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OUTSIDE, A WORLD GROWS (*AFUERA CRECE UN MUNDO, FERNÁNDEZ*): A POETICS OF TRANSFIGURATION

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Abstract

This article presents considerations on the corpus *Outside, a World Grows* (Afuera crece un mundo) by Adelaida Fernández, from a Cultural Studies and Intersectional Feminisms approach. From these perspectives and from the approach to slavery, a problem that goes beyond the nineteenth century and influences the production of the New Historical Novel in contemporaneity, we observe how narratives become agencies/resistances that reveal and break the idea of nation constructed in New Granada/Colombia. Thus, these ethical, aesthetic, and political trajectories of the narratives of the enslaved become maps across the Amefrican oceans, drawing the transit from the traumatic history of the Middle Passage to a Poetics of Transfiguration, that is, resemanticizing a heterogeneous nation that requires a new exercise of law and of subjectivities.

Keywords: Amefrican literature; intersectional feminisms; New Historical Novel; poetics of transfiguration.

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We read *Outside, a World Grows (Afuera crece un mundo)* within the framework of Amefrican[1] literatures and through the Poetics of Transfiguration[2] of the colonial wound. Drawing on Cultural Studies and our own theoretical category, we analyze the narration of history as the enunciation of slavery from a peripheral discourse articulated through the New Historical Novel[3]. Accordingly, within the scope of a reappraisal of the history of slavery in New Granada—through a novel in which we find narratives that revisit this phenomenon within an Amefrican history and literature—the text moves from a discourse of mourning and nostalgia, characteristic of novels such as Isaacs's *María*[4] and its vision of the Middle Passage[5], toward what we have termed the Poetics of Transfiguration in *Outside, a World Grows (Afuera crece un mundo).*

The plot rejects an exclusionary concept of nation. Its most significant feminist forms of resistance and agency lie in Nay's refusal to serve as the master's sacrificial mother for Efraín at the expense of her Black son, Sundiata. That refusal also affirms a return to the values and land of Gambia. Under post-abolition law and racism, Sundiata would not be free until adulthood because of the delays built into the apprenticeship contract required for manumission. Likewise, figures such as Candelario Mezú—torn between freedom and maroonage —become another fissure in the idea of the nation.

To elaborate on the novel's plot, it's worth mentioning that Nay and her son Sundiata live in the *big house* as servants to the Sahal family: Nay works in Santa Ruda as an administrator, and Sundiata serves as Efraín's lackey. In the background is Obando's campaign in the War of the Supremes, in which he promises freedom to the *cimarrones* and enslaved Africans/Afro-descendants who help him secure victory, among them the *palenquero* leader and *boga*[6] Candelario Mezú, lover and patron of our central character. It is then that Nay—beyond the gold she carries in her faltriquera (apron pocket) and the letter of manumission—secures the help of an English naturalist, Sir Charles Birdwhistle, whom Sundiata injures in one leg with a poisoned trap, promising him a cure in exchange for taking them as close as possible to Nay's native Gambia, a task he fulfills by arranging passage with the English captain, Joseph R. Well.

I, Nay of Gambia: Fissures in the Nation

If we take seriously Nay's claim about freedom—'The letter I have in my apron pocket is also maimed' (Fernández 2017, 48; 'También es manca la carta que tengo en mi faltriquera')—we argue that the novel critiques not only the gradual abolitionist process (that is, the one adopted in New Granada and represented in Isaacs's work) but also the semantic field woven around female bodies as objects of production: enslaved both sexually and in their capacity as procreators, as sacrificial mothers or as breeders for masters, and finally as labor power. Given Yuval-Davis's argument that women—are those who "reproduce nations" (2004, p. 14), this work opens fissures in ideas of nationality. For if women

were expected to produce and/or symbolically reproduce a nation that did not include them within the legal framework, Nay's resistances consisted in asserting her sexuality beyond the master's sexual regime over enslaved women, rejecting the symbolic image of the *Slave Owner´s* sacrificial mother to the detriment of her own children, and mobilizing her own labor power in pursuit of freedom.

In this sense, the character articulates an intersectional and feminist understanding of her own body, and of the ambiguous legal status of abolition, and of the slaving industry, thereby consolidating a project of humanity—of transfiguration—within the kind of novel we have been categorizing. Accordingly, at several moments in the work there is a sustained rejection of merely legal manumission: when she is purchased by Ibrahim Sahal, freed, and then placed once again in a condition of servitude, until she finally attains the longed-for freedom outside the nation's territory. Thus, with Johnson we can point to the contingent interpretations and practices that enslaved women like Nay in the Americas embodied in order to circumvent the system, as this study frames slavery—and its ambiguities—as an oppressive machine acting upon bodies/subjectivities:

> These women, when encountering Atlantic slavery, whether along the African coast or in the Americas, did not limit their understanding of freedom to legal or official status, no matter how triumphant the manumission battle that was won. They could not. First, slaveowners, traders, and colonial officials themselves resisted honoring distinctions between slave and free or illuminating a definitive path from bondage to freedom. Second, at every step of the way, as slaveowners, traders, and colonial officials attempted to harness black women's bodies, labor, and lives to the industry of slaving, African women and women of African descent challenged them in return with their own understandings of what, where, and how their bodies should be used, their labor expended, and their lives lived. African women and women of African descent who survived the horrific crossing continued to turn to what was available (intimate and kinship ties), practicing freedom even when they could not call themselves free. Exceeding the boundaries of the manumission act, African women and women of African descent demanded freedom as a project of ecstatic black humanity in the face of abject subjection and against slavery as social death. (Johnson 2020, 104-113)

Drawing on archival review as a subsidiary method within the research line 'Literature, History, Culture, and Society' (Cali), we trace the untold histories of these lines of flight forged by enslaved women. From this perspective, the novel refutes the narrative of the Middle Passage, rupturing the ideal of harmony suggested by the figure of the 'happy' enslaved person in *María*. Nay and her son Sundiata—that is, Feliciana and Juan Ángel in Isaacs's work—remained harmed until the end of their lives and cannot articulate claims that would register the fissures of the slave system in their own bodies: she dies, and he, despite being free under the Free Womb Law, remains enslaved until after reaching legal adulthood. This situation, framed by Fernández's parallel song, stands in full antagonism

to the nineteenth-century narrative: "I no longer want to be Juan Ángel but Sundiata, he who learns to be a man" (Fernández 9, My translation into English)[7]

For all these reasons, we schematize the work's resistances and agencies as follows: the refusal to embody the wet nurse/sacrificial mother of whites at the expense of her own descendants (her stance toward Sahal and Efraín); the critique of the legal freedom promised by Creole armies, embodied in Candelario Mezú; the rejection of living within the exclusionary Colombian nation, or of the fantasy of legal freedom; and, finally, the fissure in official history and foundational literature in order to cross the door of return—a chronotope of the future, the nation yet to be built, the journey, and the unfinished.

Being for oneself and for one's own lineage.

In *Outside, a World Grows (Afuera crece un mundo),* the title is not only suggestive but also a direct indicator of a broader reflection on Colombia's abolitionist laws: their gradualism, designed to safeguard slaveholders' property. In this sense, it is precisely through this long trajectory in search of freedoms that Nay decides to direct her existence toward the longed-for return, since it is outside the nation project of New Granada that another possible world can grow for her and for her son, Sundiata. In this regard—concerning the paradox between the country's republican values and its abolitionist ones, a paradox that Isaacs's *María* exemplifies particularly well—we concur:

> This oxymoron made it possible for nineteenth-century revolutionaries such as Restrepo and Antillón to imagine a free and Christian political community while simultaneously denying the *fīlia* that existed among those baptized in Christ and that was supposed to give meaning to that very community. This entails the naturalization, in discourse and in practice, of republican enslavement and of the political exclusion of free Afro-descendants in the context of the revolutionary nation. Jaca, by taking the premises of natural law of divine origin to their ultimate consequences, was able to advocate for the radical and unconditional abolition of slavery as a way of restoring the fīlia of the political community. By contrast, Restrepo and Antillón, under the sway of the law of nations over natural law, devoted themselves to designing strategies to defend the project of a restricted political community and to repair the slaveholders' right to property. The resulting oxymoron—the slavery of free wombs—made it possible to defend freedom while guaranteeing the power of slaveholders." (Chaves 2014, 195-196)

Thus, if we look at how Nay arrives on New Granada shores, the contrast becomes evident between the various possibilities of obtaining freedom (legal manumission, struggles within the armies, maroonage or revolts and the mirage of the law. Let us recall that she arrives shortly after the Free Womb Law, as Sahal confides to her—he who had won her and granted freedom not only to her but also to her son:

> My condition as an enslaved woman lasted an instant and fifteen rainy seasons. Three hundred Castilian gold coins created the mirage of my son's freedom. The men debated the sum over the course of a game of cards; the American spoke to him of the advantages the boy represented—muleque, he called him. Mr. Sahal haggled a little and not only won the hand, but also humiliated his opponent by drafting this letter of freedom (…)" (Fernández 77)

What the narrator and protagonist of the work classifies as a mirage constitutes a lucid understanding of the reluctance toward total abolition in a context that depended on the slave trade. For this reason, it is worth recalling the development of abolitionism in New Granada, from its first attempts—cut short by the Spanish Reconquest—to the apprenticeship contract for children born under the Free Womb Law, including even illegal ways of obtaining freedom: maroonage, palenques, or militarized routes through participation in the wars of Independence or the War of the Supremes, the context of Fernández's novel. In these wars, both sides—royalists and Creoles, state forces and rebels—promised letters of manumission to the enslaved:

> During the first half of the nineteenth century, the possibilities for enslaved women and men to gain access to freedom in what is now Colombia were diverse and can be grouped into two categories. On the one hand, there was freedom by legal means, understood as that obtained through the legislation produced during that period, which certainly allowed the chances of being free to increase in comparison with earlier years. (…) Within this group are also those freedoms obtained by serving in the contending armies during the wars of independence, in which both royalists and independence forces issued calls to serve in their ranks under the promise of granting letters of freedom (Pita, 2012). Likewise, self-manumission was possible, a practice recurrent since the colonial period that consisted in purchasing one's freedom (Mejía y Córdoba, 2017). On the other hand, there was the illegal route, through which enslaved people sought to attain freedom by transgressing the law—that is, by undertaking individual or collective flight and establishing palenques in the mountains and in places difficult to access in order to avoid recapture, or by organizing uprisings in mines and workplaces to gain autonomy—acts common in eighteenth-century Latin America and more recurrent during the wars of independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century.1" (Perdomo Forero 2022, 139)

Thus, in that context—where freedom depended on many factors, above all on the territory in which enslaved people found themselves—Nay devises her own route of acts of disobedience, her own line of flight toward a deterritorialized freedom, outside New Granada space, especially in the territory of Greater Cauca, where Sahal takes her to serve and where abolition was fiercely resisted:

> Now, the idea of gradually freeing enslaved people was less accepted in some regions than in others. For example, in Cauca abolitionist ideas did not take hold favorably, particularly because it was a territory whose economy was sustained by enslaved labor, which was understood as an

> affront to the patrimony of the families who owned mines and haciendas. Consequently, certain notable groups clung obstinately to this right of property." (Perdomo Forero 150-151)

A slaveholding obstinacy that, despite the legal context, rendered the fate of freed African women and of their children manumitted under the aforementioned Free Womb Law profoundly unstable. In the work, both Nay and her son experience this precariousness: first, as part of Sahal's property even while holding the letter of manumission; and later, once their flight toward freedom begins, during their journey to Africa—specifically in their brief stop in Buenaventura, when, after being seized by the Governor, they are taken as hostages and, in Sundiata's case, he is made the target of sexual predation, a fate averted by Nay's murderous hand. This instability would end only upon their arrival in Gambia:

> Let's see what we're going to do with this freedwoman! Where should I send you, Black woman? I'll see whether you cook in the railroad camps the General Mosquera is already bringing in, or whether you're off to Chagres—yes, with those who are headed to that prison, you know—at the service of the crew. The boy is for me. Do you have a name, boy? Juan Ángel—his name is Juan Ángel. From Gambia. Let him speak! Governor, my name is Juan Ángel. What can you do, boy? I know how to handle horses; I'm also a hunter and a charcoal burner. Ah! He's useful to me, useful.

> (…) His thick, pasty voice threatened him: if you scream, I'll kill your mother. Give me the lamp. Take off your trousers. Turn around. What are you going to do to me? Something I like—and you're going to like it. He pulled down his trousers. I let him touch, slobber, and while he grew frantic trying to get at my son (…) I measured the thrust to the neck well." (Fernández 150-151)

Gradual abolitionism produced instability and precariousness, leaving enslaved people—whether formally freed or not—in ambiguous conditions with respect to freedom. In this sense, within the work, Nay will pursue a return to Gambia in order to live a full maternity and to secure the survival and real freedom of her children, outside New Granada territory.

The refusal of the Black sacrificial mother: deformation of national discourse

The figure of Black women was split between the sacrificial Black mother of the Big House and the sexualized[8] Black woman; yet Nay of Gambia does not permit such a stereotyped reading. Rather, she brings together the attributes of an intersectional Black woman and mother who claims for herself her entire body, maternity, and her freedom, understanding early on that—given the ambiguities

and paradoxes of gradual abolitionism in New Granada—her trajectory would have to be otherwise.

In the novel, the character systematically rejects this figure of the sacrificial mother and even claims sexuality for herself, since, both in her role as mother and as woman, she escapes the prescriptions of the Big House, educating her son toward freedom and dignity; she also eludes the desires of the slave owner as the sole enunciator and owner of power and pleasure:

> Sorry is a subordinating word; I will make him change it so that instead he says that it will not happen again, and that as he says it, he should look toward the future—the future lies beyond the master, beyond his hand and his foot. And his laughter. Let him repeat it: This will not happen again. In that phrase the seed of freedom germinates. (Fernández 16)

> First thing in the morning I sent a messenger bearing news: that Juan Ángel was ill, that he had a fever, that I had drawn poison from his heel. As soon as he recovered he would return to serve master Efraín. Once informed, the master-father would come by one of these afternoons to settle accounts with me, to reproach me for indulging my son. Your pampering makes him lazy, he says. He serves your son, I say. To serve is his function, he says. I have told him, however, that my son must be returned to me as soon as the younger master travels, unless he takes him with him. Should that occur, my Sundiata has precise instructions: learn, and seek his course. (Fernández 17)

> And since that violent reaction in his office that afternoon had made me anticipate his visit, I was already prepared in body and mind. So, barricaded against the wall, I bit down on pleasure, and with his release bubbling into my warmth I felt infinite. If you don't want to kiss me, pretend, he said. And I kissed him without pretending. (Fernández 127)

Nay's story—also understood as a voice that echoes other historical, possible voices amid the precariousness of abolitionist laws—is better understood as a transfigurative project when we examine archival cases that document those Black mothers who did not fulfill the role of sacrificial mothers for the machinery of slavery, as Perdomo Forero's (2022) shows, in relation to these intersectional mothers who broke with national discourses and with the delays of gradual abolitionist law:

> A 104-folio judicial file in which the freedom of Juan Román—the son of María Antonia Serna, the first child born free under the Free Womb Law (Ley de Vientres) of 1821 in the parish of Lloró, Quibdó, capital of the province of Chocó (map 2)—was litigated. The case is significant as far as it is a file initiated by a free Black woman who, autonomously, navigates the judicial procedures required to enforce the rights of enslaved people, in this instance the right granted by the Free Womb Law (Ley de Vientres) of 1821. (Perdomo Forero 150-151)

It is entirely possible that María Antonia Serna was among the women whom Adelaida Fernández sought to honor in her revisionist writing of history and of foundational literatures, as she set out in her master's thesis (Fernandez, 2011) and in the dedication of the work studied here: "en memoria de sus padres esclavizados, mis mayores" (in memory of her enslaved parents, her elders). This also leads us to consider the knowledge and cases of enslaved people who, through a process of learning to read and write, managed to defend themselves, claim their rights, and produce an epistemic rupture in the idea of the illiterate enslaved subject.

It is striking to consider the "case of the old Gertrudis de la Puente y Bacca, (…) On April 12, 1761, with the chief justice lieutenant of the city of Cali present, the enslaved woman requested (…) to purchase her freedom." (Portilla Herrera 2015, 102-103). Likewise, in our review of the Historical Archive of Cali, we observe other cases such as that of Nicolás Congo (1749), who sues his master, Manuel Cobo, and writes a letter denouncing the abuses of which he was a victim, aware of the royal laws that prohibited such outrages or "malos tratos", as recorded on folio 189, from the year 1749.

Thus, the epistemic rupture that nonetheless took place in the history of slavery in New Granada—among some of the enslaved who dared to take up reading and writing—also appears in Nay's transfigurative construction. For no sooner does she arrive in New Granada than she learns to read and write, first under the guidance of Gabriela, the wife of her first owner, and later as Sahal's scribe:

> When Sardick went out, Gabriela was left free. (…) So, right under his nose—but even more in his absence—Gabriela taught me this language that now serves me for writing. My first words were born when my son sprang from her waters, pumped by the palpitations of her tenacity. (Fernández 59-60)

> Over endless moons I learned to read this letter of manumission, and now I know it by heart; I have even gone very deep, and there, where words were compact flint, I find subterranean passages with springs and mud.

> (…) While sir Sardick and the master spat tobacco and braided their smoke in the storeroom that had a lookout over the river, I had Gabriela repeat the reading to me. And she took the opportunity so that I might practice my learning: the 'c' with the 'a', 'ca', plus the 'r', 'car'; the 't' with the 'a', 'ta'. *Carta*! [letter] (Fernández 73)

It is no accident that her language learning is accompanied by her maternity and by the letter of manumission that Sahal gives her: several kinds of knowledge converge—intellectual, bodily/subjective, and political—to help her understand the limitations that, as a human being, she would come to experience in the new

nation. Indeed, she would be expected to reproduce the nation's symbols through her maternity, completely unprotected by republican and abolitionist paradoxes. It is there that the character—who embodies a kind of deterritorialized freedom—sets her own conception against that of her compatriot and lover, Candelario Mezú, developing what the novel's title had already been suggesting: a freedom outside the nation-state. In doing so, she also constructs one of the most poetic and significant images of the dead of the slave trade—not only in a literal sense, but also of those legally drowned by abolitionism's very gradualism:

> Candelario Mezú gives his life for paper freedom. For me, freedom is returning to Africa. The freedom of the abolitionist cause matters little to me because it will be no different from the one I carry in my apron pocket. My son would not be free because of the Free Womb Law, but because my condition as an enslaved woman lasted only a moment. (Fernández 88)

> Now he is beginning to get excited about pigs, and perhaps he dreams of a herd and a hut in the palenque, which is not worthy of my son. What is a prince to do locked away between the jungle and the stretch of river where he goes fishing, while outside a different world grows with many roads? I told Candelario Mezú: I prune my son's spirit; I weaken those roots that want to bind him to this foreign land, and to some grieving brothers sown with lichens and algae and echoes. (Fernández 89)

> That one I carry in my apron pocket serves me as a safe-conduct before people who might tear it up; my letter of manumission is a handful of smudged ink, like that mirage called the Free Womb Law, which strangles rather than protects my Sundiata. (Fernández 89)

Gradual freedom is thus seen as a symbolic death; images such as the drowned man suspended in the water, entangled in lichens, algae, and echoes, remind us of this. Freedom—that concept, that idea, and that image—about which abolitionist intellectuals and politicians spilled rivers of ink, just as the founding fathers would spill rivers of blood in the wars of independence, such as the War of the Supremes, the historical context of the novel.

Candelario Mezú: Battles for Others and the Savory Taste of maroonage

The character—presented as a descendant of Mackandal and Biohó, and comparable to Admiral José Prudencio Padilla—embodies a trajectory that moves between abolitionism and maroonage; that is, between two paths explored by many enslaved people who, after the failure of different political national heroes—Bolívar, and in the case of the War of the Supremes, Obando—to fulfill their promises, whether because they lost their campaigns or because of the gradual abolitionism we have already discussed at length, ended up on

the deterritorialized periphery of the exclusionary nation, far from the centers of power:

> It was as clear in my mind as water that, where freedom takes its letters, one enters only by the hand of a white man. We climbed back up the cordillera in a line with the yanaconas who know the invisible paths. That is how I joined the rebel army." (Fernández 45)

> "Even then Candelario Mezú was thinking about the narrow scope of palenque freedom—a freedom of flight. At the mercy of the jungle, with our few hands, we are not free but survivors. Free, he said, we are among our equals who, because of a law that exceeds us and makes us equal among ourselves and inferior to it, come together to defeat the river, the enemy, disease. Faced with the risks that arise among equals, faced with the threat of those who want to take what belongs to us and set their foot on us, the law imposes itself." (Fernández 48-49)

Thus, the maroon hero, after the defeat of Obando's army in the War of the Supremes, perceives other opportunities—deterritorialized in the palenques—for himself and his people to gain access to the longed-for and well-deserved freedom, once again denied by the shifting turns of military conflict in New Granada. It is worth noting that, nonetheless, and despite the initial faith placed in the manumission that could be obtained through these campaigns, Candelario—once Obando's army is defeated—transforms from a boga into a smuggler, palenquero, and merchant. In fact, through his multiple contacts in the Caribbean (Panama, Kingston, and Santo Tomás), he is the one who ultimately provides Nay with the help that Sahal refuses her: not only gold from Chocó to pay for part of the journey to Africa, but also the safe-conduct passes that would allow her to obtain a new letter of manumission —this time from the Virgin Islands and through the mediation of the Jew Ishay.

Against Archive Fever: Fissures in Official History and Foundational Literature

Derrida (1994) takes up from psychoanalysis a theory of the archive in which hope for the future—what we might call utopia—appears in the novel as a Poetics of Transfiguration, occupying the space of repression and suppression to which official history and foundational literatures have been subjected. For this reason, these novels operate in the interstices between what was—and what is in fact recorded in the Historical Archive—and what, from the hope and mourning of the colonial wound, we seek to conjure: the exclusions and structural racism that still persist in national narratives:

> This double presupposition leaves an imprint. It inscribes an impression in language and in discourse. The weight of the unthought that is thus

> imprinted does not weigh only as a negative burden. It implies the history of the concept; it reorients desire, or archive fever ("mal de archivo"), its opening to the future, its dependence in view of what is to come—in short, everything that binds knowledge and memory to the promise. (Derrida s.p.)

Accordingly, the theme of contraband—both in Candelario Mezú's case and in that of Lorenzo (who, in Isaacs's *María*, is nothing more than Efraín's lackey), as well as in the cases of the boatmen ("bogas") Nacho and Pascual—brings into view a set of figures deterritorialized from the centers of power. Although in the nineteenth-century writer's work these characters were already sketched as interstitial to the nation—Lorenzo in particular—in Fernández's work they can be linked to that counter-archival spirit through the purchase of freedom by enslaved people who owned mines, a practice that did in fact occur, as Perdomo Forero shows in an archival case:

> On August 27, the Black man Juan Camilo Torres, captain of that mine, on behalf of twenty-three more enslaved people, sent a written petition to the lieutenant governor of Popayán requesting that an inquiry be admitted in which the services they had rendered and their conduct toward the king's enemies throughout the entire period of the insurgency were set forth. (Perdomo Forero145)

> By June 1820, Gerónimo Torres, one of the owners of the San Juan mine, wrote to the governor of Popayán informing him of the state of the mine due to the seditious behavior of 'his' enslaved people, who had been acting for around nine years without any authority, appropriating the tools and the products of the mine's labor, and dividing up the land for their own planting and benefit. (Perdomo Forero 147-148)

The case of Juan Camilo Torres and the miners' crew invites us to think about a counter-archival vocation ("contra archivo") in the case of Lorenzo in Fernández's novel: a figure who is nothing more than Efraín's servant in Isaacs's *María*, but who in *Outside, a World Grows* goes even beyond what Perdomo Forero recounts in the archival case, attaining freedom and, together with his compatriots, purchasing a mine. Added to this is the role of both the boatmen ("bogas") and Candelario Mezú—each a smuggler—on the nation's periphery, supporting Nay's return journey, while, and this must be read both symbolically and materially, the Sahal estate and the slave-based economy were collapsing. There is an important detail in this breakdown of the slave economy: from within the legal framework—especially after the prohibition of the transatlantic slave trade—this process unfolded in Colombian territory and became the last strategy of obstinate slaveholders to recoup their investment in the purchase of enslaved people by selling them to Peru, as appears in the historical, literary, and transfigurative revision that Adelaida Fernández offers us:

> In the estanquillo (corner shop) I learned that I was at Lorenzo's shop—Lorenzo, my friend of always. I tell you, Nay, that, working both for Don Bartolomé de Otálora and for this same gentleman, and for ourselves whenever we hired ourselves out, we traveled the whole province and even beyond, from the San Juan to the Naya. (…) With patience and vision, Lorenzo settled himself—as he pleased—on a branch of the Dagua River, near Juntas. With relatives and others who gradually joined them, they formed a society of proprietors called Negros Libres (Free Blacks). (Fernández 119)

> The entire estate had its routines thrown into disarray; the master had to hasten the negotiation in Santa Ruda, he managed to save the sugar mill, he sold the slave gang to a trader who took them to Lima, and he attended to business, to the situation in the house, and to Efraín's sadness. (Fernández 131)

All told, what remains of that counter-archival vocation is the recovery of petitioners' voices—their juridical knowledge, but also a utopian movement of what could have been and what can still be, as a way of overcoming the fateful and exclusionary destinies of the nineteenth-century national discourse. This began as early as 1789, which is why we find early petitions, as well as an entire juridical and literate culture among enslaved petitioners, even before the first abolitionist laws:

> In 1789, the king of Spain, Charles IV, issued a royal decree regulating slavery in his kingdoms—a curious combination of authority, regulation, and paternalism. It was inspired by the so-called Black Code ("Code Noir") (…). Slaveowners were forbidden to torture their enslaved people or to chain them 'except when they deserved it,' a criterion that is presumably rather lax. They were required to feed and clothe them, care for them in old age or illness, and evangelize them; the latter included baptism and Christian burial. As for manumission, the reference is vague and required prior payment, with the approval of the competent authority." (ÁLVAREZ, LBV, Magazine Cultural Independiente s.p.)

Despite everything, fully aware of the limits of law and justice, the characters of *Outside, a World Grows (Afuera crece un mundo)*—such as Candelario's comrades in the militia and the palenque, together with Nay's narrative voice—reflect on and judge all these frameworks as imperfect, after the final disappointment that followed the defeat of the Supremes and the hope of being free under the aegis of the Creole general Obando:

> In the palenque there are those who worry about what may have been lost with Obando's exile. Although it is Candelario Mezú who holds the troops together, it is a white general with honors who provides guidance in matters of legality and of relations among sectors of society, and between that society and other nations. Although it is said that he is not educated, in letters he has an advantage over our men; he knows what it means to

> insert oneself between the lines of written justice that moves the world. As for the other—vital law and justice—there can be little in our favor in terms of recognition and rights; it scarcely sharpens the instincts that allow us to live and adapt to imperfect laws, incapable of serving equally those with different interests." (Fernández 101)

The Final Song: The Chronotope of Utopia

The epistemic and symbolic ruptures produced through the power of the aesthetic experience that literature offers bring about a break with the past in relation to memories of slavery. Thus, we are dealing with a work that functions as a utopian archive of memory regarding the African diaspora and Black African history, even against the repression and suppression of those memories carried out by official history and foundational narratives.

The novel ends with its characters at sea. In Nay's chronotope[9] of utopia, the sight of Gambia's shores—accompanied by her son's final song—opens an imaginary of possibility and freedom.

Sundiata—from an absence of chronotope, out at sea, in the midst of nothingness and with time suspended—crosses the threshold of return ("puerta del retorno") with his mother and Captain Joseph R. Well, the new accomplice and patron of Nay's love. A final twist: the reverse of the accursed destiny imposed by the machinery of slavery—line of flight, deterritorialization—that, as Brand (2001) said with respect to the Middle Passage, was marked by the fatality of "a Porta do Não Retorno, um local esvaziado de começos" (s.p.), that is, the symbolic place from which the enslaved bid farewell forever to any root. Here, instead, in the characters' voices within the Poetics of Narrative Transfiguration, as they return to Africa, that threshold is invested with utopia and hope, conjuring the colonial wound:

> Because Africa comes out to meet me; it arrives with the breezes—they bring the entire coast, the dust of its stones and everything their steps grind against them, the moisture of words and sighs, the vapors of its pots and a little of the smoke of fires diluted with the low-hanging stars. Africa comes out to meet me. The waves that rock me are her liquid arms. ¡Maangi ci néég bi! (Fernández 267)

> She says that time has arrived weary at this stage, and that she would like to lend it her wings so that it might advance as is its custom—in seconds, minutes, and the rest—but it has remained stuck in a single infinite second. I sing and speak to my mother so that she will not feel this disturbance of time (…) time has stopped.

> I want to weep when the coast appears, crisp and clear; it is barely a line with the glow of fires. I take off my shirt and whirl it with all my strength. And I shout the only possible shout: Mother! (Fernández 270-271)

A heterotopic sea—a oneiric imaginary, as Phaf-Rheinberger observes in his discussion of vessels and the sea's potency (2011, 176)—becomes a site of resemanticization: a projection of a heterogeneous nation that would require a different exercise of law and subjectivity—in short, a resemanticization of life or a poetics of transfiguration, as I have termed it in this work.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT: Does not apply.

End notes

1. Amefrican, according to Lélia González, refers to the following: "sistema etnogeográfico de referência, é uma criação nossa e de nossos antepassados no continente em que vivemos, inspirados em modelos africanos. (...) uma experiência histórica comum que exige ser devidamente conhecida e cuidadosamente pesquisada." (Gonzalez 77); my translation into English: "an ethno-geographical system of reference, a creation of ours and of our ancestors on the continent in which we live, inspired by African models. (...) a common historical experience that must be properly understood and carefully researched."). Gonzalez, L. "A categoria político-cultural de amefricanidade." Tempo Brasileiro, no. 92/93, jan./jun. 1988, pp. 69-82.
2. We begin from Gilroy's concept of the Politics of Transfiguration in order to outline our category: "Esta política enfatiza o surgimento de desejos, relações sociais e modos de associação qualitativamente novos no âmbito da comunidade racial de interpretação e resistência e também entre esse grupo e seus opressores do passado." (Gilroy 96–97); my translation into English: "This politics foregrounds the emergence of qualitatively new desires, social relations, and modes of association within the racial community of interpretation and resistance, as well as between that group and its past oppressors."). Gilroy, P. Atlântico negro de modernidade e dupla consciência. Editora 34, 2012.
3. In line with our previous post: Caicedo, Juana Maricel Sañudo. "Rizomas en los océanos amefricanos: una lectura de Afuera Crece un Mundo (Adelaida Fernández) y Um Defeito de Cor (Ana Maria Gonçalves)." Via Atlântica, vol. 26, no. 1, 2025, pp. 273-336. DOI: 10.11606/va.v26.n1.2025.208948.
4. This work, emblematic of Romanticism in Colombia, tells the story of the ill-fated love between Efraín and María, set against the backdrop of a slave plantation, and the female character's subsequent death.
5. This is a term coined by English-language criticism to describe the slaving route between Europe, Africa, and the Americas: "A expressão Middle Passage tem uso consagrado na historiografia de língua inglesa e designa o trecho mais longo - e de maior sofrimento da travessia do Atlântico realizada pelos navios negreiros." (Gilroy 38; my translation: "The expression Middle Passage is well established in English-language historiography and designates the longest—and most

harrowing—leg of the Atlantic crossing carried out by slave ships.").

6. The boatman.
7. "Ya no quiero ser Juan Ángel sino Sundiata, el que aprende a ser hombre". Since there is no English translation of the work, all the quotations below are my own free translation of the work.
8. "Black women emerged from slavery firmly enshrined in the consciousness of white America as 'Mammy' and the 'bad black woman.'" (Hill Collins 1991, 266). Hill Collins, P. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. Unwin Hyman, 1991.
9. In Bajtín's now-classic definition (Bajtin 237–238), which we take as our point of departure, we propose thinking through a category derived from it for the novels in question: as one travels toward Gambia, and between space and its absence, and time and its suspension, the door opens onto a utopian chronotope in which—reversing the voyage into slavery—one returns to freedom. Bajtin, M. Teoría Y Estética De La Novela. Trabajos de investigación. Madrid:Altea, Taurus, Alfaguara, 1989.

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