

<AT>The Reconciliation Of Opposites: Challenging Group Categorization And Stereotypes In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “A Private Experience” And César Mba A. Abogo’s “Hora De Partir”</AT>

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<AB>ABSTRACT

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel; Tajfel and Turner) is rooted in the premise that individuals construct their own identities based on social categorization and group membership, and this attachment of people to groups is sufficient “to produce prejudices both in favor of members of one’s own group and sometimes against members of another group” (Dovidio, Gaertner, and Saguy 4). In this article, I analyze how the characters in “A Private Experience” (2009), by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and “Hora de Partir” (2007), by César Mba A. Abogo, resist group categorization and minimize stereotyping and group distinctions by experiencing intergroup relationships and enhancing their individualities. While the story “A Private Experience” portrays a Muslim and a Christian woman who defy the Muslim-Christian conflict in Nigeria by means of their peaceful and close connection, the interracial couple in “Hora de Partir” challenges racial and social prejudices through their love relationship. Thus, both narratives depict resistant subjects who confront the hegemonic ideologies resulting from group categorizations by the mutual interest between individuals who belong to conflicting groups and

the depiction of a fruitful amalgam of transcultural elements within the stories that endorses diversity as a positive social value. By means of establishing harmonious relationships with outgroup members, these literary voices delegitimize intergroup conflict, trigger a transcultural dialogue, and find an effective way to resist the social constraints imposed by group categorization.</AB>

<FL>Social Identity Theory (Tajfel; Tajfel and Turner) is rooted in the premise that individuals construct their own identities based on social categorization and group membership. As John F. Dovidio, Samuel L. Gaertner, and Tamar Saguy put it, “social categorization primarily involves the perception of a person in terms of his or her own group membership rather than with respect to their individual, unique characteristics” (4). In fact, the perception of a person as a member of a group has a profound impact on how people process information about and act toward others (Brewer; Fiske, Lin, and Neuberg), and, consequently, this attachment of people to groups can lead to potential constraints for “minority group members,” since it is sufficient “to produce prejudices both in favor of members of one’s own group and sometimes against members of another group” (Dovidio et al. 4). Thus, when people are categorized into groups, not only do the differences between members of the same category tend to be minimized (Tajfel), but also individuals cease to be free agents. By contrast, when people rebel against their group categorization, they undergo a process called *individuation* that leads them toward the demolition of social lumps and the releasing of their agency (Ross 469).

Social psychology has widely explored intergroup relations (Allport; Goffman; Tajfel and Turner), focusing on core questions such as how individual interactions are conformed by group membership and why intergroup conflict arises and persists (Sherif; Tajfel and Turner). Some

research has illustrated the negative effects of categorization into groups (Tajfel; Tajfel and Turner) when pointing at categorization itself as a primary cause of intergroup conflict. Given that the categorization into social groups is a basic process to intergroup bias, social psychologists have approached it as a starting point for improving intergroup relationships (Dovidio et al.). Along these lines, some academics such as Aneeta Rattan and Nalini Ambady have highlighted the importance of diversity ideologies for social psychological research on intergroup relations and specifically point at the ideologies of multiculturalism and *colorblindness* as fundamental theories when it comes to undermining interracial relations, stereotypes, prejudices, and other issues related to intergroup conflict (Rattan and Ambady). While multicultural ideology advocates for group memberships and the need for valuing them to achieve equality and diversity (Schofield; Plaut), colorblind ideology argues that equality among groups is best attained by undermining group distinctions and recognizing people as unique individuals (Rosenthal and Levy; Peery; Apfelbaum, Norton, and Sommers).

In this article, I draw on *colorblind* ideology to analyze how the characters in “A Private Experience” (2009), by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and “Hora de Partir” ‘Time to Leave’ (2007), by César Mba A. Abogo, resist group categorization and minimize stereotyping and group distinctions by experiencing intergroup relationships. While the story “A Private Experience” portrays a Muslim and a Christian woman who defy the Muslim-Christian conflict in Nigeria by means of their peaceful and close connection, the interracial couple in “Hora de Partir” challenges racial prejudices and stereotypes through their love relationship. All these characters undergo an *individuation* process to confront a hegemonic discourse based on religious, racial, or social class intergroup conflicts that hinder their free agency. Thus, these two short stories combat the hegemonic ideologies around group categorizations, and they do this by

portraying a fruitful amalgam of transcultural elements that endorses diversity as a positive social value and by depicting characters who, driven by an interest toward “the other,” penetrate into theoretically opposed and conflicting groups. By means of establishing harmonious relationships with outgroup members, these literary voices delegitimize intergroup conflict, enhance their individuality, trigger a transcultural dialogue, and find an effective way to resist the social constraints imposed by group categorization.

“A Private Experience” is one of the twelve short stories compiled and published under the title *The Thing around Your Neck* (2009), a collection in which Adichie explores a variety of topics, ranging from racism, love and culture conflicts to military dictatorship and corruption. As in much of post-independence African fiction, “A Private Experience” portrays the challenges of African nation-building and the difficulties of implementing “a long-lasting peace among the many nation-ethnic groups living on the same geographic territory created by the colonizer” (Alou 19). As Elizabeth Jackson suggests, this short story calls attention to the sectarian and national divisions that are imposed on the Nigerian people through elaborate institutional structures and to the idea that identity politics within Nigeria can at times be deadly (53). More specifically, this story depicts a Hausa Muslim and an Igbo Christian woman who end up hidden in a store because of a riot. The traumatic experience that they endured as a result of the attacks fosters the development of strong emotional bonds between them, and the intimate space that they create is alluded to from the first lines of the narrative through the image of the shutter:

<EX>Chika climbs in through the store window first and then holds the shutter as the woman climbs in after her. The store looks as if it was deserted long before the riots started; the empty rows of wooden shelves are covered in yellow dust, as are the metal containers stacked in a corner. The store is small, smaller than

Chika's walk-in closet back home. ... Chika's hands are trembling, her calves burning after the unsteady run from the market in her high-heeled sandals. She wants to thank the woman, for stopping her as she dashed past, for saying "No run that way!" and for leading her, instead to this empty store where they could hide. But before she can say thank you, the woman says, reaching out to touch her bare neck, "My necklace lost when I'm running." (Adichie 43)

<FL>It is noteworthy that there are some elements in this excerpt that favor the construction of an intimate atmosphere. Firstly, the shutter acts as a metaphor of coziness since it is the object that, once closed, provides the two women with a refuge away from the violence outside. The store itself, described as "deserted long before the riots" and as an unkempt and small place, also triggers this intimacy. Likewise, the fact that the space where the two women are hiding is described as smaller than "Chika's walk-in closet back home" works as a very visual image that locates the characters in a place where a closeness between the two seems inevitable.

Although the sense of intimacy between Chika and the Muslim woman is more heavily evidenced in this first paragraph of the narrative, their relationship becomes closer as the story advances. For instance, when the Muslim woman tells Chika "come and sit" (46) or that her "nipple is burning like pepper" (49), the communion between the two characters becomes stronger. In this light, Chika also fosters this intimacy when "she lowers herself and sits, much closer to the woman than she ordinarily would have, so as to rest her body entirely on the wrapper ... and smells something on the woman" (48). Such a smell reminds her of "the bar soap their house girl uses to wash the bed linen" (48), that is, something that is familiar to her. This familiarity is further shown when the woman, after learning that Chika is a doctor and not able to

put up with the pain, “unhooks the front clasp” (49) of her bra. Her nipple reminds Chika of her mother:

<EX>It was the same with my mother. Her nipples cracked when the sixth child came, and she didn't know what caused it.... Besides, her mother always had Dr Igbokwe, with his British training and affectation, a phone call away.

“What is your mother rubbing on her nipple?” the woman asks.

“Cocoa butter. The cracks healed fast.”

“Eh?” The woman watches Chika for a while, as if this disclosure has created a bond. “All right, I get it and use.” (Adichie 50) </EX>

Indeed, this disclosure contributes to the tightening of the bond between the two characters, likewise stressed at the end of the narrative, when the Muslim woman cries to her because she doesn't know where her child Halima is. Surprisingly for the reader, the narrator describes the woman's crying as private, and although her regret is depicted as if “she is carrying out a necessary ritual that involves no one else” (51), she somehow makes Chika a participant of this “private experience” when crying and praying in front of her. The fact that the Muslim woman is on her knees facing Mecca while sobbing makes Chika uncomfortable, since the intimacy that the Muslim woman is sharing with her is so intense that she feels the need to look away, although wishing she could participate in her praying. Thus, the Muslim woman opens up first, and the sense of familiarity and closeness that she creates with Chika reaches its climax when, at the end of the story, they find out that Chika's leg is bleeding and the woman uses one of her scarves to treat it. Eventually, once the danger outside is over and they decide to leave the store, the Muslim woman allows Chika to keep the scarf, which constitutes the ultimate symbol of a sisterhood between the two characters.

Similarly, in “Hora de Partir” (2007) by César Mba A. Abogo, the main characters develop emotional ties and the act of crying also becomes a metaphor for intimacy. This short story forms part of *El Porteador de Marlow: Canción negra sin color* [*The Marlow’s Carrier: Black Song without Color*], a short story and poem collection published in 2007 that explores the disenchantment that the African immigrant experiences in Europe and his/her fight to shake off the racial and social stigmas enforced by the old continent. The narrative begins at the end of the story with the moment of departure between the two main characters, Ariadna and Ka, an interracial couple that, after realizing that their relationship is over, have to say goodbye. In the first lines of the narrative, it is revealed that Ka’s eyes are teary because of the sadness that the departure produces in him. In addition, an atmosphere of closeness between the two is shown when the narrator mentions that both have lived emotive moments together.

The closeness between Ariadna and Ka is further displayed throughout the narrative as their romantic relationship is described more in detail. For instance, the fact that Ka nicknames Ariadna ‘the White Nefertiti’ “la Nefertiti Blanca” (Abogo 63; my translation) shows the sense of familiarity that they have. Also, their mutual urge to know more about each other’s life can be translated into a desire to demolish any wall between them. While Ariadna asks Ka about African places and recites aloud Tennyson’s poetry, Ka explores some neighborhoods in his lover’s city and watches her attitude toward life:

<EX>Después de una semana de convivencia en la que sus formas se juntaron y se dispersaron como rayos de sol, Ka descubrió que la vida para Ariadna era una fruta madura que había que morder y masticar a dos carrillos ... Ka, deseoso de leer todos los espacios de la vida de Ariadna, se sumergió con alegría hiperbólica en los ritos y actitudes de la existencia de Ariadna.

After a week of cohabitation, in which their forms joined and spread as sunrays, Ka found out that Ariadna's life was a mature fruit that he had started to bite and chew with his two cheeks ... Ka, wishing to read all the spaces in Ariadna's life, delved with a hyperbolic happiness into the rites and attitudes of Ariadna's existence. (Abogo 67; my translation)</EX>

Indeed, this excerpt portrays Ka's interest in Ariadna's routine and world. Their urge for intimacy is perceived in the depiction of their sexual encounters. In fact, I argue that sex is evoked as another means by which they achieve their close union, and the depiction of their sexual relationship constitutes an outstanding narrative tool for the construction of this closeness:

<EX>Ambos querían morir el uno dentro de la otra o la una dentro del otro, convertirse en sustancias inanimadas, recorrer toda la gama de la existencia pre-orgánica y post-orgánica, y renacer una y otra vez, un millón de veces, ad infinitum, para volver a amarse.

Both wanted to die inside each other, turning into inanimate substances, travelling through the pre-organic and post-organic range of existence, in a continuous resurrection, one million times, ad infinitum, to love each other again. (Abogo 67; my translation)</EX>

Accordingly, the trope of sex as a relevant means through which to achieve their complete union is further developed at the end of the narrative:

<EX>A pesar del ensueño su cuerpo había recibido el mensaje y respondía con temblores de deseo, intensos, envolventes. Su cuerpo se sublevó. Se ofrecía

latente a la espera de un dedo que lo iniciara. Empezaron a besarse y susurrarse frases cardiacas. Sin prisas fueron perdiendo la noción de todo cuanto les rodeaba, tensando sus cuerpos para encadenarse hasta el infinito.

Despite the dreamy feeling, his body had received the message and was replying with tremors of desire, in an intense and immersive way. His body rose up. It gave itself latently, waiting for a finger to entice it. They started to kiss and to whisper to each other heartfelt sentences. Slowly, they were losing track of everything around them, stretching their bodies to chain themselves forever. (Abogo 69–70; my translation)</EX>

<FL>Words such as “immersive,” “kiss,” and “whisper” allude to the act of becoming both physically and spiritually fused. Significantly, in these excerpts, their interconnection is alluded to as infinite, beyond time and existence, evidencing their sexual encounters beyond time and space, the outmost act of intimacy.

Therefore, both short stories share the depiction of characters who, despite their differences in terms of religion, social class, nationality, and race, become closer by establishing bonds based on an intimacy that emerges from their aim to know more about each other. However, their disparities also act as obstacles they need to overcome in their attempt of a transcultural coexistence, since powerful political, social, and racial conflicts conform the background of the stories and hinder intergroup relations by highlighting their differences rather than their common features. In “A Private Experience” (2009), once the Muslim woman and Chika hide in the store, the latter notices “the woman’s strong Hausa accent,” the unfamiliar “narrowness of her face” and “rise of her cheekbones” that reveal she is a northerner (Adichie

44), and the scarf around her neck showing that she is a Muslim. Similarly, Chika wonders “if the woman is looking at her as well, if the woman can tell, from her light complexion and the silver finger rosary her mother insists she wears, that she is Igbo and Christian” (44).

The causes of intergroup conflicts have been widely explored by scholars within a wide range of disciplines (Warner et al.). On the one hand, some academics point at religious and ethnic differences as an excuse for conflict where tangible resources and power are the real goal (Toft; Berman). On the other hand, incompatibilities between groups’ values and religious ideologies are sometimes viewed as the motivation for conflict (Huntington; Barker et al.). Additionally, intergroup conflict has been portrayed by indicators of prejudice, group and individual violence, interpersonal discrimination, and symbolic aggressions (Warner et al.).

In this light, academics such as Oluwaseun Bamidele have studied the reasons behind the difficulty of structuring Nigeria under a national identity, and he attributes this problem to the multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-linguistic society that exists in there. More specifically, Bamidele points to the following reasons for Nigeria’s fractured society: the Muslim-Christian conflict, differences between the northern and southern regions, the fact that ethnic groups in Nigeria have little in common, and ongoing fights over land ownership (7). In this respect, in “A Private Experience,” the woman’s northern origin, as well as her Hausa and Muslim identity, operate as features that strongly differ from Chika’s southern origin and her Igbo Christian identity. Indeed, they are presented as individuals who belong to opposed groups and that should be, in principle, in confrontation due to intergroup conflict.

Chika’s and the Muslim woman’s physical and ideological differences are made evident to emphasize the fact that both belong to distinct groups. In this sense, although the characters develop a close relationship, the narrative voice also highlights the existent conflict between the

religious and social groups they belong to: “Later, Chika will learn that, as she and the woman are speaking, Hausa Muslims are hacking down Igbo Christians with machetes, clubbing them with stones” (44). The enmity between Igbo Christians and Hausa Muslims in Nigeria is further addressed in other parts of the narrative:

<EX>She will find out it [the riot] had all started at the motor park, when a man drove over a copy of the Holy Coran that had been dropped on the roadside, a man who happened to be Igbo and Christian. The men nearby, men who sat around all day playing draughts, men who happened to be Muslim, pulled him out of his pickup truck, cut his head off with one flash of a machete, and carried it to the market, asking others to join in; the infidel had desecrated the Holy Book.

(Adichie 45–46)</EX>

Indeed, the religious intergroup differences between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria act as the core conflict in the narrative. Religion is highlighted as the main source of violence, since, as Chika finds out after the attack, it all starts at the motor park “when a man drove over a copy of the Holy Koran ... , a man who happened to be Igbo and Christian” (Adichie 46), in front of Muslim men. The connection between religion and conflict has been largely studied (Toft; Berman), often concluding that religious infusion predicts greater intergroup conflict and that highly religiously infused groups are closely related to extreme forms of conflict, such as riots (Warner et al.).

Also, the excerpt not only shows the existence of a violent Muslim-Christian conflict in Nigeria. It also points at men as the promoters of the riot, which counters the two women’s willingness to develop a peaceful relationship within the store. It is compelling that Adichie chooses two women to bridge intergroup hostilities, while it is men who initiate the riot. In this

sense, gender becomes significant in the story. In her book *Feminism without Borders* (2003), Chandra T. Mohanty advocates for a cross-cultural feminism that recognizes a feminist politics based on the particularities of women's experiences and the specificity of historical and cultural locations and contexts of struggle. In other words, she claims that cross-cultural feminist work should leave the assumption of women as an always already constituted group, one labeled as powerless and exploited, and believes that feminist studies must be "attentive to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle" (223). By drawing on Mohanty's theory, I argue that the significance of these women's solidarity lies in that, although belonging to opposing religious groups, they can develop a sisterhood that clashes with men's conflicting attitudes.

Even though religious intergroup conflict is central in the narrative, social class also constitutes an important difference the two women need to overcome if they want to establish a communion beyond group categorization. Given that establishing bonds with a person with dissimilar social and economic characteristics implies crossing a social boundary (Mäenpää and Jalovaara), the relationship between two characters with distinct socioeconomic statuses can be regarded as conflicting.

In this vein, the fact that Chika thinks of herself as different from the woman in social terms becomes evident at certain points in the narrative and, as Yacoubou Alou claims in his study of "A Private Experience," Islamophobia and the demonization of the Hausa is present all along the narrative (108). At the beginning of the story, the items that both women lose work as an indicator of their socioeconomic status: whereas Chika is wealthy enough to have a designer purse, the Muslim woman regrets the loss of a cheap piece of plastic jewelry. In this sense, Chika views herself as being wholly different from her companion as "she knows nothing about riots" (Adichie 44), and "the closest she has come is the prodemocracy rally at the university a few

weeks ago” (44). In addition, their social status is revealed when they ask each other about their jobs. Chika is studying to become a doctor at the University of Lagos, while the Muslim woman is a trader:

<EX>“I am a trader,” the woman says, “I’m selling onions.”

Chika listens for sarcasm or reproach in the tone, but there is none. The voice is as steady and as low, a woman simply telling what she does.

“I hope they will not destroy market stalls,” Chika replies; she does not know what else to say.

“Every time when they are rioting, they break market,” the woman says. (Adichie 48–49)</EX>

The socioeconomic distinction between the two women is more remarkable when the narrative voice depicts how Chika adopts a patronizing tone toward the unnamed woman. The fact that Chika expects the woman’s answer not to be true shows the Christian girl’s patronizing and naive attitude, further reinforced at some points in the narrative, such as when “Chika wonders if the woman even knows what going to university means” (47), or when she thinks that “she and her sister should not be affected by a riot” because “riots like this were what she read about in newspapers. Riots like this were what happened to other people” (47). This attitude is underlined by the vision of northern Nigeria as a historically problematic area. As Bamidele puts it, “the one single government established for the whole North as one entity remained in existence and operation until 1967 when ... it was broken into six states” (16). He also mentions the disadvantaged situation of the Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups since they “are the largest single group, but they are, population-wise, a minority vis-à-vis the rest of the ethnic groups” (16), and that:

<EX>the thought of one “Northern Nigeria” has prevailed ... , even after it (Northern Nigeria) has stopped being a governmental entity, with a firm hold on the thinking and vocabulary of the ruling elite and political class in that region of the country, conditioning their attitudes and views in the matter of management of the social, political, and even economic relations between the two segments of the country. (15)</EX>

Significantly, most of the information that Chika has about Hausa Muslims is not the product of her own experiences but comes from pieces of information that she reads in the media, as the narrator mentions that “Chika wants to ask the woman how many riots she has witnessed but she does not. She has read about the others in the past: Hausa Muslim zealots attacking Igbo Christians, and sometimes Igbo Christians going on murderous missions of revenge” (Adichie 49). Once the riot finishes and Chika returns home, she will read in the *Guardian* that “the revolutionary Hausa-speaking Muslims in the North have a history of violence against non-Muslims” (55). Chika’s assumptions relating the other woman to riots and violence for the fact of being Muslim, together with an apparent broader access to the press (even international newspaper such as the *Guardian*), highlights that she belongs to a higher social class. Chika seems to see herself as completely different from the Muslim woman. Indeed, she thinks that it is normal that her companion regularly experiences riots due to her social class, while she views herself as someone who should not be experiencing such violence.

Nationalism as the source of social distinction and as a cause of intergroup conflict is also key in Abogo’s “Hora de Partir.” As happens to the Muslim woman in “A Private Experience,” Ka is depicted as a second-class citizen due to the fact that he is an African immigrant. The narrator reveals how Ka is constantly being patronized because of his origins, while he struggles

to be an equal citizen in the eyes of the native Europeans. In fact, negative attitudes toward immigration have been widely explored by studying the ways in which national group boundaries are established, and social psychological theories of prejudice and intergroup conflict have been successfully applied to immigration (Bobo; Esses et al.; Stephan and Renfro; Pehrson and Green).

In this light, the first paragraph of “Hora de Partir” reveals that, once in Europe, Ka feels the need to shorten his African name, Karaevini Ekan, as “una forma ritual para acortar la historia ... de su vida” ‘a ritual way to shorten the story ... of his life’ (Abogo 63; my translation). It can be claimed that he is pushed to change part of his identity to fit European parameters due to his disadvantaged immigrant position. This second-class citizen condition is further reinforced when the narrator mentions how he is treated as a “agente patógeno” ‘pathogenic agent’ that “se vio arrastrándose por las calles de Europa como una cosa desvaída sin órganos, envejeciendo delante de histerectomizadas expresiones” ‘saw himself crawling across European streets as a helpless thing without organs, getting old in front of histerectomized expressions’ (Abogo 70; my translation).

Also, race constitutes another source of intergroup conflict in Abogo’s narrative. I argue that the race-related conflict in “Hora de partir” is evidenced through all the racial prejudices and attitudes that Ka and Ariadna need to overcome in an effort to protect their relationship. Indeed, race is presented as a decisive obstacle for their love:

<EX>Pero, finalmente, el timbre del mundo cruel y cruento había encontrado un hueco por el que penetrar y apagar la utopía de los cronopios. Y el timbre del tiempo trajo a las patrullas policiales que le preguntaban, en plena calle, por los papeles a Ka, el miedo justificado de Ka de no conseguir nunca un trabajo que se

ajustara a sus capacidades, el miedo y la vergüenza de Ka a tener que demostrar siembre de buenas a primeras que él era un “negro diferente,” la rabia de Ariadna de tener que enumerar los méritos intelectuales de Ka de buenas a primeras para que su relación ... no fuera vista como una aberración.

But, eventually, the sound of a cruel world had found a hole through which to penetrate and turn off the cronopios’ utopia. And the sound brought the police patrols that asked him, in the middle of the street, for his documentation, Ka’s unjustified fear of not achieving a job that fits his abilities, Ka’s fear and embarrassment for having to demonstrate that he was a “different black man,” Ariadna’s anger for having to enumerate Ka’s intellectual merits time after time so that their relationship ... was not seen as an abomination. (Abogo 74; my translation)</EX>

This excerpt shows that the intergroup conflict in this narrative is not only due to a categorization based on social parameters, but also on a racial question. Ka acquires second-class citizenship because of both his immigrant status and his black skin, and Ka’s categorization as an immigrant and as a black man trigger prejudices such as the belief that he does not have intellectual merit. For her part, Ariadna, who belongs to the privileged white and European social class, feels the need to face all “las miradas inquisidoras tipo ¿Cómo puedes estar con ese negro?” ‘the inquisitive looks, such as how can you be with that negro?’ (Abogo 74; my translation). In this regard, race is pointed to as the main source of conflict that hinders the characters’ love relationship, and, significantly, the allusions to skin color are constant throughout the narrative: “las raíces del rechazo pigmentado” ‘the roots of the colored rejection’

(66), “mientras veían *Gato Negro, Gato Blanco*” ‘while they were watching *Black Cat, White Cat*’ (67), “viajando a través de las tinieblas de su memoria negra” ‘travelling through the darkness of his black memories’ (73).

Therefore, both “A Private Experience” and “Hora de Partir” allude to intergroup conflict based on religious, social, and racial distinctions, which provide the stories with dramatism and present a very realistic portrayal of the Hausa Muslim/Igbo Christian conflict in Nigeria and the racial and social problems underlying the African black immigrant/European white native categorization. However, these conflicts are counterattacked by the intergroup relationships that the individuals fuel, and their consequent interactions, which favor minimizing categorical distinctions and a transcultural coexistence that enhances their commonality.

Firstly, the narrative voices allude to an amalgam of transcultural elements that prompts the connection between different individuals. Such an amalgam is achieved through the constant evocation of this transculturality, i.e., the intermingling of distinct cultures, the blurring of the lines between them, and the acknowledgment of societies around the globe as expanded, pluralized cultural repertoires in a continual dialogue (Benessaieh 11). While academics such as Elizabeth Jackson have underlined internationality as a key element in “A Private Experience,” as well as the other stories compiled in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, Lola Bermúdez Medina and Lola Aponte and Elisa Rizo, among others, have called attention to the constant cultural references from different parts of the world in Abogo’s *El Porteador de Marlow: Canción negra sin color*, while highlighting “Hora de Partir” as an outstanding example of this transculturality.

For instance, in “A Private Experience,” Chika loses a Burberry handbag “that her mother had bought on a recent trip to London” (43), and she also wears a T-shirt “embossed with a picture of the Statue of Liberty” (46) that she bought in New York. Moreover, she listens to BBC

radio, reads the *Guardian*, and the market where both characters were before the riot started is depicted as an international collage: “Just half an hour ago, she was in the market with Nnedi. She was buying oranges and Nnedi had walked farther down to buy groundnuts and then there was shouting in English, in pidgin, in Hausa, in Igbo” (44).

Similarly, in “Hora de Partir,” African and European elements intertwine, thus evoking an intercontinental atmosphere that serves as the narrative frame of the story. The heartbeats that Ka feels when seeing Ariadna for the first time are compared to “una batucada” ‘an African percussive sound’ (64; my translation). In the same way, Ka shares African authors with his lover and both listen together to “los sanadores espirituales de llaga Africana” ‘the spiritual healers of the African sore’ (69; my translation). Other elements of African imagery are further alluded to when depicting Ariadna’s curiosity about Ka’s culture: “Ariadna no paró de hacerle preguntas a Ka, con los ojos brillantes como un felino agazapado tras un arbusto en una noche negra de mayombe, sobre África” ‘Ariadna couldn’t stop asking Ka, with her eyes as bright as a feline crouching behind a bush on a dark night in Mayombe, over Africa’ (68). Also, the narrator mentions some European elements, such as “guitarra Española” ‘Spanish guitar’ (65) and “un decorado de película independiente” ‘an independent film set’ (65) to describe Ka’s feeling about his neighborhood, the verses by Tennyson that Ariadna reads aloud while she is at home, or the Hundertwasser collage painted on their headboard. Sometimes the narrative voice transcends geographical borders by referring to an explicit universality:

<EX>Un argentino, con una voz rasposa y profunda, guitarra Española en mano, ... al ritmo de un tango de Obango.... Unos niños magrebíes jugaban al fútbol.... Un grupo de Muyahidines formaban un círculo en uno de los extremos de la plaza, charlaban amigablemente.... Velos islámicos. Turbantes sijs. Gente

paseando abrazada.... Con los ojos puestos en muchas partes del planeta.... Todo parecía tener una belleza frágil. Indescriptible.

An Argentinian, with a raspy and deep voice, a Spanish guitar in his hands, ... to the rhythm of an Obango's tango.... Some children from the Maghreb were playing football.... A group of Mujahideen formed a circle at one end of the square, were chatting in a friendly manner ... Islamic veils. Sikh turbans. People walking embracing.... With the eyes set in many parts of the planet.... Everything seemed to have such a fragile beauty. Indescribable. (Abogo 65)</EX>

In this excerpt, the narrative voice transmits Ka's idea about his European neighborhood. There is a parallelism between the depiction of this street and the market in "A Private Experience" in terms of the allusion to both transcultural contexts as peaceful. While the market in Adichie's narrative is described as a quiet place before the riot, where "shouting in English, in pidgin, in Hausa, in Igbo" (Adichie 44) intertwines, the transculturality of Ka's neighborhood is depicted through international elements, such as "Spanish guitar," "turbans," "veils," "tango," or "children from the Maghreb." Importantly, both scenarios of diversity are associated with peacefulness and joy. In Abogo's story, the terms "chatting in a friendly manner," "people walking embracing," or "fragile beauty" transmit a positive image of the street, while the market in "A Private Experience" is depicted as a quiet place where Chika and her sister Nnedi buy oranges and groundnuts safely until the riot starts.

Importantly, I argue that the depiction of a transcultural context in these narratives is the perfect fuel for intergroup relations between the characters to happen. Indeed, they resist group categorization through their peaceful coexistence, which establishes intergroup bonds and

releases them from the entrapment of categorization. In Adichie's story "A Private Experience," despite belonging to warring religious and ethnic groups, Chika and the Muslim woman develop a sisterhood based on their similarities. First, the riot is introduced as an event that affects both women negatively, as it breaks their peace and forces them to run away. In fact, the Muslim woman shows Chika where to hide from the attackers, and the latter shows her gratitude: "Thank you for calling me. Everything happened so fast and everybody ran and I was suddenly alone and I didn't know what I was doing. Thank you" (Adichie 44). In this sense, the riot brings bad consequences for the two women, since they lose their sister and daughter, respectively, because of all the chaos caused by the attackers. Their worry comes from the fact that they do not know if their relatives are alive. Whereas Chika claims that she left her sister buying groundnuts in the market just before the riot started, the unnamed woman tells her companion that her first daughter was selling groundnuts at that time. Their communion emerges from their common desperation, and when the Muslim woman wishes that Allah will keep Chika's sister in a safe place, Chika avoids answering with an "amen" and simply nods as a sign of respect for her religious practices.

As a result of their fear and anxiety, both women pray in a desperate attempt to raise their hopes. At some point in the narrative, the Muslim woman kneels and prays facing Mecca. Although before the riot Chika thought that "offering Masses is a waste of money" and "just a fund-raising for the church" (52), her companion's prayers encourage her to "touch the finger rosary that she still wears ... to please her mother" (52) and, when she leaves the store once the riot is over, she prays that a taxi appears with her sister Nnedi inside. Interestingly, although religion constitutes the basis of the conflict between their groups, it also becomes their point of

union, as both pray to calm their anxiety. In this sense, religion establishes a sisterhood between the two triggered by their similar way of fighting their fears.

Furthermore, this communion between the two women is based on the mutual interest they have for each other's lives, as they ask one another about their jobs, relatives and past experiences. For instance, Chika wonders whether her companion has witnessed many riots, and the Muslim woman shows interest in Chika's mother and sister. Therefore, their attachment to their group categorization is broken by the mutual acceptance and embracement of their lifestyles and beliefs, which are shown to be more similar than thought. Also, the handing of the scarf to Chika so that she can use it to stop the hemorrhage constitutes a metaphorical act of choosing to feed their individuality and sisterhood over religious and ethnical bias. In fact, this intergroup bias is combatted by presenting the riot as negative for both sides:

<EX>The streets where she ran blindly, not sure in which direction Nnedi had run, not sure if the man running beside her was a friend or an enemy, not sure if she could stop and pick up one of the bewildered-looking children separated from their mothers in the rush, not even sure who was who or who was killing whom. (Adichie 45)</EX>

As this excerpt shows, the narrative voice adopts a neutral perspective in the religious conflict between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and attacks intergroup bias through the employment of sentences that highlight the violent event as pointless and harmful for both sides, such as "children separated from their mothers in the rush" and "not even sure who was who or who was killing who." The unfounded nature of the riot is further underlined when the narrative voice reveals that, after the violent episode, Chika "will look at only one of the corpses, naked, stiff, facedown, and it will strike her that she cannot tell if the partially burned man is Igbo or

Hausa, Christian or Muslim, from looking at that charred flesh” (Adichie 53). Also, intergroup conflict is approached as only convenient for rulers when the narrator reproduces Nnedi’s opinion about it and mentions that “religion and ethnicity are often politicized because the ruler is safe if the hungry ruled are killing one another” (48).

This communion and truthful interest between members of distinct groups can likewise be perceived in “Hora de Partir.” According to Edward A. Ross, “the diversification which is going on in each culture in consequence of its penetration by elements from other cultures widens the range of individual choice” (479). Thus, intergroup relations and their transculturality affect the individual positively, as opposed to group categories. The romantic relationship between Ka and Ariadna and the effort they make to maintain it despite the multiple obstacles imply a huge interest in each other’s thoughts and way of living. As previously mentioned, whereas Ka is “deseoso de leer todos los espacios de la vida de Ariadna” ‘wishing to read all the spaces in Ariadna’s life’ (Abogo 67; my translation), she asks her lover about Africa. Ka’s interest in his partner is showed from the moment he meets her for the first time:

<EX>La primera vez que Ka vio a Ariadna fue en la terraza de un café que languidecía a los pies de un horrible edificio que hacía de Museo de Arte Contemporáneo.... Los contornos de las cosas se desvanecían.... En aquel instante, mientras la descifraba, Ka se preguntó cómo es que aquella chica no estaba maravillada de sí misma

The first time Ka saw Ariadna was on the terrace of a café that languished at the foot of the horrible building that served as the Museum of Contemporary Art.... The contour of things vanished.... At that very moment, while he deciphered her,

Ka wondered how it was possible that the girl wasn't amazed with herself.

(Abogo 64–65; my translation)</EX>

Ka's desire to decipher Ariadna, together with his admiration of her beauty, evidences his curiosity toward the European girl. In this light, the sentence "the contour of things vanished" constitutes a revealing metaphor that illustrates how they cross group categorization boundaries (based on white/black and native/immigrant binaries) to start a relationship. This act of resistance towards group categorization culminates when they decide to live together and "sus formas se juntaron y se dispersaron como rayos de sol" 'their forms joined and spread like sunrays' (Abogo 67; my translation). Indeed, they rebel against homogamy, the practice that supports the fixity of individuals within their group categories and that is based on the romantic and sexual union of people based on ethnic, racial, ideological, and socioeconomic similarities between them (Brynin et al.; Killian; Mäenpää and Jalovaara). According to Killian:

<EX>choosing to marry a partner from a different racial and/or ethnic background can carry serious social and psychological implications for interracial couple's relationships with friends and family. By violating social expectations of homogamy, social conformity, and segregation along racial and ethnic lines, interracial couples appear to represent a site of social and political resistance to larger social forces and institutions. (190)</EX>

In this sense, the decisive role of homogamy in the construction of racial categories and boundaries among races is based on the historical perception of interracial couples as a threat to racial purity by white supremacists (Sexton; Childs). Thus, interracial sex can be understood as deviant and as a form of resistance to the notion of homogamy. The sexual scenes between Ka and Ariadna that take place in the story play an important role in the materialization of their

union and evoke the breaking of racial and social boundaries. Their conversion into “inanimate substances” alludes to their liberation from the rigid lines that fence both characters in racial and social categorizing parameters, evoked through “segregationist classifications” and “geometrical fears.” Ka and Ariadna travel toward “the range of existence,” that is, the amalgam of colors. Their fusion transports them to “nuevo espacio” ‘a new space’ (Abogo 68) where group distinctions are minimized in the name of their love by the construction of their “burbuja particular” ‘individual bubble’ within “la gran Burbuja en la que los fanatismos de unos ... abren las puertas del infierno de otros” ‘the big Bubble in which the fanatisms of some people ... open the gates of hell for others’ (74; my translation). This powerful metaphor refers to the bias they have to confront and that results from group categorization.

The fact of not following these hegemonic narratives is considered an act of disobedience and highlights the psychological consequences and the social costs that can result from “loving a body that is supposed to be unloveable” or “a body that people are supposed to repudiate” (Ahmed 146). Consequently, the social tension that emerges from interracial encounters and intergroup relationships in “Hora de Partir” can be approached as part of “the negative effects of ‘not quite’ living in the norms” and implies “how loving loves that are not ‘normative’ involves being subject to such norms precisely in the costs and damage that are incurred when not following them” (Ahmed 146).

To sum up, while in the two narratives the main characters establish intergroup relationships, thus minimizing category boundaries, the stories portray a very realistic framework when depicting the communion between groups as a hard process to achieve. Even though the two women in “A Private Experience” reach an intimacy and a mutual understanding that defy

the Muslim-Christian conflict in Nigeria, the narrator suggests at the end of the story that their communion, although successful, is just transient:

<EX>“May I keep your scarf? The bleeding might start again.”

The woman looks for a moment as if she does not understand; then she nods.

There is perhaps the beginning of future grief on her face, but she smiles a slight, distracted smile before she hands the scarf back to Chika and turns to climb out of the window. (Adichie 56)</EX>

This last paragraph in the narrative shows that, once the riot finishes and Chika asks her companion for the scarf, the Muslim woman doubts for a moment lending a symbolic piece of herself to the Igbo Christian girl. The beginning of future grief on the woman's face can be interpreted as a future regret that the Muslim woman might have when remembering this granting to a person who belongs to a group in conflict with hers and evidences that despite the efforts that both characters make for an intergroup communion, the borders between group categorizations are depicted as hard to demolish and as strongly rooted within people.

In the same way, the characters' communion in “Hora de Partir” (2007) is eventually broken. Despite Ka and Ariadna carrying out an intergroup relation successfully, thus being resistant subjects who trigger the coexistence among different people, their willingness to embrace each other is eventually interrupted. As Julia Borst claims in her analysis of Abogo's short story, “the ‘mixed’ couple as a trope of transcultural coexistence ... is slowly deconstructed throughout the story” (43). She highlights a firmly rooted racism in society as the cause of Ka's and Ariadna's struggle to overcome differences and understands the legacy of colonialism and prejudices as the main consequences of this racism, as the following excerpt shows:

<EX>Su voz, amarga y salvaje, era como un grito triste y frío, aunque hablaba en un tono bajo.

-No podemos seguir así.... Te niegas a enterrar a tus muertos, quieres vivir bajo sus sombra, quieres destruirte.

Las palabras de Ariadna rebotaron contra las paredes, pintadas de azul cielo.

His voice, bitter and savage, was like a sad and cold cry, although he was talking in a low tone.

-We cannot go on like this.... You don't want to bury your dead, you want to live under their shadow, you want to destroy yourself.

Ariadna's words bounced off the walls, painted in a sky blue. (Abogo 71; my translation)</EX>

As shown in this excerpt, Ariadna blames Ka for not being able to separate himself from a group categorization marked by his race. In turn, Ka blames Ariadna for treating him as “one of those African objects of curiosity and desire she wants to acquire knowledge about” (Borst 44). Consequently, at the end of the story, both characters realize that “the stigmas of history” are more powerful than their love, and the protagonists' efforts to “discolor” themselves (74) are made in vain (Borst 44). Just as in “A Private Experience,” Ka's and Ariadna's willingness to overcome racial and social prejudices is not enough to shatter firmly rooted intergroup conflicts both in society and in the characters.

However, while being aware of the eventuality of the Muslim and the Christian women's closeness in “A Private Experience,” and of Ka's and Ariadna's failed love relationship in “Hora de Partir,” my point is that these characters dare to defy boundaries based on hegemonic racial,

social, and national group categorizations for the attainment of their free agency. Indeed, these pieces of writing constitute outstanding examples of resistance literature, since they question the Muslim-Christian conflict in Nigeria and the native-immigrant, black-white conflict, respectively, by depicting peaceful intergroup relationships between the characters, and thus offering an alternative version to the hegemonic ideology based on group categorizations. While the sisterhood between the two women in Adichie's "A Private Experience" is materialized when, despite her doubts, the Muslim woman decides to give her scarf to the Christian girl, thus ignoring religious and ethnical differences, the communion between the black immigrant and the white European in Abogo's "Hora de partir" is shown through their sexual encounters and the love and interest they have for one another.

To conclude, despite the impossibility of reaching a lasting communion among different individuals in "Hora de partir" and "A Private Experience," both stories portray literary voices that resist group categorization by means of achieving a close relationship between outgroup members. Even though they belong to distinct racial, social, religious, and class categorizations, the characters' interest in each other and their desire to bridge intergroup hostilities constitute effective devices to minimize stereotyping and a way of delegitimizing intergroup conflict. In this sense, their penetration into theoretically opposed groups leads them to a process of *individuation* that provides them with a critical voice detached from the bias thinking that the group categorization imposes on individuals. Consequently, the mixing of intercultural elements, and the mutual interest among the characters based on a sexual attraction, love, and friendship, widens their individual choice and demolishes category boundaries as a first step toward a transcultural coexistence.

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