maintains that “Exile and immigration are interwoven, not identical” (xi).

⁴¹² *Idealized* because this “promised land” often exists only in the mind, compiled from hearsay and rumors. As I will examine in *El metro*, preconceptions of the destination country often self-destruct upon arrival.

⁴¹³ The parallels are not exact, but the immigrant's – and more specifically the undocumented immigrant's – politically interstitial status shares much in common with Agamben's analysis of the *homo sacer* in that both (the undocumented immigrant and the *homo sacer*) move within an ambiguous political sphere. See Agamben 45-68.

Immigration is undertaken by many distinct classes of individuals and for a variety of reasons⁴¹⁴ – be they economic, political or other – and yet the most pervasive image is that of the economically marginalized, third world subject seeking financial opportunity in an affluent, often Western, society. Indeed, the term “immigrant” often serves as a polemical lightning rod for the media and society at large. The list of pejorative, often racial, epithets for immigrants is long, and the connotative definition of the term has the ability to obscure the cultural and economic dynamics that impel migration. The harshest of portrayals falls upon the undocumented immigrant, the undocumented alien. While any immigrant is susceptible to suspicion, it is the undocumented one that receives the most vehement criticisms and cultural outcry. It is the experience of this last archetype, that of the undocumented immigrant, that Donato Ndongo describes in his novel *El Metro*, as he himself has stated that he wrote *El Metro* “del deseo de humanizar al inmigrante” (“Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo: ‘Escribo para comunicar,’” 4).⁴¹⁵ With *El Metro*, Ndongo attempts to give voice to the politically marginalized, linguistically and culturally Other immigrant.

The immigrant is, at the basest of understandings, one who travels or has traveled to arrive at his or her host destination. Inherent in the definition is physical movement from one geographical space to another. This act of traveling is the common tie between the immigrant, the tourist, and the nomad, but what marks the undocumented immigrant as distinct is the extent to which s/he is often politically, legally, culturally, and

⁴¹⁴ Migration is also not limited to the act of entering Spain from outside its borders. In Chapter Two, I examined *La llamada del Almuédano* by Concha López Sarasúa which narrates a story of Spanish migration to North Africa, and it would be remiss to not mention the reality of internal migration within Spain, about which much has been written. Also, Ugarte notes that Spain is very often only a transitional space for African immigrants who end up settling in other European countries (5, 77-78).

⁴¹⁵ [out of the desire to humanize the immigrant.]

financially disenfranchised in the host community while simultaneously serving as an essential component of the global economic network. This confluence of travel and intercultural contact make the immigrant an ideal archetype for critical literary consideration. Ndongo's protagonist, Lambert Obama Ondo, undertakes a voyage from his native Cameroon, traversing north across Africa, to finally arrive in Spain by *patera*.⁴¹⁶

El Metro could be called several novels in one, a trilogy bound within one cover. While the novel traces the voyage of Lambert Obama Ondo from Cameroon to Spain, his actual voyage comprises only the middle third of the story. The first 150 pages lead up to his departure from his village, narrating his first love interest and the complications that lead him to flee in shame to Yaundé, the capital. The final third of the novel relates his experience as an immigrant in Spain. The first third can be considered to be a prelude to immigration, the middle part as the act of migration, and the final third as the reality of the immigrant. Ugarte analyzes the novel as arriving at a "fusion of both worlds" – the African and the Western – stating that Ndongo "has fused both cosmologies within his writing" (89). In my own analysis, this fusion – this *encounter* – is made possible by the middle third of the novel, the act of travel that links the two worlds. Ndongo's novel presents a voyage that is a complex interweaving of motives and possibility, within a clandestine sphere of undocumentation and often physical danger. While *El metro* does contain a powerful sea-crossing-by-patera scene, the full development of Obama Ondo's story allows the novel to go beyond simple categorization as the so-called "patera literature." It is more appropriately a Bildungsroman as the protagonist travels,

⁴¹⁶ The *patera* is an open boat without a keel; it has been generalized to refer to almost any boat used by immigrants to traverse the waters between Africa and Spain. See Rueda, *El retorno/El reencuentro* 285.

encounters his Others at every step of the journey, and becomes “enlightened” as to the superficiality of preconceived stereotypes.

In my consideration of travel and the representation of the Other within this chapter, this novel represents not only a powerful humanization of the immigrant, but also a work by a Hispano-African author. As a Hispano-African author, Ndongo’s explicit Other is the Westerner, the European; and yet, he is not so reductive in his portrayals of Same and Other. The act of traveling, of migrating north across Africa and to Spain, brings the protagonist into contact with other Africans and Europeans. This intercultural contact within *El Metro* results in an evolved sensibility in Lambert Obama Ondo that offers insight into the power of travel and intercultural contact to overcome stereotypes and preconceived ideas. This process is undoubtedly an arduous one. Ndongo’s immigrant would agree with Kapuściński’s assertion that “a journey is a challenge and an effort, involving hard work and dedication; it is a difficult task, an ambitious project to accomplish” (16), but the “potential [for] loss or profit” (Abbeele xvi) is so tempting, or so necessitated, that it begs the question “[Why w]ould we otherwise voluntarily expose ourselves to hardships and take on the risk of all sorts of discomforts and danger?” (Kapuściński 17). Even though the act of migration is meditated on the search for an economic “Tierra Prometida” (*El Metro* 350),⁴¹⁷ it has as a secondary aspect that “each step along [the voyage] takes us nearer to an encounter with the Other” (Kapuściński 17).

It is worth noting the fact that the main protagonist is Cameroonian and the majority of the novel unfolds in Cameroon, even though Ndongo is an Equatorial Guinean, writing in Spanish. This authorial decision subtly erodes lines of difference. It

⁴¹⁷ [Promised Land]

universalizes the experience of the immigrant, sidestepping easy criticisms that it is a novel about a former colony and its relationship with its colonizer, and instead emphasizing that the immigration issue extends beyond a post-colonizer/post-colonized relationship and is one of the West and its Other (Personal Interview).

As a brief plot synopsis, the novel opens with Lambert Obama Ondo – “miembro del clan de los yendjok”⁴¹⁸ from the village of Mbalmayo, Cameroon (Ndongo, *El Metro* 13)⁴¹⁹ – descending into the Madrid Metro. The novel returns to this moment in the final pages, but the reader knows from the start about the eventual arrival of Obama Ondo in Spain. The following chapter returns to Obama Ondo’s childhood in Mbalmayo. The story outlines his father’s work for the local French missionaries, Obama Ondo’s maturation, infatuation and romantic courtship with a girl from his village, Anne Mengue, who becomes pregnant with his first child. Just as the story-line begins to look like a familiar coming-of-age tale, Obama Ondo’s father betrays his son by courting and marrying Anne Mengue’s mother, making impossible, according to tribal traditions, the son’s involvement with his now “half-sister.” In rage and panic, Obama Ondo flees the village for the capital Yaundé, slipping away in the night.

Obama Ondo’s emigration from the village takes him to another cultural and economic reality within his own nation. In Yaundé, he experiences the difficulties of internal, urban immigration, and also presences the independence of Cameroon from France.⁴²⁰ But Yaundé is only a stopping point, one of several, as he becomes involved with Sylvie, discovers she is pregnant at the height of an economic crisis, and he believes

⁴¹⁸ [member of the clan of the yendjok.] The Yendjok are a tribe in Cameroon that are ethnically related to the Fang in Equatorial Guinea, yet linguistically different in their colonial language (French) versus the Spanish of Equatorial Guinea (Ndongo, Personal Interview).

⁴¹⁹ All future references to the novel are indicated parenthetically.

⁴²⁰ 1 January 1960 (“Cameroon”).

his only solution to economic survival is undocumented immigration to Spain.⁴²¹ From Cameroon he hides in a boat, is discovered along with the other immigrants, and left in Dakar where he spends a year working to earn money. He is able to save enough to fly to Morocco where he pays “la Red”⁴²² to carry him by patera to the Canary Islands. Over half of the immigrants on the patera drown within sight of the Islands when the boat driver dumps them overboard to swim ashore. The surviving immigrants are offered help by NGOs, and Obama Ondo is eventually able to travel to mainland Spain, where he works in both Murcia and Madrid as an agricultural laborer and street vendor. Eventually, he is able to save enough money to begin planning his return to Cameroon; he sends a dowry to Sylvie’s family and plans another year or two of saving to realize his return voyage.

The final pages return to the initial chapter where he descends into the Lucero Metro station in Madrid and the reader discovers the foreshadowing of the initial chapter; as chapter one concludes, Obama Ondo thinks to himself “había reforzado tanto su territorio personal, fortaleciendo de tal modo sus deseos de elevarse sobre la adversidad, que había determinado que su muerte nunca sería una muerte anónima” (21).⁴²³ And yet there are two skinheads awaiting him in the Metro who stab him to death for his friendship with a white Spanish girl. In this closing, traumatic scene, Obama Ondo lies bleeding to death alone, in the Metro station, as his grandfather’s voice speaks to him “no tengas miedo, hijo: al fin has llegado al puerto de destino, y tu muerte no será una muerte

⁴²¹ This synopsis is in no way a complete overview, as it is not until the fourteenth chapter (of nineteen), that Obama Ondo leaves Cameroon.

⁴²² “the network” – Also called “harague:” a clandestine mafia-like network that transports undocumented immigrants, specifically between Africa and Spain. See Rueda, *El retorno/El reencuentro* 383.

⁴²³ [he had so reinforced his personal territory, strengthening simultaneously his desires to elevate himself over adversity, that he had determined that his death would never be an anonymous death.]

anónima” (458).⁴²⁴ After following Obama Ondo’s arduous journey from his childhood and through all the tribulations of his immigration experience, the reader finds hope in the final pages that his dreams will see fruition, that his deepest fears – of finding an “anonymous death” – will not come to pass, and then his life is cut short at the moment of hope and possibility. It is a powerful, emotional, and textually effective end to the narrative.

I will return to an analysis of this ending below, but the parenthetical scenes in the first and final chapter emphasize the fact that the plotline develops towards this final moment, where Obama Ondo is cruelly murdered in the subway. There is a distinct fatalism that permeates the text as Obama Ondo continuously worries about achieving his destiny and fears his possibly anonymous death. By foreshadowing the end in the initial pages, chapters two through eighteen become a narrative flashback, a prelude to the final outcome. His entire life story is a narrative voyage back to the moment when he descends into the Lucero Metro station. This metaphorical, narrative travel is paralleled by his physical voyage across Africa and Spain, further emphasized in the title *El Metro* – the symbol and reality of modern, urban travel and where he also ends his voyage.

The first and last chapters are also tied together in that they complicate Van den Abbeele’s articulation of the *oikos*. This complication serves to deepen the portrayal of the protagonist by revealing the complex reality of the immigrant. Abbeele articulates that

the *oikos* is most easily understood as that point from which the voyage begins and to which it circles back at the end, its function could

⁴²⁴ [don’t be afraid, son: you have finally arrived to the port of destiny, and your death will not be an anonymous death.]

theoretically be served by any particular point in the itinerary. That point then acts as a transcendental point of reference that organizes and domesticates a given area by defining all other points in relation to itself. Such an act of referral makes of all travel a circular voyage insofar as that privilege point or *oikos* is posited as the absolute origin and absolute end of any movement at all. (xviii)

The chapter opens with a reflection on his birthplace, his original *oikos* – “A pesar de haber perdido la intrepidez de sus antepasados, Lambert Obama Ondo, miembro del clan de los yendjok, se esforzaba por mantener incólume y reafirmar su africanidad militante en todo lugar y circunstancia” (13).⁴²⁵ And yet, even though he intends to return, and is in fact sending money home to build a physical house in Mbalmayo, the narrative use of the first foreshadowing chapter creates a circular narrative and simultaneously suggests to the reader that his journey will not be circular; he will remain in the “tierra prometida” – threatened by the possibility of “una muerte anónima” (21).⁴²⁶ He is a being psychically trapped between an imagined *oikos* and an inhabited one in the host country. In Spain, his return to Cameroon is his imagined *oikos*; his life as a street vendor, the inhabited one. As the story returns to his past, these oppositions exchange poles – Spain becomes the imagined promised land, while his father literally destroys his possibility of establishing a permanent, satisfying *oikos* in his home village. The “transcendental point of reference” is unstable for the immigrant; it is a shifting, complex conceptualization, emphasizing the interstitial, marginalized existence of the immigrant. While offering the reader an insight

⁴²⁵ [Even though he had lost the intrepidity of his ancestors, Lambert Obama Ondo, member of the clan of the yendjok, made an effort to maintain intact and to reaffirm his militant *Africanness* in all situations and circumstances.]

⁴²⁶ [promised land], [an anonymous death]

into the difficulties inherent in the act of immigration, the shifting nature of this “point of reference” also operates to destabilize hierarchies of West versus Africa. The West is privileged in the ideal as the Promised Land, but Cameroon – Africa – is privileged in the ideal once residence in Europe is achieved. The unstable and shifting *oikos* substitutes the hierarchy of West over Africa, one of ideal over real. This substitution also confers upon Obama Ondo the very human quality of hope, simultaneously universalizing the psyche of his character, and de-stratifying conceptualizations of West over Africa.

These two important points are further established in the first chapter. Upon descending the stairs to the station Obama Ondo reflects that “no había hecho solo ese duro camino hasta llegar a ese lugar;” his story, his travel, is a collective work, as he is guided by “las ánimas de sus idos” (13),⁴²⁷ and helped by friends, family, NGOs, and kind strangers. Inter-ethnic and intercultural cooperation make possible his survival. Many of his Others, be they African or European, extend a helping hand to him when he is in need. His recognition of the help of others humanizes the immigrant by emphasizing inter-personal/cultural cooperation and personal gratitude, imbuing the protagonist with an amiable and empathetic personality. Even in his violent death at the end, at the hands of skinhead neo-Nazis, he is gracious and does not generalize: “bastan unos pocos, o uno solo, para cometer un crimen” (368).⁴²⁸ The cooperative nature of his travel – at each stage he is helped by some new acquaintance – emphasizes *exchange*, one of the three methods of intercultural interaction the Kapuściński highlights in *The Other* (20). These exchanges arise from encounters with Others along the way, and even though there are multiple examples of negative encounters – extreme racial prejudice and general

⁴²⁷ [he had not made this arduous journey to arrive at this place alone], [the spirits of his ancestors]

⁴²⁸ [it only takes a few, or just one, to commit a crime.]

maleficence – the impression is made that “an encounter with Others is not a simple, automatic thing, but involves will and an effort that not everyone is always ready to undertake” (Kapuściński 31). These representations serve to undermine racial and cultural stereotypes, underscoring that some individuals are good and some are not regardless of their race or culture. The text avoids sweeping generalizations by describing the variety of individuals the immigrant meets along the way, as well as the variety of reactions he faces.

The impetus, the provocation, for migrating further complicates the hierarchy of West versus Africa. Spain functions as the “tierra prometida,” and yet it is not simply an idealized, irresistible force that draws the third-world Other due to discrepancies of wealth. *El Metro* offers a more complex consideration of the motivations behind the immigrant’s voyage. The problem is both intercultural – due to systems of power put in place by colonialism – as well as intracultural – Obama Ondo’s father betrays his son, leaving him little option but to flee. Obama Ondo’s father, Guy Ondo Ebang, effects indeed a double betrayal, first against the tribe in going to work for the colonial missionaries – a job which earned him the reproach of his tribe and father: “el muy correcto jefe Ebang Motuú... maldijo al réprobo, extrañándole de la tribu, despojándole para siempre de la protección de los antepasados” (24),⁴²⁹ and next against his son by marrying the mother of Obama Ondo’s love interest. However, Ondo Ebang cannot hold all the blame for the immigration of his son to Spain. His betrayal(s) are a consequence of the colonial paradigm, an economic power relationship that renders the skills of the African Other indispensable to the Westerner. Upon beginning to work for the

⁴²⁹ [the very upright chief Ebang Motuú... cursed the reprobate, estranging him from the tribe, divesting him forever of the protection of his ancestors.]

missionaries, he quickly becomes “insustituible” (26),⁴³⁰ and later Obama Ondo himself forms a part of the necessary undocumented work force when he labors on a farm near Murcia. Colonialism established economic relationships of dependence that neo-colonialism maintains. As Cameroon faces a difficult economic crisis shortly after independence, Obama Ondo reflects that those in power continue to support “sin rechistar unas medidas económicas que reforzaban la dependencia de los antiguos países colonizadores” (249).⁴³¹ International economic forces hobble the third-world economy: “el pago de la abultada deuda exterior, no eran para otros sino una imposición más del neocolonialismo para terminar de ahogar las frágiles economías de un continente empobrecido por la depredación y los abusos” (251).⁴³² The modern day, undocumented immigrant is a product of contemporary economic dynamics, colonial legacies, but also interpersonal (in this case inter-familial) disagreements. Ndongo posits a complex interweaving of dynamics that avoids placing blame solely on Western or African sources, but rather nuancing its complexity.

Ndongo is careful not to place all blame in a bitter attack on the old colonial power; instead, he recognizes the intracultural dynamics that also motivate emigrants to leave. Ondo Ebang’s decision to move forward in his relationship with Jeanne Bikié, the mother of Obama Ondo’s love interest, prohibits Obama Ondo from marrying the woman who is carrying his child. The traditional laws that prohibit his relationship, restricting his ability to form his own literal home – his *oikos* – drive him away from his village in a

⁴³⁰ [irreplaceable]

⁴³¹ [without arguing some economic measures that reinforced the dependence on old colonial nations]

⁴³² [the payment of the bulging exterior debt, was nothing less than another neocolonial imposition to finally drown the fragile economies of a continent impoverished by the depredation and the abuses.]

search for the freedom to pursue his own life. Intrafamilial squabbles aside, the text also explicitly blames the post-colonial leadership of Cameroon:

Verdad o mentira, se aseguraba que había ministros y directores de empresas estatales o paraestatales que desayunaban en Yaundé, almorzaban en París y cenaban en Nueva York, en unos viajes costísimos que las autoridades presentaban como necesarios en el esfuerzo de buscar soluciones para los problemas del país, pero cuyos frutos nadie veía; y así iban pasando los años. (89)⁴³³

The immigrant's reality is, therefore, predicated on a variety of forces that place blame on both the Western and African leadership. This particular analysis can be further elaborated, but the important element to consider within the current framework is the equal guilt placed on both parties and a consideration of the complexity of the issue. The text even toys with the possibility that the immigrants are “un problema irresoluble: no eran delincuentes, y en todo caso no habían delinquido en su territorio; no se les podía acusar de delito alguno; no tenía sentido mantenerles encerrados, y además costaba dinero” (296).⁴³⁴ The problematization of the immigration issue highlights the complex nature of the forces at work, while the narrative of Obama Ondo's experience humanizes the individuals caught up in these forces.

In spite of the gruesome incident on the patera, the act of traveling, the voyage, is a process of personal growth and reflection, developing Obama Ondo's character into a

⁴³³ [True or false, there were surely ministers and directors of state or para-state companies that ate breakfast in Yaundé, lunch in Paris, and dinner in New York, on exorbitant trips that the authorities presented as necessary in the effort to find solutions to the country's problems, but whose fruits no one ever saw; and that is how the years continued passing.]

⁴³⁴ [an irresolvable problem: they weren't delinquents, and in any case they had not committed a crime in their territory; they could not be accused of any crime; it made no sense to keep them locked up, and it also cost money.]

complex and self-reflective awareness. He considers that “una de las ventajas de viajar es conocer otros lugares, otras experiencias, otras formas de ver y de entender la realidad, sin conformarse con las cortas miras de lo inmediato” (447).⁴³⁵ He is not a uni-dimensional caricature, but rather a conflicted soul, caught between multiple spheres. He vacillates between the traditions of his village and tribe, the realities of colonialism and modernity, and the stereotypes of (his) race (“Perteneía a una raza que – dijeron – nunca inventó nada, que anteponía el sentimiento a la razón, que ansiaba la paz futura desdeñando la felicidad en el presente... Procedía de la tierra maldita, África, el continente de la noche eterna, el corazón de las tinieblas” (21)⁴³⁶), and his realization that he is “un ser humano que trataba con otros seres humanos” (431).⁴³⁷ He is caught between these competing spheres, and in his psyche they merge. The modern is imbued with the traditional:

le fascinaba el Metro... Como ahora, el primer día que bajó las escalerillas de aquella estación no pudo contener ese arrebató de entusiasmo que le dejaba pasmado a su pesar: le parecía que se estaba convirtiendo en un grombif, una enorme rata silvestre que cazaba con su primo Ntogo allá en su aldea. (15)⁴³⁸

and the traditional must be tempered with contemporary realities: “ni podían ni debían seguir reproduciendo los mismos gestos que sus mayores: puesto que se encontraban en

⁴³⁵ [one of the advantages of traveling is to know other places, other experiences, other ways of seeing and understanding reality, without being content with the shortsightedness of the nearby.]

⁴³⁶ [He belonged to a race that – so they said – never invented anything, that put feeling above reason, that yearned for future peace while disdaining the happiness of the present... They came from a cursed land, Africa, the continent of the eternal night, the heart of darkness.]

⁴³⁷ [a human being that interacted with other human beings.]

⁴³⁸ [the Metro fascinated him... Just like now, the first day that he went down the steps of that station he could not contain the fit of enthusiasm that left him stunned despite himself: it seemed to him that he was converting into a grombif, an enormous wild rat that he used to hunt with his cousin Ntogo back in his village.]

otra época y en otro mundo, estaban obligados a abrir sus ojos y sus espíritus a la realidad de un tiempo nuevo” (433).⁴³⁹ He inhabits a realm of “incertidumbre” (369)⁴⁴⁰ but as he spends time in another culture “se estaba habituando a pensar y a hablar de estas cosas [el racismo, la violencia, la injusticia], que nunca le preocuparon, pero ahora eran temas recurrentes en sus conversaciones con los demás, cuestiones inevitables que ya formaban parte de su vida” (364).⁴⁴¹ The uncertainty of this travel, and his experiences and exchanges along the way, force Obama Ondo to mature, to reflect, and to re-evaluate his preconceived ideas.

In the final chapter, Obama Ondo reflects on all that he has learned. His “awakening” is a sympathetic one: “A medida que fue conociendo el medio en que se movía, percibía que quizá no todos tuvieran unas ganas deliberadas de ofender, y sólo pretendieran satisfacer una curiosidad” (401),⁴⁴² and he comes to understand his European Other: “Ahora que se encontraba en un país de blancos, tenía la oportunidad de comparar, explorar y asentar con seguridad la visión que tenía de ellos desde África, o desechar por infundadas las ideas preconcebidas” (363).⁴⁴³ His face-to-face encounters with his Others lead him to individualize his cultural Other, no longer are they a *they*, but rather a group of distinct individuals. This realization is brought about by one individual, Ana María, an NGO lawyer who helps him gain legal residency:

⁴³⁹ [neither could nor should they continue reproducing the same gestures as their elders: due to the fact that now they found themselves in another epoch and another world, they were obliged to open their eyes and their spirits to the reality of a new time.]

⁴⁴⁰ [uncertainty]

⁴⁴¹ [he was becoming accustomed to thinking and talking about these things [racism, violence, injustice], that never bothered him before, but now were recurring themes in his conversations with others, inevitable questions that formed part of his life.]

⁴⁴² [As he got to know the environment in which he moved, he felt that maybe not everyone intended to offend, but only wanted to satisfy their curiosity.]

⁴⁴³ [Now that he found himself in a country of white people, he had the opportunity to compare, explore and settle with confidence the vision that he had of them from Africa, or reject as unfounded the preconceived ideas.]

Ana María nunca conocería su grato y profundo influjo. Su breve trato con ella le dotó de perspectiva, de mayor amplitud de miras, ayudándole a ver a los blancos de manera distinta, no tanto su color, sino dentro de la piel, el interior de la persona, que, como él mismo, podía tener defectos y virtudes; al fin y al cabo, se dijo, la piel es sólo un envoltorio, como una camisa o una blusa; era injusto juzgar a un ser humano por el color de la ropa que viste. Poco a poco, aprendió a distinguir a las personas de la masa, a ver la individualidad velada por la multitud; ya no se conformaba con la epidermis, y procuraba profundizar para llegar al corazón de sus semejantes. (431)⁴⁴⁴

Through the kindness of Ana María, and his own experiences brought about by his voyage, his Other is converted into his “semejante.”⁴⁴⁵ His interaction with Ana María leads him beyond the superficial, visual markers of difference and to a more profound consideration of their humanity. By surpassing the visual sense and relying on the empathetic sense, Obama Ondo projects Levinas’s assertion that “I find myself facing the Other. He is neither a cultural signification or a simple given. He is, primordially, *sense* because he lends it to expression itself” (30). His encounter with the *visage* of another human causes him to reevaluate his understanding of others. In Obama Ondo’s exchange with Ana María, he is able to pierce beyond the cultural to find the personal; he realizes

⁴⁴⁴ [Ana María would never know her pleasant and profound influence. His brief time with her gave him perspective, of more open-mindedness, helping him to see the whites in a new manner, not only for their color, but for within their skin, the interior of the person, that, just like him, could have defects and virtues; ultimately, he told himself, skin is only wrapping, like a shirt or a blouse; it was unjust to judge a human being for the color of the clothing that they wore. Little by little, he learned to distinguish people from the masses, to see the individuality veiled by the multitude; now he was not satisfied with the epidermis, and further sought to reach to the heart of his fellow-man.]

⁴⁴⁵ [fellow-man]

that he is “un ser humano que trataba con otros seres humanos” (431).⁴⁴⁶ She is not Other, but Same; “cultural ornament” is made irrelevant (Levinas 32). Obama Ondo’s face-to-face interaction with his cultural Other allows him to find the universally human hidden behind the phenotypical racial markers.

As facile cultural differentiations are replaced by a recognition of the individual, Obama Ondo’s brutal murder suggests that racial violence is the ultimate dehumanizing action. His reflections on descending into the metro in the first chapter take on a retroactive ominous tone in the final chapter: “no podía dejar de sorprenderse cada vez que bajaba hacia el Metro: le parecía que se había transformado en un ser extraño, medio animal y medio humano, como un gigantesco grombif” (13),⁴⁴⁷ “le parecía que se estaba convirtiendo en un grombif, una enorme rata silvestre que cazaba con su primo” (15).⁴⁴⁸ And in the final chapter, he does indeed turn into a hunted animal, as the skinheads corner him alone, hurl racial epithets at him, stab him, and leave him bleeding to death, alone in the subway station. They call him “mono asqueroso, negro cabrón” (456)⁴⁴⁹ and their violence dehumanizes him: “le asustaba, ante todo, terminar como un insecto insignificante y ruin aplastado en cualquier vereda del bosque, sin que nada alterase el orden sempiterno del universo” (456-457).⁴⁵⁰ The tragedy is made more acute in that Obama Ondo does not return the generalization: “Claro que bastan unos pocos, o uno

⁴⁴⁶ [a human being dealing with other human beings.]

⁴⁴⁷ [it never ceased to surprise him each time that he went down into the Metro: it seemed that he was transformed into a strange being, half animal and half human, like a giant grombif.]

⁴⁴⁸ [it seemed to him that he was converting into a grombif, an enormous wild rat that he used to hunt with his cousin.]

⁴⁴⁹ [disgusting monkey, black bastard.]

⁴⁵⁰ [it frightened him, above all, to end up like an insignificant and despicable insect crushed on some forest trail, without anything altering the everlasting order of the universe.]

solo, para cometer un crimen” (368),⁴⁵¹ but when he is robbed of his individuality, he is also robbed of his humanity and, ultimately his life.

This final, tragic scene is traumatic. Obama Ondo finds himself at the moment of greatest possibility at that instant in the novel. He has sent money for a dowry back to Cameroon and received the blessing of both families. His paperwork is finally in order – no longer is he undocumented –and he estimates two years more in Spain before he will be able to return home to Cameroon to live with his family. His voyage has led to great insights, great hardships, and is regaining the potential for opportunity now that he is documented. His life is cut short at the moment when things appear to be improving and optimism has re-entered the narrative. For these reasons it is a powerful final ending. Having followed Obama Ondo on his journey for so long, to watch him die as his goals are in sight demands a reaction from the reader. His death brings forth an empathetic response. As Obama Ondo breathes his final breaths, he hears the voice of grandfather, the village chief Ebang Motué, “al fin has llegado al puerto de destino, y tu muerte no será una muerte anónima” (458).⁴⁵² The use of the second person in this final phrase emphasizes the personal comfort that the voice offers to the dying Obama Ondo, and yet it also subtly involves the reader. The “tú” emphasizes shared human mortality; it closes the narrative, leaving the reader with the story of Obama Ondo the murdered immigrant, and in the act of passing along the story proves that his death was not anonymous – this immigrant who died beneath Madrid’s streets has a name and a story. The reader finds that “*I is an other*” (60), as Richard Cohen explains in the introduction to Levinas’s *Humanism of the Other*: “Suffering and mortality, then, are first and foremost suffering

⁴⁵¹ [Of course it only takes a few, or just one, to commit a crime.]

⁴⁵² [you have finally arrived at the port of destiny, and your death will not be an anonymous death.]

and mortality of the other, from whom one's own suffering, otherwise useless, takes on meaning" (17). That is to say, we do not know what the experience of death or certain sufferings feel like, but we are able to construct emotions towards and ideas about them through the observation of others who suffer and die. Death and suffering's signification for us is made possible by our interaction with our Other. And so, Obama Ondo's death forces a reaction for its injustice. This fictional character that is carefully developed throughout the novel is senselessly murdered at the moment of optimism. Why? What dynamics lead to this moment? In Obama Ondo, Ndongo offers the Westerner an African Other whose death provides a glimpse of both the peril and the vulnerability of the immigrant, but which ultimately underscores his humanity.

As a final point, within the novel there is another forceful line that stands out and that makes the reader confront the African Other as Same. Over halfway through the book, immediately before he leaves Cameroon, Obama Ondo reflects: "Estaba seguro de que no emigraba para olvidar, ni tenía intención de irse para siempre; su viaje duraría sólo el tiempo preciso de colmar sus anhelos y situarse en su propio país... Pese a lo cual no era fácil la separación; era *como si te arrancaran tu piel*" (emphasis mine, 284).⁴⁵³ This phrase, as with the final phrase of the novel considered above, stands out for its use of the second person informal conjugation. By involving the skin in this metaphor, it suggests the racial difficulties of emigration, and by offering a painful image, spoken directly towards the reader, it draws the reader into the experience of pain. Two hundred and eighty-three pages into the novel, when the reader stumbles across this singular use of "tu," the effect is shocking. This narrative device shows Ndongo's mastery of effective

⁴⁵³ [He was sure that he did not emigrate in order to forget, neither did he intend to leave forever; his travel would last only the precise time required to fulfill his wishes and establish himself in his own country... Despite the fact that separation was not easy; it was *as if they ripped off your skin.*]

narration, and underscores his efforts to humanize the immigrant by drawing the reader into a participatory relationship with the protagonist. It also suggests that on an authorial level, Ndongo would agree that coming face-to-face with the Other is the best way to see the human. As the narrator addresses the reader directly with this powerful simile, Ndongo makes the face-to-face encounter unavoidable, effectively canceling the space between Same and Other.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has examined the use of archetypes of travel and their concomitant implications in the writing of the African Other. Whereas Chapter Two focused on a collective engagement between opposing sides (as in war or diplomacy), this chapter has focused more on the interpersonal interactions that travel makes possible. The tourist, the nomad, and the immigrant continue to be powerful archetypes for the Western imagination, and yet they are personalized in these representations.

Within each of these novels, the act of traveling has the power to bring Same and Other into contact, to facilitate the encounter. Reverte, Vázquez-Figueroa, and Ndongo each narrate the power that these intercultural encounters have to undermine and counter Orientalist discourse, and their novels, therefore, reflect powerful responses to the tradition of Orientalist narratives. The Other of their works, be it a Saharawi refugee, a Tuareg nomad, or a Cameroonian immigrant, is ultimately a fellow human. The encounter offers the opportunity to pierce beyond pervasive and harmful cultural stereotypes.

And yet, each of these authors acknowledges the enduring negative power of these stereotypes. The somber endings of each of these works are difficult to analyze. Even though Vázquez-Figueroa's novel does not end with a violent death, the future is bleak for the Tuaregs. Reverte and Ndongo's works seem to suggest that fatal violence is an inevitable societal response to examples of intercultural acceptance. On one hand, this is a depressing and pessimistic view of the prospect for intercultural conciliation and coexistence. On the other hand, these endings admit that racial prejudice is a persisting issue for Western society. These tragic endings are written as such; they are shocking and

mournful, but they are textually effective because they are a surprise. All three novels rely on the element of surprise for their denouement. This climax is the death of Clara and Lambert, and the forgiveness that Gacel offers Milosevic. The fact that these murders are surprising shows that they are hyperbolic narrative techniques. They are meant to be affective and to impact the reader. The murders and Gacel's act of forgiveness are also strong critiques of any perceived Western moral superiority, and serve to subvert any inherent Orientalist hierarchy that privileges the West over its African Other. While these endings may suggest that there is no space for coexistence, they also explicitly counter the legacy of Orientalism, even while invoking its horrors.

These depressing endings are the result of Orientalist rhetoric carried to its conclusion. But rather than a passive resignation to this eventuality, these novels offer a powerful critique of structures of thought that would resort to such extremes. Like these authors, I suggest that instead it is more valuable to focus on the positive intercultural interaction that travel makes possible, while retaining awareness of the destructive power of Orientalism's legacy.

CHAPTER FIVE.

CONCLUSIONS

This study does not pretend to be an exhaustive and definitive analysis of current trends among contemporary Spanish authors, but it has sought to analyze a selection of works that point to a diminishing presence of Orientalist discourse in Spanish literature on Africa. The authors examined here share a focus on Africa and the African Other, but also do not form a unified literary movement. Each of these authors has chosen to write about Africa for very personal reasons, and so therefore it would be both brash and artificial for me to classify these nine authors as a unified and concerted group. However, it is their very difference that signals a broader trend within recent Spanish fiction that I have highlighted here. From authors as dissimilar as Abumalham and Vázquez-Figueroa or Ndongo and López Sarasúa, we can identify certain reactionary elements within their works that respond to the concerns articulated by Said in 1978. The generic and thematic differences between these authors suggest that, just as Orientalism continues to be a pervasive force, so there also exists a counter-current in Spanish letters that reacts to Orientalism's legacy. This work hopes to have identified the trend, and while I do not want to suggest that these authors are unified in their ideological projects, I do hope to have shown that Said's theories on Orientalism are less applicable to recent Spanish fiction than in the past.

I am encouraged by my findings. The majority of the authors examined here seem to be conscious of the pitfalls in writing about their Other. Mayrata, Gamboa, and Abumalham all make specific efforts to avoid authoritative narrations about the Other. Ndongo and Abumalham's narrative voices reflect a growing diversity within Spanish

fiction. And Silva and Vázquez-Figueroa's works are strong critiques of any assumed Western superiority. These accomplishments may not be completely novel; Silva's war writing draws on and reflects the projects of Sender and Díaz Fernández from the 1920s, and similar literary examples of Reverte's intercultural interaction may be found as far back as Cervantes' story "La gitanilla" or in the *novelas moriscas*. However, the combined effect of these works signals a significant movement away from the totalizing and essentializing discourse of Orientalism in contemporary Spanish literature.

This was the ultimate goal of this project, to consider the status of Orientalist discourse in the contemporary Spanish novel. Does Said's monumental work still serve to analyze the contemporary Spanish literary reflections on Africa? Is Orientalism as a mode of representation alive and well? The answer to both of these questions must be "yes," but that does not mean that Orientalism exists with unflagging force. The legacy of Orientalism instead persists in subtle ways. Dueñas' novel shows that it often hides beneath the explicit text, a subtle dynamic exerting its force. In contrast, Mayrata, Abumalham, and Gamboa all confront the authority of the Western author to speak for and represent its Other, implicitly engaging with the haunting force of Orientalism. Thirty years later, Said still offers a valuable theoretical framework with which to understand the dynamics at work in these Spanish reflections on Africa.

Orientalism's power has indeed waned. The works analyzed here reveal that it is no longer the authoritative, authorizing, and explicit voice of the West speaking for its African Other. Instead it exists as a subtle undertone, a narrative assumption that does not necessarily direct the text but that does influence it. It is a weakened rhetoric. The

majority of the authors examined here are moving beyond the strict binary that structures and upholds Orientalism.

Even as they avoid Orientalism, these authors do not avoid Africa. Africa still serves as a fertile inspiration for literary creation. However, it is no longer a totalized vision of Africa that reflects colonial designs; instead, it is a reflection that often admits limitations and nuances. Spain, as part of the West, is not a totemic authority in all interactions with the Other, and Africa is not simply the dark continent awaiting the illumination of Western authority.

To their credit, these authors have also avoided a mere reversal of the Orientalist paradigm. Silva's novel, *El nombre de los nuestros*, does employ the same binary structure of Orientalism, but replaces the categories with economic divisions instead of racial or cultural ones. The narrative ambiguity and humility of Mayrata, Abumalham, and Gamboa avoids totalizing conclusions on either side. And the focus on the interpersonal encounter in the works by Reverte or Ndongu undermines any presumed cultural hierarchy. Therefore, the current literary production on Africa is not a simple knee-jerk overturning of Orientalism, but rather a calculated rejection of its limiting structures and characteristics.

The ultimate accomplishment of these authors examined here has been a decentering of the narrative focus. They have written a textual space that is inclusive. The cultural Other has a space within the literary canon (as with Abumalham and Ndongu) and within the specific literary works (as with Vázquez-Figueroa or Mayrata). Africa is not merely a cultural contestant (Said 1), and the West is no longer the hegemonic, authorizing voice that excludes all Others.

If potential readers of this dissertation would appreciate a concise summary of this project, then I offer the following: Africa is still literary and Orientalism persists, but these contemporary Spanish authors are writing their African Other in new ways that undermine the historical power of Orientalist discourse. I am heartened by the trend that these works suggest, and I look forward to reading the future works not only by these nine authors, but by the growing number of authors who are writing Spain and Africa in the twenty-first century. The ultimate aspiration of any scholar is that his or her work will spark an insight in a fellow colleague's research; I also hope that this project may open new paths of inquiry for present and future scholars. Spain and Africa's history together is long, and it is far from over.

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