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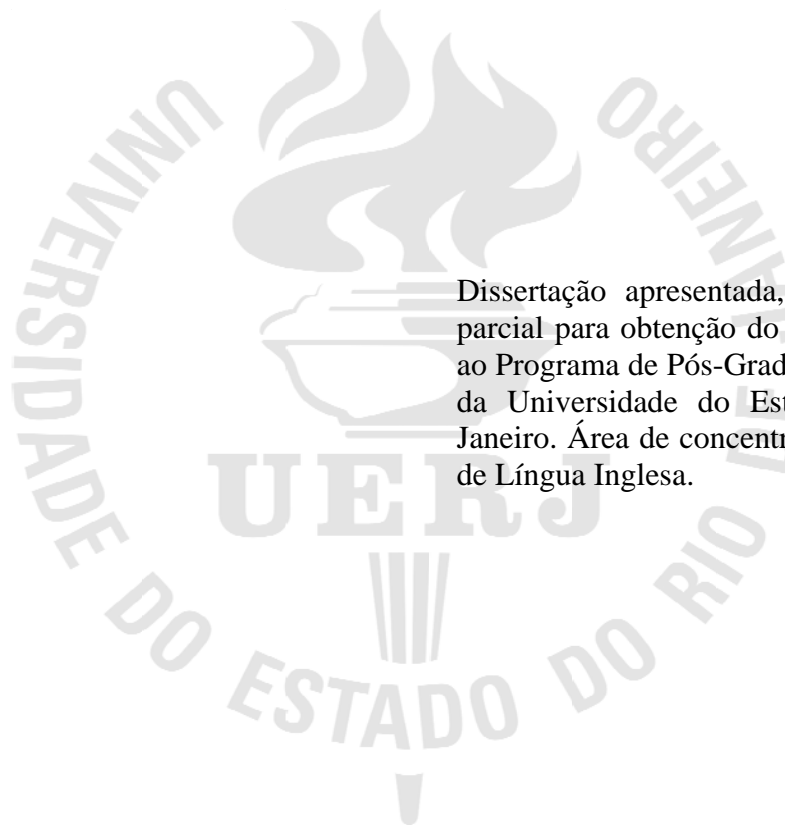
The content of the form of Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*

Rio de Janeiro

2012

Daniela Silva de Freitas

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora: Prof^ª Dra. Leila Assumpção Harris

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I would like to thank all my professors, especially Professor Leila Harris.

I would also like to thank all my family and friends, especially Alice Pereira, for all the help and support.

We all know there is another story to be told

Adrienne Rich

The history of these islands can never be satisfactorily told.

V. S. Naipaul

Ninguém aqui quer chegar a uma verdade absoluta e impô-la. Apenas se quer abrir as portas
para as verdades individuais.

Raul Seixas

RESUMO

FREITAS, Daniela Silva de. *The content of the form of Julia Alvarez's In the time of the butterflies*. 2012. 78 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2012.

In the Time of the Butterflies é um romance da escritora dominicana-americana Julia Alvarez sobre a vida e a morte das Borboletas, *Las Mariposas*, codinome das irmãs Mirabal, membros de um movimento clandestino contra o regime ditatorial de Rafael Leonidas Trujillo na República Dominicana, que se tornaram símbolos da luta contra o Trujillato depois de serem assassinadas a mando do ditador. Essa dissertação tem como objetivo expor como forma literária e contexto social estão diretamente relacionados nesse romance. Ela defende a ideia de que o borramento de três gêneros literários distintos – metaficção historiográfica, autobiografia e *bildungsroman* – reflete o questionamento das fronteiras entre o privado e o público, o pessoal e o político, o eu e o outro, o individual e o coletivo, a literatura e a história, fato e ficção e história e subjetividade. Ela também tenta mostrar como a problematização dessas dicotomias implica na contestação de noções pré-concebidas de identidade, história e nação.

Palavras-chaves: Borrimento dos gêneros. Metaficção historiográfica. Práticas autobiográficas. *Bildungsroman*. História.

ABSTRACT

In the Time of the Butterflies is a novel by the Dominican-American writer Julia Alvarez on the life and death of the Butterflies, *Las Mariposas*, codename of the Mirabal sisters in the national underground movement that fought against the dictatorial regime of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. The novel is an attempt to re-member the sisters' assassination under the dictator's orders, a story that has never been officially told. This dissertation aims to expose how literary form and political content are related in this novel. It argues that the blurring of three distinct literary genres – historiographic metafiction, autobiography and the *bildungsroman* – reflects the questioning of the boundaries between private and public, personal and political, self and other, individual and collective, literature and history, fact and fiction as well as history and subjectivity. It also tries to show how the problematizing of these dichotomies de-naturalizes received notions of identity, history and nation.

Keywords: Blurring of genres. Historiographic metafiction. Autobiographical practices. *Bildungsroman*. History.

SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

I have always been a big literature fan. In my first year at pre-school my teacher complained to my mom that I would sneak away while she was too busy with the other students and she would find me only hours later in the library. She told my mom that I had done that so many times that she thought it was necessary to contact her and talk to her about it. My mom, who is also a teacher, was very proud of me and scolded the teacher for not realizing my potential. She has told this story over and over again – every time somebody asks her what it is I do, every time I tell her I am sick and tired of this dissertation.

Because of this love of mine for fiction and libraries, I could not help but keep reading other books on the side during this Master's course, even though I already had plenty of material to read for the classes. One day, in the beginning of my second semester, when I should already be working on my dissertation, I came upon this beautiful hardcover edition of a novel by Julia Alvarez I had not read before. It was love at first sight, a feeling which was only intensified every time I turned a page.

I think the reason why I loved the book so much was because of the way it was at the same time proof of the author's masterful writing and a political novel. The combination of postmodern strategies and postcolonial agenda helped Alvarez to question the *status quo* from within, de-naturalizing the grand narratives of History and Nation. And this, of course, pleased both my aesthetic and political inclinations.

My main point in this dissertation is that *In the Time of the Butterflies*'s literary form is inescapably connected to its political content. The disruptive nature of the content of this novel, namely the questioning of Official History, the proposal of a new model for national identity, the blurring of the boundaries between private and public, personal and political, individual and collective, self and other, fact and fiction, history and literature is reflected on the novel's form. *In the Time of the Butterflies* uses and abuses three distinct literary genres: historiographic metafiction, autobiography and the *bildungsroman*.

What I present you here is, of course a Frankenstein, except these are not parts of dead bodies but patches of my own skin and guts that I feel I have ripped off without any kind of sedatives, stitched together and blown life into.

Throughout this process I have wondered whether it was really necessary for me in this introduction to talk about imperialism, late capitalism, the postcolonial and the Caribbean. I honestly think that if you have read the novel I am writing about, or any of Julia Alvarez's novels, or any piece of the literature produced by Caribbean diasporic women writers, you know what I am talking about. Or maybe if you live in a third world country, or even if you live in the metropolis but have been careful enough to look around you, beyond the center, into the margins, you certainly know what I am talking about.

I am talking about the process that was initiated with the so-called discovery of the Americas and the sub-sequent exploration of the land and the people that followed it. I am talking about the development of grand narratives, of philosophical concepts that have rationally supported this exploration. I am talking about the dissemination of prejudices and their naturalization. I am talking about the argument that Natives and Black people did not have souls and that it was okay to enslave them, to treat them like animals. I am talking about how after the Industrial Revolution such conception was changed so that non-whites were also able to consume. I am talking about how the institutionalizing of binarisms separated bodies from minds, manual from intellectual work, and established that each of them deserved different payments. I am talking about how in the beginning of the age of globalization, after the two World Wars, when it became so easy for information to flow around the globe via new technologies, the imperial centers have supported dictatorships in independent postcolonial countries to prevent socialist ideas from spreading. I am talking about the people who fought against these regimes and were forced into exile or people who left the colonies and went North or West in search of better conditions and about the way they were received. I am talking about how these diasporic subjects now try to write about their experience, how they appropriate themselves of imperial cultural traditions to write back.

But I am talking about how all of this has taken place in the Dominican Republic, in an island torn into two countries, that has been under the control of so many for so long. I am writing about Julia Alvarez's family traumatic past experience that has forced them into exile. I am talking about the Trujillato and of how Alvarez re-members a story that has not been officially told about it.

The island of Hispaniola, where the Dominican Republic and Haiti are set, was the first place Christopher Columbus' group of explorers set foot on in the first of their four voyages to America in 1492. Following the "discovery" of the island, the Spanish colonized

the Dominican Republic for over three centuries, with French and Haitian interludes, till the country's independence in 1821. However, even after independence was proclaimed, the country continued to depend economically on big metropolitan centers, such as Europe and the United States. As Helen Scott puts it, all over the Caribbean “new mechanisms of foreign control have replaced formal colonialism, making a mockery of the notion of ‘independence’ in any genuine sense” (SCOTT, 2006, p. 2).

During this post-independence period it may be relevant to highlight two moments in the history of Dominican Republic which help establishing a background scenario for our future arguments. The first of these moments is 1905, when the country was annexed to the American territory by President Roosevelt, with the purpose of ensuring that the Dominican Republic honored its financial obligations. In May, 1916, U.S. Marines occupied Santo Domingo and in three months, the USA had occupied the whole country. The occupation officially lasted till July 1st, 1924. Among the recruits of the U.S.-Marine-trained Dominican National Guard was Rafael Leonidas Trujillo y Molina, who later became president, ruling the country for over thirty years (ALCANTARA, 2009, p. 28-29).

Trujillo's *coup d'état* is another moment in Dominican history that is central to our discussion. On February 16, 1930, with the help of his “private army”, he was sworn president, running the country for the next thirty-one years. During his dictatorship he paid off the country's external debts and implemented many programs to promote national patriotism and international recognition. Moreover, he was responsible for a series of corrupt acts. In October 1937, he ordered the Massacre of Haitians on the Dominican side of the border, which killed 20,000 civilians in five days. He was also the author of a series of political murders, relying on both U.S. support and his private squad of assassins, *La 42*, to suppress his enemies (ALCANTARA, 2009, p. 31-32).

Julia Alvarez's father involvement with the Fourteenth of June was what forced her family into exile. The Fourteenth of June was an underground movement that aimed to overthrow Trujillo's dictatorship and plotted to kill the dictator. Some of the movement's heads were the Mirabal sisters, who were murdered in December of 1960, under Trujillo's orders, like so many other members of the movement were.

Fearing his own life and those of the members of his family were at risk after his involvement in an underground plot to kill Trujillo, Alvarez's father, who was a doctor, accepted the fellowship the CIA had helped set up for him to specialize in cardiology in an

American university. At the excuse that *El Jefe* needed to have a good cardiologist near him in case he had any heart problems, Alvarez's father went studying in the U.S.A. in August of 1960, taking his family with him, never to come back. The story of their migration is told in many of Alvarez's novels, namely, *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents*, *Yo!*, *Before we were Free* and *In the Time of the Butterflies*.

In an interview she gave, Alvarez claims she had to write *In the Time of the Butterflies* because it was a "debt" that she "owed". She goes on saying,

It was a story that was a pebble in my shoe that I couldn't shake out. We were the family that got out and came to the United States and one thing led to another and here I am, an American writer, but this is a story that I left behind. (...) And so what is the responsibility of those that survive? To remember and to remind (NEA Podcast, 9/2/2010).

In a time when many countries in Latin American are going through the process of recovering the shattered fragments of the memory of the traumatic political events of the dictatorships they have recently undergone, this seems to be a very relevant project. In Chile, for example, the government wants to replace the phrase "military dictatorship" per "military regime" in all of the country's school History books. In Brazil, there has been a lot of polemics towards the accessibility to the secret archives of the military dictatorship. Some groups in Brazilian society are trying to make them public but other groups are fiercely fighting against the revelation of these secret files. It seems the responsibility of art to recover and give voice to the other, silenced stories of this recent Latin American past.

This dissertation tries to show how this is done in *In the Time of the Butterflies*, how literary form and political content are intrinsically related in the novel. In order to achieve this goal, I have divided this dissertation into four chapters. The first three chapters demonstrate how three different literary genres are appropriated by the author into the novel. All these genres are reproduced in it with a difference. The traditional, main-stream character of these genres invests the marginal subjects that play a central role in this novel with the credibility usually granted to the winners of History, usual protagonists of such narrative forms. However, Julia Alvarez manages to provide these ex-centric characters with agency within imperialist models of representation through a series of adaptations made by her to each literary genre deployed as well as through the postmodern strategy of the blurring of the genres itself.

The first chapter investigates the similarities between literature and history writing. It analyzes how the postmodern form of the historiographic metafiction, already an adaptation

of the traditional historical novel, has its boundaries bent by Alvarez in the novel. The main difference we see between Hutcheon's definition of the model of the historiographic metafiction and the form deployed by Alvarez is the kind of intertexts explored by her. In the absence of a formal written archive from which she could draw from, Alvarez has to rely on oral history to re-member this true story. In the process, she cannot help but denounce how fluid the borders between fact and fiction are.

The second chapter analyzes how and why self-referential strategies are incorporated into the novel. The genre of the autobiography has been very much in vogue lately. Many critics have tried to set clear boundaries for the genre, but I have chosen to privilege the theory of those theoreticians who prefer to talk about the broader space of self-representational practices. *In the Time of the Butterflies* is assumedly a novel. However, it is a novel based on a true story lived by true people, in which the author is also re-presented. Therefore, it deploys many biographical and autobiographical strategies, which further complicates the relationship between fact and fiction, between history, literature and their referents. The portrayal of the life of the self in a critical moment in the political life of a country also complicates the borders between private and public, personal and political. The representation of individual stories to represent the life of the nation destabilizes the division between self and other, individual and collective.

The third chapter shows how and inquires why the traditional literary form of the *bildungsroman*, is appropriated into the novel. Commonly associated with the ideals of the humanist ideology (see LIMA, 2002, p. 859), the traditional subject of the *bildungsroman* goes into the world, experiments, and learns about everything there is around him (for he is frequently a man), but he always comes back to his society conformed, ready to live according to its rules. However, Bakhtin adds, the *bildungsroman* portrays the hero in the process of becoming, which gives a deep human quality to the fictional and somewhat mythological characters of the Mirabal sisters. The *bildungsroman* deployed in *In the Time of the Butterflies* is deeply associated to Bhabha's notion of the performative nationalism, for it demonstrates how the life of the nation is lived day by day in the individual's life, how the narration of one's personal identity is inevitably the narration of his or her national identity and of his or her History.

The common nature of cultural identity, nation and History as narration is what is highlighted in the fourth chapter. These constructed representations have come to a crisis in

the late modernity. The chapter examines the findings of critics such as Walter Benjamin, Homi K. Bhabha, Rosemary George, Catherine Hall, Stuart Hall, Linda Hutcheon, and Hayden White on identity, nation, History, memory and narration.

In the Time of the Butterflies is a very rich novel that offers myriad paths for critical analysis. I have chosen to talk about the relationship between literary form and social process, showing how both are connected in this novel. However, the road I have taken here is only one of the many possible directions I could have gone. I do not talk much about Alvarez's autobiography, for instance. As a consequence, I do not talk much about how her diasporic experience has helped her in this re-vision. I focus on the way the central characters of this novel are represented, on how they are provided with agency by the author, on the role this representation plays in the construction of another history, in the re-imagining of a nation. It is far beyond my means as well as of the purpose of this dissertation to exhaust the topics that are raised by this novel. From the research I made in order to write this dissertation, I feel like *In the Time of the Butterflies* has been overlooked for very long. I hope my research helps raise interest in other researches on this wonderful novel.

The strategy of “using novels to understand cultural configurations studied by social scientists”, Françoise Lionnet argues in *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*,

is grounded in my belief that literature allows us to enter into the subjective process of writers and their characters and thus to understand better the unique perspectives of subjects who are agents of transformation and hybridization in their own narratives – as opposed to being the objects of knowledge, as in the discourse of social science (LIONNET, 1995, p.8).

This is something I also believe in, hence this dissertation and its form.

1 THE USE AND ABUSE OF HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

In the Time of the Butterflies, a novel first published in 1994 by Dominican-American writer Julia Alvarez, is based on the life of the flesh-and-blood Mirabal sisters, symbols of the fight against the Trujillato, held as national legends in the Dominican Republic. Three of the Mirabal sisters – Patria, Minerva and María Teresa Mirabal – and their respective husbands – Pedro González, Manolo Tavárez and Leandro Rodríguez – were members of an underground movement – the Fourteenth of June – that aimed to overthrow the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, which lasted from 1930 until his death in 1961.

The involvement of the Mirabals and their husbands in the movement led to the imprisonment of Pedro, Manolo, Leandro, Minerva and Maria Teresa in 1960. After the two sisters had been released from prison – even though they were still under house arrest – Minerva, Maria Teresa and Patria used to visit their husbands in the prison where they were kept, in the mountains. The official history claims that one day, when coming back from one of these visits, the sisters suffered a “car accident” and ended up falling off a cliff. However, the story which has been told and retold by the population of the island is somewhat different: the women and their driver were in fact murdered under Trujillo’s orders and then put back into the car which was pushed over a cliff – a version which no historical document in the Dominican Republic of the time seems to have been prone to bear witness to.

This lack of the documentation on the death of the sisters is a claim made by Julia Alvarez in her article “Chasing the Butterflies”, published originally in her non-fiction book, *Something to the Declare* (1999). A slightly adapted version of the same text, subtitled “A Note from the Author”, also appears in the latest edition of the novel that was published in 2010. In “Chasing the Butterflies”, Alvarez states that her original intention was to write a paragraph on the sisters, as she had been commissioned to doing (writing a paragraph about a Dominican heroine of her choice and she chose the Mirabals) by a woman’s press which was publishing a series of postcards and booklets about Latina women. Alvarez also talks about how, during a trip she made to the island in 1986, she looked for more information about the sisters in order to write the text. She explains that she first tried to find formal sources. “In the National Archives I combed for information about the Trujillo regime. I found many volumes missing and (...) a stack of yellowing *El Caribes* [the local paper]” (ALVAREZ, 1999, p.

203). Consequently, Alvarez was forced to turn to other non-official kinds of evidence, forms which are unconventional to tradition:

I visited bookstores and libraries, but all I found was a historical 'comic book'. (...) On the other hand, any shoeshine boy on the street or *campesino* tilting his cane chair back on a coconut tree knew the story of the Mirabal sisters. *Las muchachas*, everyone called them. The girls (ALVAREZ, 1999, p. 199).

Alvarez started researching on the Mirabals in 1986, when she was commissioned to writing a paragraph on a Latina heroine, as we have mentioned above. *In the Time of the Butterflies* was first published only in 1994. The book had a long gestation period, during which Alvarez collected information about the Mirabals in the annual trips she took to the Dominican Republic (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 331-335).

Once, during one of these trips, she met one of Patria's neighbors who told her "how the girls' death was reported the very next day in *El Caribe* as a car accident". The neighbor also told Alvarez of the Trujillo visit paid to them shortly after the Mirabals' assassination:

"We felt those girls' deaths. Trujillo pretended his hands were clean. Such a tragic accident, he said when he was here. Oh yes, he was here. He made us throw him a big party. And the girls not a month in the ground. Imagine, all of us dressed up like there was something to celebrate, our hearts so heavy, ay" (ALVAREZ, 1999, p. 206).

In another occasion, a cousin of Alvarez's introduced her to Noris, Patria Mirabal's daughter, who took her on a trip to the place in the Dominican Republic where the girls were from. There Alvarez visited the house, turned into a museum, where the sisters had lived the last months of their lives. She saw the curious collection of personal items of the sisters held by the museum – such as the clothes they made in prison for their children, their jewelry, the books Minerva Mirabal used to read, the spare dress Patria Mirabal had in her bag on the day of the accident and Maria Teresa Mirabal's long braid of hair which was cut down by Dedé herself off her sister's corpse in the morgue. In the article, Alvarez inserts the text she wrote on her journal about it:

In the house: the little clothes that the girls had made in prison for their children are laid out on the beds. Their jewelry – bracelets, clamp earrings, the cheap costume type – lies on the dresser under a glass bell that looks like a cheese server. In the closet hang their dresses. "This one was Mami's", Norris says holding up a matronly linen shift with big black buttons. The next one she pulls out she falls silent. It's more stylish, striped, with wide, white labels. When I look down, I notice the pleated skirt has a blood stain on its lap. This was the dress Patria carried "clean" in her bag so she could change into something fresh before seeing the men.

Maria Teresa's long braid lies under a glass cover on her "vanity". There are still twigs and dirt and slivers of glass from her last moments tumbling down the mountain in that rented Jeep. When Noris and Reina head out for the next room, I lift the case and touch the hair. It feels like regular real hair.

We walk in the garden and sit under the laurel tree where “the girls used to sit”. Noris says it is too bad that I am going to miss meeting Dedé.

That is the first I hear there is a fourth sister who survived. (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 332 - 333)

It was her meeting with Dedé, the fourth sister mentioned above – that only took place later in 1992 – that Alvarez claims to have “opened up the story” for her. “After I wrote my Latina postcard”, she states, “I put the project away. The story seemed to me almost impossible to write. I couldn’t imagine yet how one tells a story like this. *Once upon a holocaust, there were three butterflies.*” Then she adds, “what I was forgetting – and not forgetting – was the fourth sister.” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 335)

In the introduction to Dedé Mirabal’s book *Vivas en Su Jardin*, titled “The Most Difficult Heroism” and translated into Spanish by Minerva Mirabal’s daughter, Minou Tavarez – and which I translate back into English here – Alvarez declares that upon her first meeting with the surviving sister, the story told by Dedé entrapped her imagination in a way that enabled her to finally visualize a book. In the beginning, she says to have been in doubt as to whether she should write a biography or a novel, but that as she listened to that experienced storyteller, it became clear to her that her role went beyond reporting pure historical facts. She says she got to the conclusion that she should portray the terrible tragedy, the complex personalities of the women who kept their faith in the fundamental principles of humanity and whose sacrifice helped put an end to all the horror and persecution of the dictatorship. “So I decided to take shelter in historical fiction. As a German novelist has once said, ‘Novels are written in the gaps of history.’” (MIRABAL, 2009, p. 12)

Julia Alvarez went to the Dominican Republic, looked for archives, newspaper reports and historical documents. She interviewed *campesinos*, Mirabals’ acquaintances, neighbors, friends, family, children and the surviving sister. She visited the Mirabals’ museum and had access to the letters Minerva and her husband Manolo exchanged. She read two biographies on the lives of the sisters. After this research, she wrote her own novel. This chapter is going to look into how Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies* problematizes history: intertwining the private with the public; inverting the hierarchy usually attributed to history’s and literature’s referents; and re-imagining and re-memorizing traumatic historical happenings of the Dominican Republic’s recent past.

Divergent versions of history seem to be typical of, though not exclusive to, dictatorships. With the postmodern de-naturalizing of the status of totalizing master narratives, the doxa of official History has been consequently challenged and skepticism

towards the notion of History as an all-encompassing, universal and politically unbiased account of the past has grown. This suspicious stance towards History has been triggered in part by the insurgence of feminist and civil rights movements as well as by the insight offered by other important oppositional minoritarian perspectives, such as gay and ethnic minorities, which all argued that they were not properly represented or given voice to in History's unifying and ordering grand narrative.

With their contribution, there has been a contesting of what Jean Lyotard (1984) has termed the totalizing master narratives of our culture, "those systems by which we usually unify and order (and smooth over) any contradictions in order to make them fit" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. x). The challenge to master narratives "foregrounds the process of meaning-making in the production and reception of art", or, in broader discursive terms, of "how our various sign systems grant meaning to our experience" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. x). The postmodern raises questions about the common-sensical and the "natural". But it never offers answers that are anything but provisional and contextually determined. "It knows it cannot escape implication in the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) dominant of its time. There is no outside. All it can do is question from within" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. xiii) Therefore, History has consequently come to be seen as a discourse, a system of signification by which we make sense of the past, a human construct which grants meaning to brute past events, turning them into historical facts which are relevant for "a given group, society, or culture's conception of its present tasks and future prospects" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 96), unavoidably economically, politically and culturally determined and ideologically laden.

As a consequence, other localized alternative versions of the past have been increasingly offered by contemporary authors. Julia Alvarez's novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, re-members traumatic events of the Trujillato – especially the Mirabals's drama – into history. However, this is not done unproblematically. Alvarez complicates the relationship between public/private, personal/political, history/fiction; blurring their limits and inverting "the hierarchy of fact and fiction to reveal the constructed nature of historical narratives" (VÁZQUEZ, 2003, p. 385), the constructed nature of both fictional and scientific historical narratives. Alvarez justifies that inversion in the postscript to the novel, stating that: "I wanted to immerse my readers in an epoch in the life of the Dominican Republic that I believe can only finally be redeemed by the *imagination*" (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 324; my emphasis).

The relationship between literature and history had not been rendered particularly problematical till the nineteenth century, when the modern scientific method of historical inquiry was inaugurated and the concept of history consequently reformulated, establishing literature as history's other (WHITE, 2006, p. 25). This separation has been questioned by the New Historicists and is also being challenged now in postmodern theory and art.

New Historians and postmodern theoreticians (HUTCHEON, 1988; WHITE, 2006) have shown that in fact, history and story writing have much in common: they have “been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 105); they are both considered linguistic constructs, with highly conventionalized narrative forms as well as language and structure that could hardly be considered transparent; and they are both equally intertextual. They also share conventions, such as selection, organization, diegesis, anecdote, temporal pacement and emplotment (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 111).

In the Time of the Butterflies seems to have been built on this in-between terrain. Alvarez, in her postscript to the novel, her article and afterword to the most recent edition of the novel – “Chasing the Butterflies” –, and in several interviews, states that what she had in mind in the first place was to write a biography but that this idea had to be changed, for “history itself is the story we tell ourselves about what really happened” (NEA Podcast, 9/2/2010). She found she could not keep herself from emplotting, from relying more in verisimilitude than in truth, as she herself states:

I get swept away by my subjects. I get caught up in the drama and spirit of their stories. And when I retell them, I am more interested in capturing this drama and spirit than in subjecting the story to the tyranny of ‘what really happened’ (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 335).

She also states she could not keep the original unaltered – “I sometimes took liberties – by changing dates, by reconstructing events and by collapsing characters or incidents” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 324) – or avoid selecting, among the divergent versions of the same story she had heard, the ones that she sympathized with the most: “there were [...] certain stories that I tended to – as I became more involved in the girls' personalities – believe and give more weight to.” (NEA Podcast, 9/2/2010) Her story is certainly an intertextual one, but it draws its sources from the many stories she heard, for “it was before the time of lots of recordings, [...] and imagine everything being so controlled by the state, you know, having an official press. It was an oral culture. There wasn't that much written down about them.” (NEA Podcast, 9/2/2010).

Another interesting aspect is the amount of narrative layers we, readers, find in the novel: we know this story is written by an author, the *gringa dominicana* (who is also a character in the novel), who went over to the Dominican Republic to interview the surviving sister, Dedé, who also tells her own story of what her sisters' lives were like. The sisters supposedly take over the novel and tell their own stories, but since we, readers, know of the *gringa dominicana*'s interview with Dedé, we know this is all just a reconstruction.

In the end of the story, we also learn that Dedé herself did not see what really happened on the day of her sisters' deaths, but that she has re-imagined her own version of it after hearing all the stories she had been told (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 301). The novel tries to make us readers aware not only of how many narrators have already told and re-told this anecdote, but also of the process of narrativization itself, of how complex it is. Hayden White (2006) states that once language can no longer be considered "a transparent instrument of representation", it has become impossible to dissociate the process of historicizing from that of narrativizing, because it is only by narrativization that a series of events can be transformed into a sequence, divided into periods and represented as a process" (WHITE, 2006, p. 30).

The process of narrativization, Linda Hutcheon (1988, 1989) claims, involves the imposition of a constructed (not found) order upon events, which are composed into a narrative. This process also involves the afore-mentioned transformation of brute events into meaning-granted facts. Regarding this selection, Hutcheon states that the important question is which and whose facts end up making it into history – which is very similar to some of the questions that seem to be implicitly posed by Alvarez's novel, which challenge the accounts of official history: in the context of a dictatorship, and more specifically of the Dominican Trujillato, what is it that can be told, who has been granted the authority to do so and what has happened to the other versions of that brutal and repressive past?

When analyzing History and Literature in the Caribbean, Édouard Glissant notes that both of them seem to be totalizing systems that consolidate grandiose ideals about the Western civilization. Such systems have become operative through an ideology of "dominant sameness" (GLISSANT, 1981, p. 70) that assigns to diversity and difference a place located in the margins of documentation or representation. He also states that "History ends where the histories of those people once reputed to be without history come together" (GLISSANT, 1981, p. 64). It is, in fact,

a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at the time when it alone 'made' the history of the World. If Hegel relegated African peoples to the ahistorical, Amerindian people to the prehistorical, in order to reserve History for European peoples exclusively, it appears that it is not because these African or American peoples 'have entered History' that we can conclude today that such a hierarchical conception of 'the march of History' is no longer relevant (GLISSANT, 1981, p. 64).

And that is because the history of the Caribbean people has still not been told. The ahistoricity imposed on Africa passed over the Black Atlantic through slavery and diaspora. Instead, what they have is "nonhistory" (GLISSANT, 1981, p. 62). It is the role of Caribbean theorists and writers to imaginatively reconstruct a past in the void left by Western Historians, re-envisioning and re-creating memory and history by re-writing future pasts in the present, trying to reconstitute a tormented chronology (GLISSANT, 1981, p. 65).

Alvarez seems to accept this role. In an interview, when talking about why she decided to write about the Mirabal sisters she asks: "What is the responsibility of those that survive? To remember, and to remind" (NEA Podcast, 9/2/2010). Besides that, as I have mentioned before, in the introduction to Dedé Mirabal's book *Vivas en Su Jardín*, Alvarez talks about the moment when she decided to write a novel and not a biography on the sisters, "In the late eighties (...) there was still not much written about the Mirabals, so I decided to take shelter in historical fiction. As a German novelist has once said, 'Novels are written in the gaps of history.'" (In: MIRABAL, 2009, p. 12)

Especially concerned with this problematizing of history is a form of postmodern novel which has been singled out by Linda Hutcheon (1988): historiographic metafiction. In this genre the limits and natures of both history and fiction are questioned; the line between both installed and then blurred. Historiographic metafiction "shows fiction to be historically conditioned and history to be discursively structured" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 120). This is done through a myriad of strategies: the use of modern self-reflexivity, the centering of ex-centric characters, the use either of multiple points of view or of an overtly controlling narrator, the play upon the truth and lie of the historical record, the problematizing of subjectivity into history, among others. Linda Hutcheon (1988) starts defining the genre against that of historical novels, as they are famously defined by George Lukács. She contrasts both genres regarding three major defining characteristics of historical novels: the protagonist, the role of historical detail and the presence of historical personages.

As to the first aspect, Lukács seems to defend the idea that the main character of a historical novel "should be a type, a synthesis of the general and particular", since the historical novel was enabled to "enact historical process by presenting a microcosm which

generalizes and concentrates” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 113). Hutcheon opposes to this the idea that protagonists in historiographic metafiction are “anything but proper types: they are the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 114). Besides that, she states that, as historiographic metafiction shares the postmodern belief on plurality and the recognition of difference, “there is no sense of cultural universality” in the genre: “the protagonist of a postmodern novel [...] is overtly specific, individual, culturally and familiarly conditioned in his[her] response to history, both public and private” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.114).

In *In the Time of the Butterflies* the sisters are not representations of typical women of their time and place: they are exceptions, ex-centrics, enemies of the state, women who are shown to have sought to strike down the system for very personal reasons: for love, solidarity, justice. Throughout the novel their personal experiences are interwoven with their political lives. I could cite as an example a passage that is also offered by McCracken (1999): Minerva first learns about the secret of Trujillo – the fact that he is in truth a dictator, a very ambitious man, who has killed many on his way to power and who would kill anyone trying to overthrow him – from Sinita, a ten-year-old schoolmate whose life has been seriously damaged by Trujillo: her uncles, brother and father murdered for opposing him. The night she is told the secret, her menstruation comes down for the first time. Both personal and political coming of ages take place simultaneously, the private and the public shown to be inevitably interwoven in these girls’ lives since the very beginning of the novel.

Moreover, the sisters do not belong to official historiography, rather they have been silenced by it, the story of their fight kept alive only due to the afore-mentioned non-official attempts. One may even say that a microcosm of the Dominican Republic of their time is represented in the novel, but it is surely not a universal one “that generalizes and concentrates” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.113) the essence of the age. Rather, it is a very specific and particular one, which is reinforced by the deployment of the narrative form of the *bildungsroman*. The fact that we learn about the sisters since they were little girls going away to school and watch their lives closely, as told by each of them, till their tragic end demonstrates how “specific, individual, culturally and familiarly conditioned” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.114) was their both public and private involvement with the revolution.

Concerning the second aspect, that of accuracy or truth of detail, it is stated that in historical novels they are irrelevant, sometimes being used only with the purpose of lending

historical faithfulness to the story, of equipping the fictional world with verifiability. Historiographic metafiction, on the other hand, “plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.114). Historical details may be “deliberately falsified” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.114), which points to “the paradox of the *reality* of the past but its *textualized accessibility* to us today” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 114, grifo do autor). Historical data is incorporated but rarely assimilated, foregrounding the process of attempting to assimilate: narrators try to make sense of the historical data they have collected; “as readers, we see both the collecting and the attempts to make narrative order” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.114).

In the novel, there is not much of a concern with the faithfulness to or the verifiability of historical details. As I have already cited above, in the postscript to the novel, Alvarez states that she has deliberately falsified the events she has researched about and that she has inverted the hierarchy of history’s and literature’s referents: “though I had researched the facts of the regime, and events pertaining to Trujillo’s thirty-one-year despotism, I sometimes took liberties – by changing dates, by reconstructing events, and by collapsing characters or incidents. For I wanted to immerse my readers in an epoch in the life of the Dominican Republic that I believe can only finally be redeemed by the imagination.” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 324)

Although Alvarez does not talk explicitly about the fallacy of historical Truth – for we can only know the past through its textual remnants –, her attitude seems to conform to this postmodern idea. Stating that the Dominican Trujillato “can only finally be redeemed by the imagination” is de-naturalizing the grand narrative of History, debunking it of its former power. It is saying that the official version of the past is just another text, selected, emplotted and imposed by the ones in power: a version which serves their ideology well but fails to portray other truths – after all, “there are only *truths* in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness *per se*, just others’ truths” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 109).

We also see one of the novel’s narrators, Dedé, the surviving sister, trying to make sense of the historical data she was left with. As I have mentioned before, as soon as her sisters died, people would come from all over the country to tell her what they knew about their death. “And as they spoke, I was composing in my mind how that last afternoon went.” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 301). Dedé seems to suspect, though, that her version of the story is

nothing but a construct. Earlier, when trying to remember when the problems of the Mirabals with the regime started, she remarks on the nature of memory:

Nonsense, so much nonsense the memory cooks up, mixing up facts, putting in a little of this and a little of that. She might as well hang out her shingle like Fela and pretend the girls are taking possession of her. Better than the ghost of her own young self making up stories about the past (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 72).

The Fela in the comparison is a former servant that has been in the family “forever [...] until she started going wacky after the girls died” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 63). Fela argued that she was possessed by the spirits of the Mirabal sisters, which performed miracles through her: Patria would cure, Mate would heal love woes and Minerva would intercede for impossible causes. Fela is a symbol of the popular deification of the Mirabals, but she is also a symbol of the nature of memory and storytelling. The writer herself has been metaphorically possessed by the Mirabals: it is the dead girls themselves who tell their own story, each with their own specific narrative voice, language and structure. Another interesting aspect about Fela is that she also represents an association with an element of Dominican culture often disregarded by Dominicans – the belief in vodou, which they often deny, for they would rather regard this belief as a typically Haitian trait.

As to the third characteristic, in historical novels historical personages are said to be usually relegated to secondary roles, placed in the novel “as if to hide the joins between history and fiction” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.114). Historiographic metafiction, much on the contrary, “poses that ontological join as a problem” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.115): it seems to ask two questions: “how do we know the past? What do (what can) we know of it now?” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.115). It makes the readers “aware of the need to question received versions of history” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p.115).

The main characters of Alvarez’s novel are historical characters – not mainstream ones, but real ones –, whose history and lives are appropriated by the author and re-invented, re-written with re-visionary purposes. Ex-centric revolutionary women who were murdered by a dictator are portrayed as important subjects and agents of history.

Besides that, we never get from Alvarez the promise that she is going to re-member into history the true story of the legendary Mirabal sisters. Rather, we are made aware since the first chapter, of the constructed nature of this narrative. As I have said before, we know of the *gringa dominicana*’s interview with Dedé and even though we may have the impression that the sisters’ voices are so powerful that they end up taking over the control of the narrative

both from the author – the *gringa dominicana*, Alvarez’s alter ego – and from the narrator – the storyteller, Dedé –, we know that what they say has passed through too many filters to remain as it originally was. Even though the intertexts of the novel are not written ones, for the Mirabals’ story is not recorded in historical documents or archives of any kind – since they have been erased from there by a dictatorship –, these oral texts bear the same narrativization traces present in written ones.

Another important characteristic of historiographic metafiction, later emphasized by Hutcheon (1989) in *The Politics of Postmodernism* is the use of the archive as text. This, she claims, is usually done via paratextual elements such as footnotes, epigraphs, titles, prefaces and epilogues. “Whatever the paratextual *form*”, Linda Hutcheon claims, “the *function* is to make space for the intertexts of history within the texts of fiction” (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 86; grifo do autor).

In the Time of the Butterflies bears some examples of these paratextual elements: on two pages preceding the narrative proper, there is a “wall” of names of people who had been murdered during the Trujillato, among which are the names of the sisters and of the driver in bold – which does not feature in the latest edition of the novel; on the page containing the book’s ISBN number, there is a note which states the book is a “work of fiction based on historical facts referred to in the author’s Postscript on pages 323-324”, followed by another note which claims that, “as in all fiction, the literary perceptions and insights are based on experience, all names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously”; this page is followed by a dedication “For Dedé” and then there is a page with the full name and dates of birth and death of the three dead sisters and of the driver, under the heading “*In Memoriam*”; there is also a content page in which we readers can find out about the novel’s divisions and the years each sister writes from; in the end of the novel, there is Dedé’s epilogue and Alvarez’s postscript, both of which have been cited here before; in the most recent edition of the novel, there is also a note from the author, an essay that had already been published in Alvarez’s non-fictional work, *Something to Declare*, and that was only slightly adapted for its inclusion in the 2010 edition.

So, even though there are not as many paratextual elements as listed by Hutcheon and even though those which are present are not the ones Hutcheon sees as particularly characteristic of historiographic metafiction, the existing paratextual elements do complicate the stability of the truth of the novel’s version of history as well as that of the archive it draws

from. The archive itself, as I have already mentioned here before, is the main divergent aspect in Alvarez's adapted model of historiographic metafiction. She did not have access to what may usually be considered formal archive – historical documents, pictures and newspaper reports, for instance –, but this is a consequence of the time when the Mirabals' story took place: a dictatorship in which both the media and the official version of history were highly controlled by the government. Another important aspect to be taken into consideration is the fact that many Dominicans – like the Mirabals' mother, for instance – were illiterate, their culture predominantly oral: they did not have the means to write down their own version of the happenings; they kept this memory in their tales.

I hope to have shown how Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* problematizes history, inverting the hierarchy of history and fiction's referents, blurring the private and the public, making ex-centric characters the subjects of the history of part of the Trujillato and using as archival sources the oral tales kept by the Dominican population as their version of history. This is a highly metafictional story that successfully makes its readers aware both of the constructed nature of this novel and of the need to question received notions of history – which are also unavoidably discursively constructed.

2 THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MODE

In the previous chapter we have looked into how Julia Alvarez uses and abuses historiographic metafiction in her novel *In the Time of the Butterflies*, arguing that by bending the laws of this postmodern literary genre, the author also problematizes history, questioning the borders between fact and fiction, making ex-centric characters history's central subjects and re-membering traumatic political events of the Dominican Republic's recent past. I am now going to try to investigate how Alvarez incorporates (and subverts) another, this time classic, literary genre into the same novel: autobiography.

As I have mentioned before, *In the Time of the Butterflies* presents a somewhat biographical account of the lives of the four Mirabal sisters, three of which were murdered because of their political activism during the bloody dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. However, Alvarez has refused to call the book a biography. In an interview (NEA Podcast, 9/2/2010), she states that a biography was what she had in mind at first but that, as the versions of what really happened varied a lot according to the source she was tending to – especially in the context of a dictatorship, with written texts being so controlled by the state and from which, consequently, all the records that are left are the oral accounts of people –, she realized that “history itself is the story we tell ourselves about what really happened” (NEA Podcast, 9/2/2010).

Her realization that history is just another story, a constructed discourse highly determined by the ideology of those who produce it, as well as her consequent perception of fact, fiction, history and personal memories as equally valid historical sources are expressed by her not only in the thematic level of the novel but also in its literary form.

In the Time of the Butterflies combines history, fiction and autobiography, classic narrative forms which are highly dependent on the distinction between fact/fiction. Once the border between the two sides of this dichotomy is blurred, the grand narrative operative in each of these genres collapses, their constructed nature and ideological affiliations and implications exposed, their universalizing pretense debunked.

So far I have mentioned Alvarez's inclusion of biographical information on the lives of the flesh and blood sisters in the novel, but we cannot forget to mention that she has also managed to bring her own life story into it. Alvarez re-presents herself in the novel in two

different instances: in the fictional layer of the novel, as a character, and in the novel's paratextual elements, such as the postscript and the "Note from the Author". Her presence complicates even more the already disputed borders between fact, fiction, history and personal memory in the novel.

Alvarez's alter ego in the novel is the unnamed "interview woman", a *gringa dominicana*, a Dominican-born writer who has lived in the United States for a long time and who has gone over to the Dominican Republic to research on the lives of the sisters in order to write a book about them. She pays a visit to the only surviving sister, Dedé Mirabal, in order to hear the sister's personal version of the Mirabals's story. Both in her postscript to the novel and in "A Note from the Author", inserted at the end of the novel's latest edition (as well as in several of the interviews she has given on this novel), Alvarez seems to always insist upon the fact of how her own family's history intertwines with the story of the butterflies at multiple intersecting points.

It is also important to bear in mind that some of the most popular of Alvarez's works could also be considered autobiographical texts. *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents* and *¡Yo!* are novels on the life of Yolanda Garcia, a writer who has emigrated as a child with her family from the Dominican Republic to the United States as political refugees – all of which is also true of Alvarez. Yolanda Garcia has, therefore, been considered by critics, such as David Vázquez (2003), to be Julia Alvarez's alter-ego. In a third novel, *Before We Were Free* (2002), the central character is a teenage cousin of the Garcias's who has stayed with her parents and brother in the Dominican Republic after the emigration of her grandparents, aunt, uncle and cousins to the U.S.A – which is again also true of Alvarez and her relatives. As a consequence, much of the life of the Garcia girls – such as the moment of their emigration to the U.S. and their school life – also gets told in this teenage novel.

Therefore, it is curious to see how Alvarez does not place herself in the margins of the story she narrates in *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Rather, she represents herself in it, even though her presence was not required in the novel. She could have told the story of the sisters without being present in it. She could have sat back and watched it from the margins, but, rather, she chose to represent herself in the novel, further complicating the relationship between public and private, personal and political, memory and history. What I am going to try to discuss here is how and why it is done, mapping out the adjustments that had to be made to the traditional autobiographical form.

The distinctions between the so-called life writing genres – such as novelistic, autobiographical, biographical and history writing – have been rendered superfluous by Leonor Arfuch (2010), who, going on the opposite direction of those critics who try to set clear boundaries between these genres, has defended the notion of the *autobiographical space*. Such a term is a proposition of hers of a new theoretical perspective that allows for a comprehensive integration, rather than separation, of all the different literary genres that concern experience (ARFUCH, 2010, p. 37). She claims that, due to the impossibility of coming to a clear and total formula to properly distinguish between, for instance, an autobiography, a novel and an autobiographical novel, we must focus on the autobiographical space, where readers are able to more freely integrate several focalizations from different registers, the “truthful” and the fictional, in a compatible system of beliefs (ARFUCH, 2010, p. 56). The autobiographical space, Arfuch claims, is not to be regarded as a macrogenre that simply holds a collection of somewhat established and regulated literary forms, but, rather, as a moving, ever-changing and hybrid scenario of manifestation of self-referential motifs (ARFUCH, 2010, p. 74).

Arfuch also states that it is not the content of the tale per se – the collection of happenings, moments and attitudes – that define the grounds of this autobiographical space, but, rather, the – fictional – *self-representational strategies* employed by the author that matter. Not the truth of what happened, but its narrative construction. As an example she cites techniques such as the ways of naming (things and oneself) in the narration, the instability of experience or memory, the point of view, that which is left in the shadow and, more importantly, the story someone chooses to tell about oneself or about another I. According to Arfuch, it is this self-reflexive attitude, this narrative path that will be relevant in the end for the readers’ perception of a text as inhabiting the autobiographical space (ARFUCH, 2010, p. 73).

By undermining genre distinctions – blurring history, novelistic, autobiographical and biographical writing –, while recognizing the impossibility of assuring that the story is being told is the unquestionable and unbiased truth, Julia Alvarez sets the hybrid *In the Time of the Butterflies* in the grounds of this *autobiographical space*. Her readers are able to negotiate the different registers of truth and lie in the story she tells, even though Alvarez does not clearly point these distinctions out to them. The novel is also a very self-reflexive one. Alvarez’s concern with form is shown in the multiple narrative strategies employed by her.

The presence of the author in the novel is one of such strategies. Julia Alvarez complicates the matter of the inside/outside perspective as well as the matter of her involvement with the happenings concerning the life and death of the Mirabal sisters. Even though the book is somewhat of a biographical account on the life of the sisters – telling the story of their lives, as they grow up and get involved in the underground movement, later culminating on their death – Alvarez has managed to insert herself in the book, “mapping” her “personal history on the story of the Mirabals” (VÁZQUEZ, 2003, p. 397). Such an insertion is done in two different moments.

First she presents herself as the interview woman, who is in the Dominican Republic researching on the lives of the sisters in order to write a book on them. Vázquez argues that “the interview woman serves as both a device that propels the plot, and as the person who shapes the narrative as it emerges” (VÁZQUEZ, 2003, p. 397), for it is because of her research that the lives of the sisters get told and it is she who poses the questions that prompts Dedé to lead us into the story of her deceased sisters.

Julia Alvarez also makes herself present in the novel’s paratextual elements, such as the postscript to the novel and in the note from the author, in which her personal history is further mingled with that of the sisters. Alvarez claims her father was also involved in the underground movement, like the Mirabals, and that it was because of this involvement of his that her family ended up having to migrate to the United States. She also tells several anecdotes, for instance, one of how the death of the Mirabals left a mark upon her as a child. “I first heard of the Mirabal sisters”, she writes, “four months after we arrived in this country. My father brought home a *Time* magazine because he’d heard from other exiles in New York City of a horrifying piece of news reported there.” She and her sisters were not told about the contents of that article, because their parents, Alvarez says, “still lived as if the SIM, Trujillo’s dreaded secret police, might show up at our door any minute and haul us away.” After that, Alvarez adds:

But years later, doing research for the novel I was writing, I dug up that *Time* article. I stared at the picture of the lovely, sad-eyed woman who stared back from the gloom of the black and white photo. I was sure I had seen that face before. As I read the article, I recovered a memory of myself as I sat in the dark living room of that New York apartment and paged through this magazine I was forbidden to look at (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 328).

Another anecdote she tells is of how her family ended up helping Minerva Mirabal’s husband to survive in prison, with food and clothes that were originally destined to one of the author’s uncles, who was in prison at the same time as Minerva Mirabal’s husband.

Coincidentally Manolo Tavárez, Minerva Mirabal's husband, was a namesake of Manuel Tavares, Alvarez's uncle (as told in ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 330).

It is curious how we, readers, do not expect to find information on the author's life as we first hold the book. We may expect to find some information about the country of origin of the author in the time that the Butterflies lived in it or we may also expect to find out about the lives of the sisters, but we are certainly surprised by the author's personal involvement with the story. This involvement is not announced in any form in the book's cover or introduction, but as we read the first scene in the novel, the first two people we come across are the interview woman and Dedé Mirabal.

Of course, it is only hinted that the author and the interview woman are the same, for her name is never mentioned, but when, in the end of the novel we read the author's postscript and find out that Julia Alvarez herself went to the Dominican Republic to collect evidence on the sisters and interviewed Dedé Mirabal, the figures of the author and of the interview woman finally merge. So, what happens in this novel is that no autobiographical pact is sealed. The reader always finds him or herself taken by surprise: he or she fails to find a biography in this text, the same way he or she fails to find an autobiography. All one is able to find is a fictional story that tries to rescue and reconstruct a part of the Dominican Republic's recent historical past that has not been narrated in history books.

Another self-representational strategy is the valorizing of Dedé's personal memories. We know that the death of the sisters and their consequent turning into symbols of the political resistance against the regime of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic is one of the reasons why Alvarez decided to write about the Mirabals. However, Dedé Mirabal is still alive and the account given by her on the lives of her sisters plays a central role in Julia Alvarez's narrative choices. Like her sisters, Dedé has a chapter on each of the three time sections of the book and her chapter is always the first one, the one that leads the reader into the narrative of life in that period of time in the Dominican Republic. The impression that we are left with is that the story – that we hear as if it were told by each of the sisters, in a first-person narration – stems from Dedé's personal memories. Like Fela, the Mirabals's house servant who claims to have the dead sisters speak and perform miracles through her, Dedé also functions as the medium through which the dead Mirabal sisters are given voice to.

The "idiosyncratic acts of remembering" (SMITH; WATSON, 2001, p. 6) are put at center stage by Alvarez, as she claims to have been unable to collect a satisfactory amount of

what is traditionally held as historical data, such as newspaper extracts, documents and so on. Her account of the lives of the sisters relies basically on the personal memories of those who were there to see what happened, people she talked to. It also relies on the mementos kept by the family in the Mirabals Museo as well as on letters that were lent to her by the family. Such objects are not used in the novel to invest the narration with veracity. Much on the contrary, the point that Alvarez seems to be trying to make is very distant from assuring that the story she is telling in the novel is the truth. In her postscript to the novel, Alvarez claims to believe that the traumatic events of this time of the Dominican Republic's past "can only finally be understood by fiction, only finally be redeemed by the imagination" (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 324).

I have stated here before that Julia Alvarez questioning of the grand narrative of history makes her see personal memories as a valid form of truth and fiction as the only way to redeem the traumatic events of the Dominican Republic's recent past. Nonetheless, claiming so does not imply that Alvarez has disconnected her work from the temporal, geographical and cultural conditions of the factual world around her. Much on the contrary, she locates her novel very specifically in space and time. However, the boundaries of this time of hers are flexible. It does not attain itself only to the present, reaching into the past. Alvarez and Dedé Mirabal are having a conversation in 1994 about things that happened more than 30 years earlier. Dedé's memories get enacted by the ghosts of their sisters, which takes the narrative back in time. The narrative remains faithfully bound to personal memory archives, but these are not seen as stable, unquestionably truthful repositories of past facts. They are just recollections that change with the telling. The constructed nature of memory, as well as that of history, also gets exposed.

The similarities and differences between fiction and history writing have already been debated in the previous chapter. And as I have demonstrated in this previous chapter, Alvarez seems to be very aware of the rhetorical acts she is performing while writing this attempt of hers of "making 'history' in a sense", by chronicling an event, exploring a certain time period and enshrining a community" (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p.13).

Polyphony is another strategy employed by Alvarez. The book is divided into five different sections – the first one spans from 1938 to 1946, the second section spans from 1948 to 1959, the third takes place in the year of 1960, the fourth section is Dedé Mirabal's epilogue and the last part is the author's postscript. Each of the first three sections contains a

chapter narrated by each of the sisters. Dedé Mirabal's is always the introductory one, the one in which the interview woman asks her questions that make Dedé play the past back in her head. This section is narrated by a third-person narrator and Dedé Mirabal is a focalizing character. Minerva's, Patria's and Maria Teresa's three chapters are narrated in first person, and each of the sisters has her own distinct narrative voice and style. Maria Teresa's chapters are made to look as if they were a copy of the diary she would be writing at that specific time period, containing drawings, diagrams, poems, newspaper clippings and letters. Patria's, Charlotte Rich (2002) claims, seem to have an oral confessional tone, comprising several episodes as they happen in her life, while Minerva's consist of a series of anecdotes, some of which even bear a subtitle, as if her chapters were a series of short stories. So, we can see that *In the Time of the Butterflies* uses both third and first-person narration techniques, having not one but several narrative voices, as each of its different narrators employs her own distinct personal style.

Such diverse self-representational strategies, I argue, are used with political purposes. They are a reflection of the thematic level of the novel. The disruption in form is a consequence of Alvarez's break with the grand narrative of History, the debunking of men as history's central characters, the blurring of the private and public spheres, the questioning of the official versions of the Dominican Republic's dictatorial past, the challenging of the authority of those who are granted the permission and the means to write history.

The superimposition of the autobiographical on the historical is true not only to *In the Time of the Butterflies*. David Vázquez (2003) has previously analyzed this relationship in four of Alvarez's books – namely, *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents*, *¡Yo!*, *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *In the Name of Salomé* – in “I can't be me without my people: Julia Alvarez and the postmodern personal narrative”. In this article he argues that “Alvarez superimposes her autobiographical narrative on the historical figures of her novels in order to re-imagine history (...), clearing a space for individual identity and feminine agency in both the U.S. and the Dominican Republic”. (VÁZQUEZ, 2003, 384) Later he adds that

the superimposition of the autobiographical and the fictional on the historical can offer competing versions of events that foreground how historical narratives are constructed. Because she understands the politics of a 4-sisters-family in a “Latino” culture, Alvarez emphasizes the role that ordinary people play in historical struggles by investing private aspirations with public implications (VÁZQUEZ, 2003, p. 387).

His views are consistent with what is regarded by critics – Smith & Watson (1992), Anderson (2004), Cosslett, Lury & Summerfield (2000) – as the feminist takeover of

autobiography. They have argued that the fact that autobiography rests on the borderline between fact and fiction, the personal and the social, the private and the public, the popular and the academic, the everyday and the literary has provided feminism with an opportunity to display the connection between the personal and the political through the creation and presentation of stories about the self.

In the introduction to *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, for instance, Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield argue that “this kind of disruptive interdisciplinarity”, typical of autobiography, “the challenging of traditional boundaries and definitions, has (...) been central to the feminist project”. “Autobiography”, they state,

provides a meeting place for many different kinds of feminist approach. Feminist approaches in turn have helped to revolutionise the study of autobiography, expanding its definition to include not just a literary genre or a body of texts but a practice that pervades many areas of our lives (COSSLETT et al., 2000, p. 1).

Nevertheless, in order to provide women with agency, autobiography needs to have Man and his meanings unstuck from it. According to Linda Anderson (2004), even though autobiography has been recognized as a distinct literary genre since the late eighteenth century, the autobiographical canon seems to have been defined as such only by modern critics as late as in the 1960’s and 70’s. “Focusing on a particular historical canon of texts which celebrated the extraordinary lives of ‘great men’”, these critics “deduced abstract principles for autobiography based on the ideals of autonomy, self-realization, authenticity and transcendence which reflected their own cultural values” (ANDERSON, 2004, p. 4). They have seen the individual as transcending both social and historical contingency and associated the autobiographical subject with this essentialist Romantic notion of a unified, unique selfhood, which is also the expression of a universal human nature. Thus, such critics have defined autobiography as an authoritative form of ‘truth-telling’ which can be clearly and easily distinguished from fiction.

It is exactly this notion of Man and his meanings that Smith & Watson (1992) argue that has to be unstuck from autobiography, if we are to consider it as a potential site for the de-colonization of the postcolonial subject. In order to do that, they affirm that three “perspectival adjustments” are required: First, we must historicize Western autobiographical practices. Second, we need to “consider the flexibilities of generic boundaries. And third, we have to understand that “what has been designated as Western autobiography is only one form of life-writing” (SMITH; WATSON, 1992, p. xvii - xviii).

With the intent of historicizing Western autobiography, Smith & Watson call our attention to the fact that even though “Western autobiography rests upon a shared belief in a commonsense identification of one individual with another” – which makes all “I”s “potentially interesting autobiographers” – not all “I”s can be considered so. The mythical Western view of Man as “a unique individual”, not belonging to any kind of collectivity, such as “race, nation, sex or sexual preference”, contrasts with the same Western view of the other, the colonized, as an “anonymous”, “amorphous, generalized collectivity” of “undifferentiated bodies”, who have no access to an individuality. “Western autobiography” contributes to the reification of this domination, for it presents “as eternal and natural what is in fact historical and transitory”, since, as a genre, it bears laws against which “the utterances of other subjects are measured and misread”, “judged and found wanting” (SMITH; WATSON, 1992, p. xvii - xviii).

As to the flexibility of generic boundaries, Smith & Watson quote Ralph Cohen, when he states that generic boundaries are “historical assumptions constructed by authors, audiences, and critics in order to serve communicative and aesthetic” and – Smith & Watson add – political “purposes”. The authors affirm that autobiography is now a very popular genre and that with the growing number of such works being written, “the more it surrounds us, the more it defies generic stabilization, the more its laws are broken, the more it drifts toward other practices, the more formerly ‘out-law’ practices drift into its domain” (SMITH; WATSON, 1992, p. xviii).

Concerning the third adjustment, Smith & Watson throw light upon the fact that what has been classified as “Western autobiography is only one form of ‘life-writing’” (SMITH; WATSON, 1992, p. xviii), while defending the idea that there are still many other traditions of life-story telling to be recognized, both oral and written, current and past, from all over the world.

In the Time of the Butterflies does not conform to the Western autobiographical model. The “I” in this novel (or should we say the “I”s? – for there is not one, but many central characters and narrators in this novel) is not the universal Man, a unique individual, ontologically identical to other “I”s. They are women, specifically located in the historical context of the Dominican Republican Trujillato, and their existence cannot be separated from the community ties they have, for they are symbols of the revolution, women who have sacrificed their lives for the better good of their country. In this novel, historical contingency

is not erased, but is further highlighted. Instead of having at its center “the Man without history”, who contains and silences “the heterogeneity of subject peoples” (SMITH; WATSON, 1992, p. xviii), the characters in this novel are the exact opposite: women who are trying to rescue a part of their history that authorities have tried to keep hidden.

In order to bring into discussion a part of Dominican history that is not told in official documents, Alvarez draws from oral history, which seems to constitute for her a historical source as valid as any other evidence that could be found in official archives. By doing so, she manages to recognize another mode of life-story telling, one outside traditional Western autobiographical models.

Besides that, as I have mentioned several times before, generic boundaries are extremely flexible in this novel. Julia Alvarez flirts with many different genres in this work, namely, with historiographic metafiction, which we have looked into in the previous chapter, with auto/biography, whose traces I am trying to expose in this chapter, and with the *bildungsroman*, which I am going to analyze in detail later.

So, I may say that *In the Time of the Butterflies* has made the three perspectival adjustments required by Smith & Watson, so that the deployment of the autobiographical genre can be considered a potential site for the de-colonization of the subject. Smith & Watson affirm that if Man and his meanings are unstuck from it, “for the marginalized woman, autobiographical language may serve as a coinage that purchases entry into the social and discursive economy”, for “the very taking-up of the autobiographical transports the colonial subject into the territory of the ‘universal’ subject and thus promises a culturally empowered subjectivity”. This way, by “deploying autobiographical practices that go against the grain,” the author of such an autobiographical occasion may succeed to “constitute an ‘I’ that becomes a place of creative and, by implication, political intervention” (SMITH; WATSON, 1992, p. xix). And it is exactly such an intervention that I argue that *In the Time of the Butterflies* has managed to perform.

“Both self-representation and self-presentation”, the critics affirm, “have the potential to intervene in the comfortable alignments of power-relationships” as well as “the potential to celebrate through countervalorization another way of seeing, one unsanctioned, even unsuspected, in the dominant cultural surround” (SMITH; WATSON, 1992, p. xx). They also state that, by miming tradition with a difference, the colonial subject manages to expose the

collective, rather than the individual, character of self-representation, while exposing the instability of forms.

We can see that, in Smith & Watson's perspective, the questioning of the law of genre is also the questioning of the separation of the private (as individual) from the public (as political). The challenge to a traditional autobiographical model implies an autobiographical practice that, by narrating the lives of individuals, manages to give an alternative account of the life of a community. They seem to see these two blurring processes of both the borders between literary genres as well as of those between the private and the public spheres as inescapably interrelated. A view which is further revealed by a quotation from Barbara Harlow, which they cite, stating that

in the same way that institutions of power ... are subverted by the demand on the part of dispossessed groups for an access to history, power, and resources, so too are the narrative paradigms and their textual authority being transformed by the historical and literary articulation of those demands (SMITH; WATSON, 1992, p. xxi).

This is an argument which is central to the point I am trying to make in this dissertation, namely that in *In the Time of the Butterflies* literary form is intrinsically related to the political content that its author, Julia Alvarez, is trying to expose. The questioning of the borders between the genres highlights the challenging of historical Truths, the debunking of the centrality of male characters in History as well as the questioning of the separation between the private and the public spheres.

Another interesting theory in the field of autobiographical studies is Leigh Gilmore's *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, published in 2001. In this work Gilmore claims that the project of representing the self and that of representing trauma are closely related. According to her, this is why there is such a "structural entanglement with law as a metaphor for authority and veracity" in texts that claim to be autobiographical, which causes "some writers" to "move away from recognizably autobiographical forms even as they engage autobiography's central questions", in order to protect themselves from the audience's judgment of how truthful the things they say in their works are (GILMORE, 2001, p. 7).

Thus, Gilmore defends the idea that it is not much the matter of truth or lie that should be central in an autobiography. Rather, we should focus on the way some authors' testimonies test a crucial limit in autobiography, "the limit of representativeness", and "its compulsory inflation of the self to stand for others, (...) the way it makes it hard to clarify without falsifying what is strictly unambiguously 'my' experience when 'our' experience is also at

stake” (GILMORE, 2001, p. 5), such as in the case of the personal traumas caused by the Dominican Trujillato.

For Gilmore, autobiography’s cultural work profoundly concerns representations of citizenship and the nation. That is because autobiography offers writers the opportunity to promote themselves as representative subjects, interweaving public and private life, lending substance to the national fantasy of belonging. So, even though

autobiography’s association with and participation in dominant constructions of the individual and the nation seem to taint it ideologically, some postcolonial scholars and writers (...) value it as a mode in which to represent oneself as a speaking subject (GILMORE, 2001, p. 12-13).

Beatriz Sarlo is an Argentine literary and cultural critic who has studied the matter of the recovery of the traumatic past memory of the military dictatorship in Argentina. In the book entitled *Tempo Passado*, she talks about memory, trauma, autobiographical strategies and national identity. She states that

memory was Argentina’s duty after the military dictatorship and that the same is true to most of the other countries in Latin America. Testimony has enabled the condemnation of State terrorism; the idea of “dictatorship never more” is based on the fact that we know what we are referring to when we wish that this does not happen again. As a juridical instrument and as a way to re-construct the past, present where other sources have been destroyed by the ones in charge, the acts of memory were a central piece in the democratic transition, supported sometimes by the State and permanently by social organizations (SARLO, 2005, p. 20; my translation).

She also talks about the relevance of autobiographical strategies for women who seek to re-imagine their cultural identities. She claims that the everyday life stories in which details, originalities and exceptions to the rule are valued are mostly produced by women (specialists in this dimension of the private and the public), who, as marginal subjects, would have been ignored in other kinds of past narratives demand new methods and tend to the systematic writing of memory discourses, such as diaries, letters, pieces of advice and prayers. She also claims it is oral history and testimony that have reinvested with trust this female first person who narrates her (private, public, affective, political) life in order to preserve memory or to mend a wounded identity (SARLO, 2005, p. 16-19).

A very interesting concept she presents is that of post-memory, a way to remember those facts which weren’t directly experienced, which were not lived by oneself. Such facts are not to be remembered in terms of experience, for this is impossible. They are only remembered because they are part of school, institutional, political or family memory canon (SARLO, 2005, p. 90).

According to her, the second generation memory is a public or family memory of auspicious or tragic facts. The prefix post would indicate, as usual, that which comes after. After the memory of those who lived the facts and that, by trying to establish with it this relationship of posteriority, also presents conflicts and contradictions typical of the intellectual examination of a discourse about the past and its effects on sensibility. Memory, mainly post-memory, is inescapably mediated, only made accessible through other people, or mediatic sources. After the Holocaust, for instance, children have reconstituted the experience of their parents based on their parents' memory, but not only on this (SARLO, 2005, p. 92).

The construction of a past by means of accounts and representations that were contemporary to this past is a historical method, not an original strategy of memory. The historian goes over newspapers the same way a son of parents who were kidnapped by the military dictatorship examines photos. What distinguishes them is not the post character of the action, but the subjective involvement in the facts that are being represented. What distinguishes them is the intensity of their subjective dimension. Post-memory for the kids of those who are missing implies the involvement of the subject in its most personal psychological dimension and non-professional aspect of his or her activity (SARLO, 2005, p. 93).

Therefore, Sarlo states, post-memory is always vicarious and mediated. Every experience of the past is vicarious because subjects try to understand something by putting themselves through imagination or information in the shoes of those who actually lived it. It is mediated because there are always two levels of subjectivity involved, there is always this biographical dimension. It bears a fragmentary character (SARLO, 2005, p. 97).

Julia Alvarez's position as a diasporic woman writer may have granted her this ambivalent, double-perspectival position from which she is able to behold this traumatic event both from outside and from within. As Salman Rushdie, also a diasporic writer, puts it,

It may be argued that the past is a foreign country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity. Which seems to me self-evidently true; but I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language experiences this loss in an intensified form. It is made more concrete for him by the physical fact of discontinuity of his present being in a different place from his past, of his being 'elsewhere'. This may enable him to speak properly and concretely on a subject of universal significance and appeal. (RUSHDIE, 1992, p. 12)

"When I'm asked what made me into a writer", Julia Alvarez declares in the About Me section of her webpage, "I point to the watershed experience of coming to this country"

(ALVAREZ: <http://www.juliaalvarez.com/about/>). In *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents*, Alvarez also talks about her (Yoyo is her alter ego) new relationship with language, after the diaspora:

Back in the Dominican Republic growing up, Yoyo had been a terrible student. No one could ever get her to sit down to a book. But in New York, she needed to settle somewhere, and since the natives were unfriendly, and the country inhospitable, she took root in the language (ALVAREZ, 1992, p. 138).

“Migration”, Carole Boyce Davies argues, “creates the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home” (DAVIES, 1994, p. 113). Living on the borderline of history and language, Alvarez is able to draw a new story both for herself and her country.

Therefore *In the Time of the Butterflies* does not concern only an individual trauma caused by family or private problems, but it also voices a collective historical trauma. The trauma suffered by Sinita Perozo, who had all the men in her family assassinated by Trujillo, the one suffered by Dedé Mirabal, who had her sisters imprisoned and then killed by the regime, or even the one suffered by Alvarez and her family, her migration and her separation from her extended family, their fear the SIM might someday show up at their house in New York and take their father are just examples of what the Dominican population has endured because of the Trujillato. Things are just put in a microcosm-macrocosm paradigm, the self inflated to stand for others. The narration of their private experience is the narration of the nation’s public trauma.

Furthermore, since their lives were so closely surveilled by a restricting dictatorship, maybe Alvarez found the Dominicans’ historical trauma could be more safely and freely voiced through fiction. Regulations in fiction are not as strict as those operative in official history. Besides that, fiction provides a space where the discussion between competing versions of past historical events can be raised in a less judicially confrontational manner, while also exposing the idea that there are no true historical facts, only different versions of past events, as told by each social group.

As Julia Alvarez herself states in her postscript to the novel, “I wanted to immerse my readers in an epoch in the life of the Dominican Republic that I believe can only finally be understood by fiction, only finally be redeemed by imagination” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 324). In order to take the public attention away from the truth-or-lie debate, Alvarez chooses fiction over facticity, but she still uses autobiographical techniques as a means to give testimony of the historical trauma her country underwent during the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo.

The suffering the Mirabal sisters and Alvarez's family went through is just a sample, a metonym, of the suffering the whole nation had to face. Appropriating herself of the post-memory of the Mirabals, voicing these traumatic happenings, giving testimony to their existence, she is able to give a resistant account of these events, giving one more step in the direction of healing the national wound left open by Trujillo's bloody dictatorship.

3 THE *BILDUNGSROMAN* REVIEWED

In “The Construction of the Self in U.S. Latina Autobiographies”, Lourdes Torres argues that one of the factors that distinguish men’s from women’s autobiography is its structure. While men’s autobiographies are presented as a chronological linear unit, women’s are usually presented in fragments, also tending to mix genres. In women’s autobiographies “the project of presenting the personal and collective selves takes precedence over conventional stylistics or established structures”. “In a sense”, she states, “the structure is parallel to the content” and that seems to be because “the main thematic concern of (...) autobiographies is the question of identity and the presentation of the self, but in these [women’s] texts [it] is complicated by the problematic of the fragmented, multiple identity” (TORRES, 1998, p. 277).

Torres’s argument is very similar to the point I am trying to make in this dissertation, namely that the disruptive formal strategies used in *In the Time of the Butterflies* are meaningful reflections of the theme of the novel. In the quotation above she links the structure and the theme of novels to the question of the postmodern identity. Identity also constitutes a central issue in another literary genre that is revised in *In the Time of the Butterflies*: the *bildungsroman*.

A kind of novel that first arose in late eighteenth century Germany, the *bildungsroman* originally concerned the development, the maturation or the process of becoming of a sensitive young man as he grows up and gets ready to enter society. It may involve the escape from the repressive atmosphere of home, education (both formal schooling and life experience) and a journey into wild or city life, upon which the character meets mentors and lovers who may guide him through his quest, at the end of which he is going to reappraise his values (FUDERER, 1990; KARAFILIS, 1998; BAKHTIN, 1986; SMITH; WATSON, 2010).

Of course, critics state, the *bildungsroman* can only be used by women after change in their social and economic status starts to take place in society, after the *bildung* becomes possible in real life (FUDERER, 1990, p. 2-3). Fuderer claims that the traditionally male form of the *bildungsroman* offers a woman an opportunity to portray herself as a creature in the process of becoming, struggling to throw off her conditioning, the psychology of oppression (FUDERER, 1990, p. 2). Critics have offered myriad perspectives of the female

bildungsroman, a theory which has been reviewed by Laura Sue Fuderer in *The Female Bildungsroman in English: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism*, published in 1990. We will take a look at some of these definitions.

Female *bildungsroman*, Maureen Ryan states, is a tale of a young woman's recognition that "life offers not limitless possibilities but an unsympathetic environment in which she must struggle to find a room of her own". Bonnie Hoover Braendlin observes that even though the female *bildungsroman* includes a description of adolescent development, its primary focus is "the crisis occasioned by the awakening that takes place in women's late twenties or early thirties" when she recognizes her existence has been "self-sacrificing and self-effacing", and its "resultant struggle for individuality". Susan J. Rosowski defends the distinction between the *bildungsroman* and the awakening novel, regarding the *bildungsroman* as an "outward movement toward self-fulfillment through integration into society" and the awakening novel as "an inward movement toward greater self-knowledge and the realization that the art of living is difficult or impossible for a woman". There are those who question the position of the *bildungsroman* as a "vehicle to express change", since the heroine does not choose her life "after conscious deliberation on the subject", rather, she is alienated by gender-roles "from the very outset", which makes her initiation "less a progression towards maturity than a regression from full participation in adult life" (FUDERER, 1990, p. 3-5).

In "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)", Mikhail Bakhtin investigates the history of the novel genre, according to how the image of the main character is constructed. In order to do so, he analyzes the particular kind of plot, of time and of the vision of the world in each category, looking into the travel novel, the novel of ordeal, the biographical novel and the *bildungsroman*.

In the travel novel, he says, the hero is a point moving in space, with no essential distinguishing characteristics. The spatial and static social diversity of the world is portrayed by means of differences and contrasts, due to the absence of historical time, which causes alien social groups, nations, countries and ways of life to be perceived as "exotic". Time itself is very poorly developed in this kind of novel, even biological time. The image of the main character is as static as that of the world that surrounds him [*sic*]; therefore, this novel does

not recognize human emergence and development. Even if his [*sic*] social status changes sharply, the hero remains unchanged (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.10-11).

In the novel of ordeal (such as the Greek romance, the Christian hagiographies, the medieval chivalric novel, the baroque novel, the adventure-heroic novel and the pathos-filled psychological sentimental novel), Man and his [*sic*] qualities are presented from the beginning, but these qualities are going to be verified by a series of tests that will take place along the novel. These stories are like parentheses between two contiguous moments of the hero's biography, retarding the normal course of life but not changing it. They begin when a deviation from the normal course of life and end when life resumes its normal course. They take place in adventure time, a time taken out of history and biography, in which the work of several years can be done in one night. Consequently, the novel of ordeal lacks the means for actual measurement as it lacks historical localization and essential location in the whole of the individual's life process. The surrounding world and the secondary characters are transformed into a mere background for the hero, a setting. So, the external world lacks independence and historicity. This world is not capable of changing the hero, it only tests him [*sic*]. Likewise the hero does not affect this world, leaving everything in the place it was when his [*sic*] story began (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.12-16).

The biographical novel (such as the form of success/failure works and deeds, the confessional form, the hagiographic form and the family-biographical form) verses on the basic and everyday aspects of any life course, but it lacks any true process of becoming or development of the hero. His [*sic*] life and fate change, assume structure and evolve, but his [*sic*] features remain unchanged. Time is biographical and realistic, events are localized in the whole of the hero's life process. Historical time is still embryonic (BAKHTIN, 1986, p. 17-19).

The main distinguishing feature of the *bildungsroman* is that it presents the image of man [*sic*] in the process of becoming. Bakhtin mentions there are many different kinds of *bildungsroman* and many definitions of it as well, that vary according to each critic's opinion: some are more biographical or autobiographical, others focus on the hero's education, but they all bear certain features that distinguish the *bildungsroman* from other literary forms. In this kind of novel, for instance, the hero is not a character that was made to fit to a certain historical background, rather, its characters unfold from a certain landscape as if they had been present there from the beginning. Time, historical time, has been introduced into the

hero, changing in a fundamental way the significance of all aspects of his [sic] destiny and life. Neither is the hero a constant. The changes he [sic] suffers acquire plot significance, for they are not his private affairs, with only private and biographical results, but have implications in the historical future. Man [sic] emerges along with the world and he [sic] reflects the historical emergence of the world itself. The hero of the *bildungsroman* does not live within an epoch, but in-between two epochs. The transition from one to another is accomplished in him [sic] and through him [sic] (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.17-24).

The characters in *In the Time of the Butterflies* seem to present these characteristics. They are portrayed in their “process of becoming”, from their early adolescence till the death of three of them. We watch as the lives of the Mirabal sisters unfold from the Dominican Republic of the time of the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, as the changes in their selves end up changing the world around them, as a series of mentors lead them through their quests, as they get educated both at school and university and in their daily lives by the experiences they have, as the love they have for their beloved ones make them reappraise their former values, as they fight against sexism in every sphere of their private, religious, family, love and public lives.

In *In the Time of the Butterflies*, the form of the *bildungsroman* is used differently by the four narrative voices in the novel. Minerva, Patria, Maria Teresa and Dedé narrate the trajectory of their lives from their early adolescence into their adulthood. We read of their education, their schooling, of the shaping experiences they had, of the mentors they meet, of the change caused by love in their lives, of the social beings they end up becoming and of the sacrifice they have to endure for choosing to be who they are, for fighting for their reappraised values.

In Minerva’s first chapter, for instance, we learn of how she managed to convince her father to let her go away to boarding school. Before she starts her tale, she compares herself to a bunny she once tried to help escape its cage. She argues she holds no similarity with it, for the bunny did not exit the cage, it did not move, even though she held the cage’s door open and slapped its back. As to her escape, she states:

And that’s how I got free. I don’t mean just going to sleepaway school on a train with a trunkful of new things. I mean in my head after I got to Inmaculada and met Sinita and saw what happened to Lina and realized that I’d just left a small cage to go into a bigger one, the size of the whole country (ALVAREZ, 2010, p.13).

All along her *bildungsroman*, we see Minerva trying to “throw off her conditioning, the psychology of oppression”. We also see that life offers her “an unsympathetic environment”, but that she is willing to struggle to find a room of her own.

The *bildungsroman* also contributes profoundly to the interweaving between the private and the public spheres intended by Alvarez. While at school, Minerva learns about Trujillo’s secret: that he has become president in a sneaky way; that he has killed those who have gone against him, that he has made many beautiful young women his lovers; that he, whose portrait hung on her house’s wall (as it did on almost every Dominican house) beside “the picture of Our Lord Jesus with a whole flock of the cutest lambs” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p.17), was no saint. Upon hearing of Trujillo’s secret, Minerva menstruates for the first time. By choosing to make these two events simultaneous, Alvarez inseparably links biological and political, physical and psychological maturation.

However, Minerva’s attitude towards Trujillo has not been antagonistic from the very beginning. While Trujillo was courting Lina Lovatón, for instance, Minerva says that she, like all of her colleagues, was falling in love with him:

Except for Sinita, I think we were all falling in love with the phantom hero in Lina’s sweet and simple heart. From the back of the drawer where I had put it away in consideration for Sinita, I dug up the little picture of Trujillo we were all given in Citizenship Class. I placed it under my pillow at night to ward off nightmares (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 22)

As we learn about her life, we see Minerva’s identity in a process of true emergence. Her qualities are not all ready-made, clearly defined from the beginning. It is the experiences that she goes through, stories she hears and things she sees that change her little by little, making her who she is. There are many key experiences she goes through that contribute to shaping her identity: her meetings with mentors, such as Sinita and Virgilio – “Three years stuck in Ojo de Agua, and I was like that princess put to sleep in the fairy tale. (...) When I met Lío, it was as if I woke up. The givens, all I’d been taught fell away (...)” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 86) –, the imprisonment of her father by Trujillo and his consequent death, her finding out about her father’s other family and the support she offered them after her father’s death, her marriage to a political, Manolo, who leads the underground by her side, her going to prison and coming back home subdued – “My months in prison elevated me to superhuman status. (...) I hid my anxieties and gave everyone a bright smile. If they had only known how(...) much it took me to put on the hardest of all performances, being my old self again” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 259) –, but soon gathering forces to fight for the freedom of her and her sisters’ husbands.

Minerva Mirabal subverts many of the pre-set gender-roles she has been ascribed. She drives, she goes to school and to the university, she marries for love, she declines the courtship of the dictator, she fights for the freedom of her husband, she plays an important part in the underground and ends up being murdered because of this. The use of the literary form of the *bildungsroman* in order to tell the story of Minerva Mirabal is proved to be a valid choice of a vehicle to express change.

Patria Mirabal's *bildungsroman* opens with a description of her birth. Having gotten married to a farmer at the age of sixteen, Patria had two kids. A very religious woman, she did not consider Minerva's political inclinations to be an affair fit for women. Early in the novel, trying to convince Minerva to forget about the revolution, she tells her sister that politics "is a dirty business (...). That's why women shouldn't get involved" (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 51).

Patria's awakening only takes place later in her life. First, with the miscarriage of the third baby she was expecting, she starts to question her religious faith. Looking at Trujillo's picture placed besides the picture of the Good Shepherd on the wall of her mother's house, she claims to understand Minerva's hatred for Trujillo.

My family had not been personally hurt by Trujillo, just as before losing my baby, Jesus had not taken anything away from me. But others had been suffering great losses. (...) I had heard but I had not believed (...) How could our loving, all-powerful Father allow us to suffer so? I looked up, challenging Him. And the two faces merged! (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 53)

After having been married for eighteen years, Patria realizes that she had "disappeared into what" she "loved" (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 148). It is only with her first-born son's involvement with the underground that she becomes more inclined towards the revolution. Pregnant for the fourth time, Patria decides to name the son she is expecting Raul Ernesto, after while in a religious retreat in the mountains, she witnesses the scene of a revolutionary young boy being shot by one of the government's *guardias*.

Coming down from that mountain, I was a changed woman. I may have worn the same sweet face, but now I was carrying not just my child but the dead boy as well. My stillborn of thirteen years ago. My murdered son of a few hours ago. (...) *I'm not going to sit back and watch my babies die, Lord, even if that's what You in Your great wisdom decide* (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 162).

Patria seems to see herself as the mother of all those who suffer because of Trujillo and she sees the need to fight for all of them. Private religious and public political lives are blurred. The use of the form of the *bildungsroman* helps blurring the borders between the private and public spheres of her life even further. Such a blurring is also present when she links her home to the revolution. First, she states that she has become her house: "Patria

Mercedes was in those timbers, in the nimble workings of the transoms, she was in those wide boards on the floor and that creaky door opening on its old hinges” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 148). Then she says that her house has become the motherhouse of the revolution. “So it was between these walls hung with portraits, including El Jefe’s, that the Fourteenth of July Movement was founded. Our mission was to effect an internal revolution rather than wait for an outside rescue” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 167). She compares the private life of her family to the political activities that took place within that same environment.

It was on this very Formica table where you could still see egg stains from my family’s breakfast that the bombs were made. Nipples, they were called. It was the shock of my life to see María Teresa, so handy with her needlepoint, using tweezers and little scissors to twist the fine wires together.

It was on this very bamboo couch where my Nelson had, as a tiny boy, played with the wooden gun his grandfather had made him that he sat now with Padre Jesús, counting the ammunition for the .32 automatics we would receive in a few weeks in a prearranged spot. (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 167)

Patria is changed by the world around her while she also changes this world. The private affairs of her life, as well as those of her sisters’, have implications in the historical future of the Dominican society. Her identity emerges day after day, year after year, shaped by the experiences she faces.

We learn of María Teresa’s *bildungsroman* as we read her diary, where she writes about every aspect of her daily life, the poems she enjoys, the loves she has, the resolutions she makes. Trujillo is very present in her private life. When writing about the Benefactor’s Day, she says she feels very lucky for having him as president and that she feels very special for having been born in the same month as he did (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 37). After Minerva tells her about Trujillo’s secret, she grows suspicious, but her feelings for Trujillo do not change immediately. As she writes in her diary,

I see a *guardia*, and I think, who have you killed. I hear a police siren, and I think who is going to be killed. See what I mean?

I see the picture of our president with eyes that follow me around the room, and I am thinking he is trying to catch me doing something wrong. Before, I always thought our president was like God, watching over everything I did.

I am not saying I don’t love our president, because I do. It’s like if I were to find Papá did something wrong. I would still love him, wouldn’t I? (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 39-40)

For her Trujillo is both like God and like a father. He is George Orwell’s Big Brother, the panoptical who watches over everything she does. He is like a father whom she would continue loving even if she knew he had done something wrong. He is present in her daily life, present in her simplest everyday thoughts.

When Hilda, one of Minerva's subversive friends gets caught, Mate has to bury the first of a series of diaries, the one she kept while she was at school (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 43). After her father's death she asks Fela for a spell she could use for a bad person and she casts this spell on Trujillo, as she would have done on a bad lover (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 121). She tells of the marches women had to go to: "It looked like the newsreels of Hitler and the Italian one with the name that sounds like fettuccine" (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 131). In another march, she sees Trujillo's daughter, Angelina, in the heat, with "a gown sprinkled with, rubies, diamonds, and pearls, and bordered with 150 feet of Russian ermine" (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 134) and she almost feels sorry for the girl: "I wondered if she knew how bad her father is or if she still thought, like I once did about Papá, that her father is God" (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 135). When Mate goes to the university in the capital, she gets involved with the revolution. The drawings of dress and shoes in her diaries get replaced by bomb diagrams. Soon she falls in love with a member of the underground, Leandro Rodríguez. Like Minerva before her, Mate gets divided between love and the revolution, but she says for her "love is the deeper struggle" (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 147).

It is from her third diary, the one she kept in prison, that we learn about what happened to the Mirabals while they were in La Victoria. There she makes friends with the prostitutes that were locked in the same cell as she was, mainly Madalegna, whom she claims to have learned so much from: "This has been the most meaningful experience of my life" (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 233).

This friendship helps her see that to have a relationship with someone "what matters is the quality of the person", "what someone is inside themselves", not "what they've done or where they come from" (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 230). While in prison, she wonders what the real connection between people is: religion, color of the skin, money? Love among women? "There is something deeper. Sometimes I really feel it in here, especially late at night, a current going among us, like an invisible needle stitching us together into the glorious, free nation we are becoming" (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 239). She seems to be referring to sisterhood, political solidarity between women, bell hooks' ideal women alliance that should go beyond religion, color and class issues, bonding women together in their common and diverse struggle.

Prison is the most shaping experience of Mate's life, as she herself claims. She is tortured by guards to convince her husband Leandro to talk but she is unable to tell on the

guards to the Organization of American States. When confronted about it by Minerva, she says that they are just victims of the system, like Minerva herself used to tell her. Minerva argues that “victims can do a lot of harm. And this isn’t personal (...). This is principle”. To which Mate replies that she “never was good at understanding that difference so crucial to my sister. Everything’s personal to me that’s principle to her, it seems” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 250).

Having been released by the government, her sentence as of all the other political women converted to house arrest, María Teresa states:

I feel sad to be leaving. Yes, strange as it sounds, this has become my home, these girls are like my sisters. I can’t imagine the lonely privacy of living without them.

I tell myself the connection will continue. It does not go away because you leave. And I begin to understand the revolution in a new way (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 250).

That statement made on the day of her release is very different from the one made eighty days after her incarceration. María Teresa had claimed that “Like Dedé”, she “just didn’t have the nerves for the revolution, but unlike her, I didn’t have the excuse for a bossy husband” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 240). It shows the emergence of María Teresa’s identity, how she has been changed by the world around her, how she has reappraised her values at the end of her journey.

Dedé’s awakening does not take place until late. Unlike her sisters, she did not go to school but stayed home to help her father in the family’s shop. As a teenager she, like her sister Minerva, had been infatuated with Virgilio Morales, whom she did not know to be a communist until the day Mate read it in the paper, out loud for her mom:

She [Dedé] didn’t really know Lío was a communist, a subversive, all the other things the editorial had called him. She had never known an enemy of state before. She had assumed such people would be self-servicing and wicked, low-class criminals. But Lío was a fine young man with lofty ideals and a compassionate heart. Enemy of state? Why then, Minerva was an enemy of state. And if she, Dedé, thought long and hard about what was right and wrong, she would no doubt be an enemy of state as well. (...) she didn’t understand until that moment that they were really living – as Minerva liked to say – a police state.

(...)What was she going to do about it now that she did know?

Small things, she decided. (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 75)

Dedé was not the kind of person to be prone to the abstractness of the revolution. In fact, she was much more practical than that, as she herself declares:

Thinking back, Dedé remembers a long lecture about the rights of the *campesinos*, the nationalization of sugar, and the driving away of the Yanqui imperialist. She had wanted something practical, something she could use to stave off her growing fears. *First, we mean to depose the dictator in this and this way. Second, we have arranged for a provisional*

government. Third, we mean to set up a committee of private citizens to oversee free elections. She would have understood talk like that (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 77).

Comparing herself to Virgilio, when he has to leave the country in exile in a hurry, she states: “Ay, how she wished she could be that grand and brave. But she could not be. She had always been one to number the stars” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 78-79). But her supposed lack of bravery seems to have been influenced by other external circumstances. When asked about her involvement with the underground by the interview woman, for instance, Dedé declares that:

“Back in those days, we women followed our husbands.” Such a silly excuse. After all, look at Minerva. “Let’s put it this way,” Dedé adds. “I followed my husband. I didn’t get involved.”

(...) Then, as if to redeem herself, she adds, “I didn’t get involved until later.”

“When was that?” the woman asks.

Dedé admits it out loud: “When it was already too late.” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 171-172)

When Dedé tried to get her husband Jaimito’s permission to attend one of the underground meetings that were usually held in Patria’s house, Jaimito would not let her, getting furious at her, claiming that he “was the one to wear pants” in their house (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 177). So she decides to leave her husband. “She would leave him. Next to that decision, attending the underground meeting over at Patria’s was nothing but a small step after the big turn had been taken” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 180). But having her sons taken away from her by her husband, she gives up her divorce, saying she could not “desert” her kids (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 182). The fighting or war vocabulary referring to Dedé’s marriage continues to be used by her sister, Minerva, who tries to convince Dedé to be patient, telling her that she is brave enough for the revolution, but that she needs to fight “one struggle at a time” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 186). The week following this episode, Dedé’s sisters get arrested and worrying about her marriage becomes pointless.

After her sisters’ death, Dedé spent a long time in pain, but after a while, she started to think that maybe it was for something that the girls died and she was able to manage the grief. It became something she could bear because she “could make sense of it. Like when the doctor explained how if one breast came off, the rest of me had a better chance. Immediately, I began to live without it, even before it was gone” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 310).

Her cancer is used as a metaphor again in the following page. As Dedé overhears a special news program on her sisters on TV, she listens to the presenter saying that:

“Dictatorships”, he was saying, “are pantheistic. The dictator manages to plant a little piece of himself in every one of us.”

Ah, I thought, touching the place above my heart where I did not yet know the cells were multiplying like crazy. So this is what is happening to us (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 311).

The cancer that had attacked the Dominican society had to be extirpated. The consequences of such a drastic removal, however, would have to be endured for a while. The painful treatment and trauma left by such a disease were suffered not only by Dedé but by the whole Dominican society. The parallel established by Dedé between her cancer, her pain, the death of her sisters and the dictatorship is an instance of how the identity at emergence in this *bildungsroman* is not the Mirabal sisters’ alone, but the collective identity of all the Dominican people.

Due to this symbolic quality of the characters of the Mirabals, some critics argue that Alvarez fails in re-writing the Dominican national identity or that what Alvarez writes is not a novel, a biography or a *bildungsroman* but a “hagiographic commemorafiction” of the sisters.

When comparing Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies* to Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones*, Lynn Chun Ink states that:

Although Alvarez’s text itself serves to make their efforts visible by retelling their story to North Americans, the narrative in effect effaces their contributions to the Dominican nation because it ultimately recasts the sisters into traditional roles within the private sphere, reinstating gendered national dichotomies (INK, 2004, p. 795).

As an example of this recasting, she cites the discovery of a women’s community in prison and the “return to their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers upon their release from prison”. She also cites the “union of husbands and wives under the cause” and the disintegration of the family “once the revolution is over”. She concludes by saying that “*In the Time of the Butterflies* succeeds in stripping the Mirabals of the very national agency it attempts to restore, reinventing them into static symbols of the nation”. And adds that “What is then refashioned is a collectivity that mirrors the patriarchal nation that ultimately denies women complete and free access to national agency.” To conclude she states that although the novel “re-envision a community in which nation building is shared between genders and across races and classes, it renders the Mirabals as symbols that are ultimately bereft of national agency” (INK, 2004, p. 795).

Ink’s argument goes on the opposite direction of what I argue here. In fact, the use of the literary form of the *bildungsroman* helps de-mythologize the image of the Mirabal sisters. We see they were not special people who have been born heroes, but ordinary women of their

time, who faced struggles common not only to all Dominican women of their time but even to what some women nowadays go through every day. They had problems at all levels in their relationships within the patriarchal society: with their father, their husbands, their jobs, their religion, their political leader. They fight patriarchy in all these levels. We watch as these struggles help shaping their individual identity, how connected the emergence of this identity is to the collective national Dominican identity. The use of the form of the *bildungsroman* enacts the feminist motto that states that “the personal is political”. Political and national agency is found by the Mirabals in the everyday struggles faced in their at once ordinary and symbolic lives.

Making a point similar to that defended by Lynn Chun Ink (2004), Trenton Hickman (2006) defends the idea that the form of the narrative that Julia Alvarez ends up writing on the sisters should be called a hagiographic commemorafiction, which she explains as follows:

because Alvarez stubbornly wishes to retain the sisters' humanity, she finds a way to make these sisters iconic through a postmodern hagiography, a mode that allows them all their quirks and weaknesses even as it honors their lives as ones worth emulating. (...) Alvarez crafts a commemorative fiction – or a “commemorafic-tion” – that reminds us of its artifice even as it asks us to respect, commemorate, and emulate the sisters' sacrifices through our own personal resolve and dedication (HICKMAN, 2006, p. 103).

According to Bakhtin (1986), a biographical hagiography lacks any true process of becoming or development of the hero: life and fate change, assume structure and evolve, but his features remain unchanged. By the exemplification of the process of emergence of the identity of the Mirabals, I hope to have proved this not to be the case of the characters of the sisters as they are fashioned by Alvarez. They are all portrayed in a process of true becoming in a very specific time and space, they are not ready-made characters, designed to fit a certain historical background. The novel seems to be fully aware of the danger of mythologization. There is a passage, for instance, located right in the beginning of the novel, in which Dedé catches herself using generalizations to describe her sisters:

Dedé realizes she is speaking to the picture of Minerva, as if she were assigning her a part, pinning her down with a handful of adjectives, the beautiful, the intelligent, the high-minded Minerva. “And María Teresa, *ay, Dios*.” Dedé sighs, emotion in her voice in spite of herself. “Still a girl when she died, *pobrecita*, just turned twenty-five.” Dedé moves on to the last picture and rights the frame. “Sweet Patria, always her religion so important.”

“Always?” the woman says, just the slightest change in her voice.

“Always”, Dedé affirms, used to this fixed, monolithic language around interviewers and mythologizers of her sisters. “Well, *almost always*.” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 6-7; my emphasis)

Our *bildungsroman* starts to unfold only after this statement. The use of the *bildungsroman* enables the humanization of the mythological Mirabal sisters. Their daily lives

are portrayed in the novel, their privacy, their little experiences. Such a perspective offers the reader an insight into what everyday life in the Dominican Republic during the Trujillato was like. This insight helps us see the sisters not as martyrs, but as symbols, their lives mirroring those of so many at their time. Their existence is therefore not individual, but collective. Through the weaving of overarching political themes, their lives are rendered a microcosm of the Dominican Trujillato macrocosm.

On analyzing Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* as a *bildungsroman*, Maria Karafilis (1998) points out three of Cisneros's revisions on the genre. One of them is the emphasis placed on the communal rather than on the individual, a revision that is also implemented in *In the Time of the Butterflies*. As David Vázquez (2003) states when analyzing four of Alvarez's works:

By virtue of the autobiographical traces in her work, individual subjectivity is registered only as it is matrixed with the community. Thus, rather than emphasizing liberal individualism, Alvarez constructs her autobiographical narratives so that subjectivity only obtains its authority through its relationship with her community" (VÁZQUEZ, 2003, p. 384).

As in Bakhtin's (1986) definition of the *bildungsroman*, the changes suffered by the Mirabals have plot significance, since they are not their private affairs alone, with only private and biographical results, but have implications on the historical future of the Dominican society. They emerge along with the world around them and they reflect the historical emergence of the world itself. The heroines of this *bildungsroman* do not live within an epoch, but in-between two epochs. The transition from an epoch to another, like in Bakhtin's definition of the *bildungsroman* is accomplished in them and through them.

Likewise, when David Vázquez talks about collective identity, he further extends his argument by affirming that "In moments of broad social crisis, the combination and redeployment of genres that appear in postmodern texts can point to larger issues related to identity and community". Then, he links individual and national identity, arguing that since "individual subjectivity forms the basis for community formation and national belonging, the renegotiation of individual identity can have broad implications for society". After that, he quotes Linda Hutcheon (1986), when she says that "the personal is often superimposed on the public in a manner that politicizes the experiences of people who have not been the legitimate subjects of history" (VÁZQUEZ, 2003, p. 386) – a point I have already touched upon in our first chapter, on the revisionary historical project that Alvarez ends up acting out when writing *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Vázquez concludes by saying that:

The full historical imbrication that Alvarez works into these novels [*In the Time of the Butterflies* and *In the Name of Salomé*] helps to reconstruct the history of the nation – which also poses new possibilities for a transformative history of the self. Alvarez accomplishes this engagement by filtering historical details through the psyches of her characters, foregrounding personal memories and subjective judgments (VÁZQUEZ, 2003, p. 395).

The engagement between the reconstructed histories of the self and the nation in *In the Time of the Butterflies* is further enabled by the use of the *bildungsroman*, a literary form that, by portraying the process of emergence of an individual's identity within a specific historical context and its implication in the historical future of a specific society, ends up “filtering historical details through the psyches of (...) characters, foregrounding personal memories and subjective judgments” (VÁZQUEZ, 2003, p. 395).

As I have mentioned before, for Alvarez, fact, fiction, history and personal memories constitute equally valid historical sources. Her appropriation of the classically male form of the *bildungsroman* endows her characters with agency, helps de-mythologizing their image and re-constructing a history of the self and of the nation, through a microcosm/ macrocosm paradigm, while drawing the readers' attention to the fact that what she is offering is not a pedagogical assigning of a Dominican identity but just another story of the Dominican past, one that has not been told by official documents or in History books.

4 HISTORY AND SUBJECTIVITY

Julia Alvarez, the author of the book I am analyzing in the present dissertation, was not born in the Dominican Republic, but in New York City in 1950. When she was three months old, her parents, both Native Dominicans, decided to move back to the Dominican Republic, where she was raised, “preferring the dictatorship of Trujillo to the U.S.A. of the early 50s” – as she herself states in the “About Me” section of her website. When reading her webpage, one is also informed that once back in the Dominican Republic, her father got involved in the underground movement to overthrow Trujillo again “and soon my family was in deep trouble. We left hurriedly in 1960, four months before the founders of that underground, the Mirabal sisters, were brutally murdered by the dictatorship” (<http://www.juliaalvarez.com/about/>).

The story of her migration, of how her parents, her sisters and she managed to find space and identity within American society is the subject of two of her novels: *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents* and *Yo!*. In the novel analyzed here, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Alvarez turns her (and her readers’) attention to her roots, to her home-country, to the reason why her family had to leave the Dominican Republic, to the trauma that they (together with countless other Dominican and Haitian citizens) have undergone.

In *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Alvarez is able to re-member traumatic past events that have not been told before by traditional historiography. This way, her book ends up not only concerning private traumatic experience, but also touching upon collective political issues of history, memory and nationalism.

So far in this dissertation I have analyzed how both traditional and postmodern literary forms, namely historiographic metafiction, autobiography and *bildungsroman*, are used and abused in *In the Time of the Butterflies*. I have argued that the blurring of these three genres and the bending of their formal boundaries are narrative strategies employed by the author in order to stress the political content of the novel, that formal innovation denotes the disruptive nature of the novel’s content in relation to the accounts of traditional historiography. It helps re-membering another past, one that was experienced by those who inhabit the margins of representation. Such past cannot be prevented from being forgotten due to the ex-centric condition of its protagonists, who are not granted space to re-present it. As Catherine Hall

puts it, “memory, as we know, is an active process which involves at the one and the same time forgetting and remembering”. She quotes Toni Morrison’s concept of re-memory to claim that if a society wants to come to terms with its past, it needs to re-memory it. “If such memories are not re-membered”, she adds, “then they will haunt the social imagination and disrupt the present”. (HALL, 1996, p. 66)

When writing about how her personal life intertwines with the life of the Mirabals, in the note placed at the end of the latest edition of the novel, Julia Alvarez states that:

The three heroic sisters and their brave husbands stood in stark contrast with the self-saving actions of my own family and other Dominican exiles. Because of this, the Mirabal sisters haunted me. Indeed, they haunted the whole country. (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 331)

Dominicans and Haitians have been prevented by traditional national historical accounts from exorcising the ghost of the past traumatic experiences of the Trujillato. With the re-remembering enacted by the contemporary fiction produced by Caribbean American women writers who come from the island of Hispaniola, such as Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones* and Julia Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Haitians and Dominicans are offered the means to articulate an alternative national identity for themselves. In this chapter I am going to analyze how *In the Time of the Butterflies* questions traditional conceptions of (national) identity, by intertwining the private and the public, the personal and the political, individual and collective, self and other, fact and fiction, history and subjectivity. Now we are going to look into some of these concepts in detail.

The reason why the question of identity has been so vigorously debated in social theory these days, according to Stuart Hall, is because the old identities which have “stabilized the social world for so long are now in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the modern individual as a unified subject”. That is because, he argues, there is some kind of structural change that has been transforming modern societies in the late twentieth century. Such change is “fragmenting the cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and nationality” which used to clearly and firmly locate us as social individuals. “These transformations are also shifting our personal identities” and fragmenting our subjectivities. This double displacement – “de-centering individuals both from their place in the social and cultural world and from themselves – constitutes a ‘crisis of identity’ for the individual” (HALL, 2007, p. 596-597).

Identity, Hall states, “bridges the gap between (...) the personal and the public worlds” – and that is why this is a concept of such a great relevance to our present analysis of Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies*. “The fact that we project ourselves into these cultural identities”, he adds, “internalizing their meanings and values, (...) helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world”. Identity thus “sutures” “the subject into the structure”, stabilizing “both subjects and the cultural world they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified and predictable” (HALL, 2007, p. 597-598).

With the crisis of identity, however, both the subject and its cultural world are destabilized. Identity, then, is no longer “fixed, essential or permanent”. The subject is no longer unified, but “fragmented; composed not of a single but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities”, capable of assuming “different identities at different times”, identities which are not “unified around a coherent self”, which can no longer be conceived of as such (HALL, 2007, p. 598).

Both in “The Question of Cultural Identity” and “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities”, Hall outlines what he has called the “great de-centerings of modern thought”, which have brought about this crisis in the old models of identity. The first of them is Marx’s lodging of the individual or collective subject always under historical practices, demonstrating that we can never have been “the sole origin or authors of those practices”. The second is Freud’s discovery of the unconscious, of this whole other psychic life that we have going on inside us, “which speaks more clearly when it is slipping rather than when it is saying what it means”. The third is Saussure’s conception of language as a social system – which ends with “any kind of notion of a perfect transparent continuity between our language and something out there which can be called the real or the truth, without any quotation marks” – and Foucault’s conception of the discourse – “you can only say something by positioning yourself” within it – as well as his discussion of the matter of the disciplinary power, that regulates, surveils and governs whole populations as well as the individual and the body (HALL, 1997, p. 43-44).

Identity, Hall claims, is also upset by other enormous historical transformations, such as “the relativization of the Western narrative (...) by the rise of other cultures to prominence and (...) the displacement of the masculine gaze”, prompted by the political movement of blacks, feminists, and other minority groups. It is also shaken by “the relative decline or

erosion of the nation-state and of the self-sufficiency of national economies” as well as of “national identities as points of reference” (HALL, 1997, p. 44).

The mention of national identities reminds us of the concomitant fragmentation and erosion that takes place in collective social identities, which, Hall states, were previously stabilized by industrialization, capitalism, urbanization, the formation of the world market, the social and sexual division of labor, the great penetration of civil and social life into the public and the private, the dominance of the nation state and the identification between Westernization and the notion of modernity itself (HALL, 1997, p. 45).

After all these changes, identity, Stuart Hall observes, has come to be seen as a process, never finished, never completed, always fluid and unstable. However this process of identification is always articulated through difference: it is always ambivalent, the result of the articulation of the self with the other. This ambivalence of post-modern identity, he states, is what has broken down the boundaries “between outside and inside, those who belong and those who do not, those whose histories have been written and those whose histories they have depended on but whose histories cannot be spoken”. For Hall, “identity is always in part a narrative, always in part a kind of representation”, a discourse, “it is always told from the position of the Other”. “It is that which is narrated in one’s own self” (HALL, 1997, p. 48-49).

These same de-centerings have shaken the basis of traditional historiography, which clung to this notion of a unified subject, which concerned only the life of the so-called Romantic subject, this great European man who has been centered by Enlightenment. After these de-centerings, “historiography”, Linda Hutcheon claims

is no longer considered the objective and disinterested recording of the past; it is more an attempt to comprehend and master it by means of some narrative/ explanatory model that, in fact, is precisely what grants a particular meaning to the past (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 64).

History is thereby contested by the “plural, interrupted, unrepressed histories (in the plural)”. After this questioning what surfaces is “something different from the unitary, closed, evolutionary narratives of historiography, as we have traditionally known it”. “We now get the histories of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few, and (...), of women, as well as men”. “The narrativization of past events is not hidden” by the postmodern, for

the events no longer seem to speak for themselves, but are shown to be consciously composed into a narrative, whose constructed – not found – order is imposed upon them,

often overtly by the narrating figure. The process of making stories out of chronicles, of constructing plots out of sequences is what is now underlined in fiction (HUTCHEON, 1989, pp: 65-66).

The distinction between fact and fiction has also become problematic. In his preface to the book entitled *The Content of the Form*, Hayden White talks about how recent theories of discourse have dissolved the distinction between realistic and fictional discourses. This distinction used to be “based on the presumption of an ontological difference between their [history’s and literature’s] respective referents, real and imaginary”. But rather, what is now stressed is “their common aspect as semiological apparatuses that produce meanings by the systematic substitution of signifieds (conceptual concepts) for the extra-discursive entities that serve as their referents”. White goes on saying that “in these semiological theories of discourse, narrative is revealed to be a particularly effective system of discursive meaning production by which individuals can be taught to live a distinctively ‘imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence’”. That would be “an unreal but meaningful relation to the social formations in which they are indentured to live out their lives and realize their destinies as social subjects”. He concludes by calling our attention to the fact that “to conceive of narrative discourse in this way permits us to account for its universality as a cultural fact and for the interest that cultural groups have not only in controlling what will pass for the authoritative myths of a given cultural formation but also in assuring the belief that social reality itself can be both lived and realistically comprehended as a story”. (WHITE, 1990, p. x)

With this revolution both in the concept of history – now seen as a constructed narrative that helps dominant classes to present as natural facts those which are in fact meaning-granted events – and of identity – which is an inescapably ambivalent narrative process, articulated between the self and the other –, the margins begin to contest traditional accounts of history, they begin to come into representation. Obviously, Hall states, this kind of cultural politics cannot be conducted “without a return to the past”. However this return is not one of a “direct”, “literal” or nostalgic kind. The past has to be “retold, rediscovered, reinvented”, re-presented. “It has to be narrativized. We go to our own pasts through history, through memory, through desire, not as a literal fact” (HALL, 1997, p. 58).

If we talk of past, history and memory, we eventually end up touching upon national identities, which are thus also revolutionized. For Homi K. Bhabha, nations (like identity and history) are like narratives, for they “lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully

realize their horizons in the mind's eye" (BHABHA, 1990, p. 1). As Stuart Hall reminds us, "national identities are not things we are born with, but are formed and transformed in relation to *representation*". "People are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in the *idea* of the nation as represented in its national culture. A nation is a symbolic community and it is this which accounts for its 'power to generate a sense of identity and allegiance'". "The life of nations, like that of men", says Hall, quoting Enoch Powell, "is lived largely in the imagination" (HALL, 2007, p. 612-613, his emphasis).

Many historians have drawn our attention to the fact that nations are fairly new forms of social organizations. Its cultural provenance is from a specifically European political and social environment, its origin closely associated with the beginnings of colonialism and imperialism. The fact that idea of nationhood has emerged earlier in 15th century Portugal, for instance, is said to be what has guaranteed the Portuguese their role as the pioneers in maritime expansion.

The discourse of the nation functions through a process of homogenizing difference, representing difference as unity or identity. By erasing class, ethnic and gender contingencies, the nation's many citizens are represented as one. However, homogeneity always fails to represent the diversity of the actual national community. A homogeneous representation of the nation usually serves and helps consolidate the interests of the dominant power groups, what turns constructions of nations into potent sites of control and domination. As Rosemary George argues, nationalism as we know it is too strict a term "because it devalues ordinary, everyday, subaltern, non-official experiences of home" (GEORGE, 1999, p. 15)

That is why Anglophone Caribbean Women writers, Helen Scott suggests, often "reject a narrow nationalism as they seek to redefine the term nation by reimagining what constitutes national community". They seem to regard the individual as Marx defined it, as an inherently "*social being*": the manifestation of his or her life inescapably "a manifestation of *social life*". They have made the "reciprocal discovery of the truly social in the individual and the truly individual in the social", taking it as a "model for authorship" (SCOTT, 2006: p. 17-18).

Similarly, in "Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation", Bhabha quotes Frederic Jameson when he says that "the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the collectivity itself" (BHABHA, 1994, p. 140). Based on that, Bhabha offers us another

proposition as to the articulation of national identity. He claims a contested conceptual territory emerges “where the nation’s people must be thought in double-time: the people are the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy” and the ‘subjects’ of a process that erases the nation-people to demonstrate the living contemporary people. He concludes by saying that

In the production of nation as narration, there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation* (BHABHA, 1994, p. 145-164).

Counter-narratives of the nation, such as the one being analyzed in this dissertation, that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries disturb those ideological maneuvers through which imagined communities are given essentialist identities and propose this new ambivalent, as all identities, national identity, articulated between the pedagogical and the performative.

In the novel there is a continuous clash between the nation Trujillo tries to impose on Dominican citizens and the nation the people fight for. The first instance is the young Minerva’s description of the way the population had to behave towards Trujillo. As an example she offers the History book she was using at school then. As she herself says it:

It wasn’t just my family putting on a big loyalty performance, but the whole country. When we got to school that fall, we were issued new history textbooks with a picture of you-know-who embossed on the cover so even a blind person could tell who the lies were all about. Our history now followed the plot of the Bible. We Dominicans had been waiting for centuries for the arrival of our Lord Trujillo on the scene. It was pretty disgusting.

‘All through nature there is a feeling of ecstasy. A strange otherworldly light suffuses the house smelling of labor and sancticity. The 24th of October in 1891. God’s glory made flesh in a miracle. Rafael Leonidas Trujillo has been born!’ (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 24)

Some pages later, when describing the way Trujillo was dressed on the occasion of the play her school friends and her performed before him because of the centennial year of the Dominican Republic, she says “he was wearing a fancy white uniform with gold fringe epaulets and a breast of medals like an actor playing a part” (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 27). As we can see, the young Minerva was already very aware of the constructed nature of this pedagogical national narrative that was being enforced upon Dominican citizens.

Mate also talks about the nationalistic ritual she had to go through day her classes in university started:

We marched today before the start of classes. Our *cédulas* are stamped when we come back through the gates. Without those stamped *cédulas*, we can’t enroll. We also had to sign a pledge of loyalty.

There were hundreds of us, the women all together, in white dresses like we were his brides, with white gloves and any kind of hat we wanted. We had to raise our right arms in a salute as we passed by the review stand.

It looked like the newsreels of Hitler and the Italian one with the name that sounds like fettuccine (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 131).

On the other hand, another occasion narrated by Mate illustrates the performative side of this nation. When she wanted to quit a beauty contest she was running for, Minerva convinces her to go on, for that election was an important symbolic ritual for the nation. In her diary, Mate writes

I don't want to be a queen of anything anymore. But Minerva won't have it. She says this country hasn't voted for anything in twenty-six years and it's only these silly little elections that keep the faint memory of a democracy going. (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 136)

Another interesting moment is the performative appropriation of a pedagogic symbol of Trujillo's nation, the national anthem, by the politicals. Marcelo Bermudez, one of Manolo's comrades who was in the torture prison with him, told Alvarez about it. She transcribes the following from the diary she kept while in the Dominican Republic researching about the Mirabals:

Marcelo also tells about the time Manolo and a group of other men were taken to the courthouse to be arraigned. The girls had already been freed, and they were there with a crowd of supporters. As the men were stepping off the police wagon, the girls broke out with the national anthem. The crowd joined them. *Quisqueyanos valientes, alcemos...* One of the things Trujillo had done for the nation was to create icons (the flag, the anthem, himself), and the law was that whenever you heard the national anthem you had to stop dead in your tracks, take off your hat, place your right hand over your heart and wait till the song was over to move along. The guards were nervous as hell. They want to rush inside the courtroom with their charges and be out of sight of the milling crowd. But suddenly, the anthem rang out, and they were confused, unsure what to do. Should they stop, pay homage? Should they rush the prisoners safely inside? *¡Salve! el pueblo que intrépido y fuerte,* the crowd sang. (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 334)

From the examples above and from everything we have read about the novel so far, I can easily affirm that Julia Alvarez's performative counter-narrative of the nation disrupts the homogeneity of Trujillo's pedagogical nation. The Dominican nation represented by her is not only made of men. Women play a very important part in it, too. Its people are not only the objects of a dictator, but also subjects who manage to conduct a revolution, fighting for their own freedom. Her people are not one but plural: the nation she represents is not only made according to a Spanish, European cultural model, but it also incorporates African and Indian elements.

As an example of the African elements incorporated in Alvarez's novel, I can cite Fela, the Mirabal's former house servant, "the ebony black sibyl" that claimed she could talk to the Mirabals after death. When Dedé is informed by the bishop about the sessions Fela

used to hold in her backyard, she sends the old maid away (ALVAREZ, 2010, p.63). When Dedé's conversation with the interview woman is over and her niece, Minerva's daughter, Minou arrives from Fela she tells Dedé: "they wouldn't come. Fela says they must finally be at rest." To which Dedé shakes her head, saying they had been there in her house with her all afternoon (ALVAREZ, 2010, p.174). In the last page of her epilogue, after all the story has already been told, Dedé confesses she usually hears her sisters around the house at night, "their soft spirit footsteps", "their different treads, as if even as spirits they retained their personalities". But that night, she says, it was quieter than she could remember (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 321). The incorporation of African religious beliefs into the story is a manifestation of *Présence Africaine*, one of the three presences, *Africaine*, *Européene*, *Américaine*, Stuart Hall (2003) argues are in articulation in the composition of the hybrid Caribbean cultural identity.

Présence Américaine is felt in the codenames and the metaphorical language adopted by the members of the underground. Mate overhears Manolo and Minerva talking in codes, saying: "*The Indian from the hill has his cave up that road. The Eagle has nested in the hollow on the other side of the mountain*" (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 138). After, she finds out about her sister's and her brother-in-law's codenames: "Manolo was Enriquillo, after the great Taino chieftain, and, Minerva, of course, is Mariposa" (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 142).

Now back to the matter of national identities, I think it is important for us to highlight the ambivalent nature of national identities, articulated between the pedagogical and the performative. Many critics have argued that *In the Time of the Butterflies* ends up mythologizing the Mirabals instead of, what Julia Alvarez claims it is her aim to do, humanizing them. But the truth is that maybe, in the process of coining a new national identity, Julia Alvarez ended up caught between the nation's ambivalent nature, articulating this new identity between the pedagogical and the performative. She both turns the Mirabals into objectified "brave and beautiful" symbols of the nation gifted with "special courage", models for emulation, and shows what their everyday lives must have been like, what it was like to be a real Dominican in the time of the Trujillato (ALVAREZ, 2010, p. 323).

If, just to illustrate, I oppose Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé* to *In the Time of the Butterflies*, for instance, we can see how the matter of national identities is treated differently in both novels. In *In the Name of Salomé* the concept of nation is extensively and directly discussed. Both Salomé Ureña and Camila, her daughter, are puzzled with the notion of

nation. Salomé tries to engage the political project of creating a national identity for her people through her art, writing poems about the matter of the Dominican national identity. She tries to make up symbols for the nation through her poetry and she is herself turned into a symbol of the nation by her politically ambitious husband. The focus on the pedagogical side of the narrative of a nation is bigger than the one on the performative.

Whereas in *In the Time of the Butterflies*, what we are presented with is how the delusions of grandeur of a man who has hoisted himself to and imposed himself as a national leader can have such a deep influence in the everyday lives of the people who inhabit the territory of this nation. What is portrayed is the struggle against this regime, the struggle for a new nation. The concept of the nation, the process of the construction of a national identity are not so frequently mentioned. There is mention to the fact that the *gringa dominicana* is there in the Dominican Republic with the purpose of re-writing into History that forgotten and silenced story. Even though her focus is on the performative, on the everyday lives of women, marginal subjects of History, who fail to be represented by traditional homogeneous versions of nationalism, Alvarez cannot help but make symbols out of the Mirabals.

Posing the Mirabals as symbols does not have to do with a prescriptive nationalism. It has to do with the role Walter Benjamin (1993) thought was fit for the storyteller. The true narrative, Benjamin argues, is dying because people do not value experience anymore. They do not learn from their experiences, so they cannot give advice. True storytellers, he argues, can reach back to a whole lifetime (a life that comprises not only his own experience but also, in great part, the experience of others). His gift is the ability to narrate his life (BENJAMIN, 1993, p. 198-221; my translation) and give advice.

As I have argued in the second chapter, Alvarez is able to expand her self to stand for the others, to appropriate of other people's experience, to reach out for this post-memory of the Trujillato and tell her story about this trauma. As a Benjaminian storyteller, she obviously has some advice to offer us from this experience.

So far in this chapter I hope to have shown how identity, history and nation interconnect, how they are all constructed narratives that have come to a crisis in late modernity and how the three of them are interwoven in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*. I also hope to have proved how political the personal is, how public the private and how the dissolution of these two dichotomies blurs the frontiers between history and

subjectivity. Now we are going to look into the relationship between literary form and social process.

4.1 Literary form and social process

Formal definition of literary genres dates as far back as to the still famous Aristotle's *Poetics*. Genre classifications, Ralph Cohen states, help readers/listeners make logical connections and distinctions as they read/hear. In an oral tradition primary markers were demanded so that one could more easily understand the story he or she could only hear. In a literary society, genres have become the bases for value distinction as well as for artistic distinctions and interrelations (COHEN, 1986, p. 207). In this dissertation I have analyzed how and why Julia Alvarez appropriates herself of these signs of traditional Western literature – namely, the historical novel (changed into historiographic metafiction), autobiography and the *bildungsroman* – to reproduce them with a difference in *In the Time of the Butterflies*.

Roberto Schwartz has talked about the relationship between literary form and historical context when analyzing Machado de Assis' works in his seminal book *Ao Vencedor as Batatas*, whose excerpts I translate into English here. In the preface, named "The Misplaced Ideas", the critic argues that in Brazil literary ideas have always looked as if they were "out of center in relation to their European use" and that there is "a historical explanation" for that, which involves "the relations of production and parasitism in the country" – "Brazil's economic dependence and the consequent European intellectual hegemony, revolutionized by the Capital" (SCHWARTZ, 2008, p. 30).

He also defends the idea that "in order to analyze a national originality noticeable in everyday life" in Brazilian literature, we have to consider "the process of colonization in its international context". The literature produced in Brazil, Schwartz suggests, is "a vast and heterogeneous field, but structured", for it is historically informed. "When analyzing its structure, we can see that it differs from the European", even if it uses European "vocabulary". "Therefore difference itself, comparison and distance are parts of its definition". But, of course, (as Linda Hutcheon has already warned us), in instances of complicity with tradition – even if its forms are deployed with a difference – one cannot help but notice "an ambiguous light of an uncertain effect" in this kind of de-centered literature (SCHWARTZ, 2008, p. 30).

Schwartz then concludes by saying that the content of the artist's work is not "formless: it is historically shaped and records, in a way, the social process to which it owes its existence". "By shaping it, the writer superimposes form upon form". The depth, strength and complexity of the results of this superimposition will depend on the relation of the writer with this pre-formed content – "where History unpredictably lies asleep". The last sentence in Schwartz preface claims that

even though dealing with the modest tic-tac of our day-by-day, sitting at his desk anywhere in Brazil, our novelist has always had as its content, which he [*sic*] orders as he [*sic*] can, issues of world history; he [*sic*] cannot write of them if he [*sic*] writes of them straightforwardly (SCHWARTZ, 2008, p.31).

Schwartz has presented a very postmodern analytic framework to analyze Machado's works. He brilliantly connects literary form to historical context and the postcolonial condition and ends up touching upon issues of History and national identity (which is for him, as for Bhabha, noticeable in the everyday life). His framework is coincidentally very similar to the one used by me to analyze Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Even though she is a contemporary Caribbean-American woman writer and Machado de Assis is a realist Brazilian man writer, the literature produced by them bear similarities in that it appropriates itself of traditional imperialist literary forms with a difference. They use it to talk about the everyday reality of the former colonies, giving voice to those who were left outside traditional national and international historical representation. Schwartz also highlights the importance of acknowledging the political dimension of everyday events, whose representation may sometimes more effectively serve the political purpose of the writer than the direct attack to the *status quo* would.

Likewise, in *Caribbean Women Writers and Postcolonial Imperialism*, Helen Scott argues that "even when there is no explicit political engagement" in the content of a novel of a Caribbean woman writer, the dynamics of politics emerge "in the 'fissures and dissonances' of fictional works ostensibly rooted in the 'personal'", often proving "the most personal issues" to be "embedded in broader societal structures". Such texts, she argues, "are not less political, but rather expressive of a *changed* political content" (SCOTT, 2006, p. 21, grifo do autor).

Similarly, Smith & Watson (1992) say, quoting Judith Butler, that agency is "located within the possibility of a variation on the repetition of certain rule-bound discourses" (SMITH; WATSON, 1992, p. xx). The central characters of *In the Time of the Butterflies* are not the typical subjects of History but third world women who fight for the death of a tyrant,

who lead a movement against him, who struggle to get their homeland back. In this narrative, historiographic metafiction, autobiography and the *bildungsroman* are mixed and many of these genre's traditional assumptions changed, thus enabling the novel's characters to find agency within discourse. By looking at history through the prism of people who have nominally been written out of it, the novel recovers the silenced voices of the underprivileged, disrupting that structure of colonial amnesia that denied the colonized his or her history.

“Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text with a new direction – is for us [women] more than a chapter in cultural history; it is an act of survival”, claims Adrienne Rich in “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision”. On the following page she adds: “we need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass a tradition but to break its hold over us”. “For writing”, Rich claims “is re-naming” and “we all know there is another story to be told” (RICH, 1972, p.18-25).

In *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie affirms that “re-describing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it”. He goes on saying this is particularly true

at times when the State takes reality into its own hands, and sets about distorting it, altering the past to fit its present needs, then the making of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicized. ‘The struggle of man against power’, Milan Kundera has written, ‘is the struggle of memory against forgetting’. Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians’ version of truth. So literature can, and perhaps must, give the lie to official facts (RUSHDIE, 1992, p.14).

Literature, Beatriz Sarlo (2005) claims, does not dissolve every given problem, neither can it explain it. However, in literature there is always a narrator thinking outside of the experience, as if humans could take hold of the nightmare they are having and not only suffer through it (SARLO, 2005, p. 119; my translation).

5 CONCLUSIONS

In May 2012 our Brazilian federal government announced the name of the members of the so-called Commission of Truth. This is a commission that is going to look into files of the military dictatorship that have remained secret up to this day, bringing to light cases of human rights violation that took place during the period of time that spans from 1946 to 1988, which comprises the military dictatorship. The Commission of Truth does not aim to punish those involved in such crimes, for it does not have the legal right to do so, since a law passed in 1979 grants amnesty to both *guerrilheiros* and torturers. The Commission's only goals, claims the government, are to promote national reconciliation and to enforce the right to historical truth and memory.

Memory, Beatriz Sarlo (2007) claims, was Argentina's duty after the military dictatorship. Sarlo says the same is true for most of the other countries in Latin America. Recovering the traumatic memory of past dictatorships has been a project which countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Chile and the Dominican Republic have been engaged in lately.

The book that I analyze in this dissertation re-covers the memory of the trauma left by the military dictatorship in the Dominican Republic, the Trujillato. *In the Time of the Butterflies* refers to the assassination of the Mirabal sisters, who were murdered under the dictator's orders in November 25th, 1960, due to their involvement in the underground movement which aimed to overthrow the regime and plotted to kill the dictator.

Even though the novel concerns the life and death of the Mirabal sisters, it metonymically recovers the trauma inflicted upon all Dominican citizens during the Trujillato through the narration of the everyday life of these girls. The representation of everyday events, critics such as David Vasquez (2003) and Roberto Schwartz (2008) seem to claim, may sometimes more effectively serve the political purposes of a writer than a direct attack to the status quo would. In the study he makes of four of Alvarez's novels, Vasquez states that when the private is narrated, the personal is superimposed on the public in a manner that politicizes the experiences of people who have not been the legitimate subjects of history. In his analysis of the work of Machado de Assis, Schwartz claims that a Brazilian novelist cannot write of issues of world history if he (sic) writes of them straightforwardly. And I believe this could be considered true for most of the Latin American novelists.

In *Caribbean Women Writers and Postcolonial Imperialism*, Helen Scott seems to agree with this argument, when she argues that “even when there is no explicit political engagement” in the content of a novel of a Caribbean woman writer, the dynamics of politics emerge “in the ‘fissures and dissonances’ of fictional works deeply rooted in the personal”, often proving “the most personal issues” to be “embedded in broader societal structures”. Such texts, she argues, “are not less political, but rather expressive of a *changed* political content” (SCOTT, 2006, p. 21, grifo do autor).

That is because, as Schwartz claims, the artist’s work is not “formless: it is historically shaped and records, in a way, the social process to which it owes its existence” (SCHWARTZ, 2008, p.31).

I, like Schwartz, have chosen to analyze the interrelation between literary form and social process. The novel I have analyzed, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, purposefully mixes elements and strategies of different literary genres, namely, the historiographic metafiction, the autobiography and the *bildungsroman* in order to re-member the traumatic history of the Dominican recent past. By blurring these genres, Alvarez has managed to give voice to subjects who have been rendered unfit for representation both in history and in traditional literary forms such as the historical novel, the autobiography and the *bildungsroman*. Third-world women are turned into valid subjects whose history can finally be told through the appropriation of these genres and the adaptations made to each of them, which create room for agency within literary forms whose central subjects are usually great Men, whose stories should be remembered and emulated.

The blurring of these genres also reflects the questioning of the boundaries between private and public, personal and political, self and other, individual and collective, literature and history, fact and fiction as well as history and subjectivity. The problematizing of these dichotomies de-naturalizes received notions of identity, history and nation.

In the *Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon (1998) calls our attention to the fact that History is a narrative which involves selection, ordering, temporal pacement and emplotment, like any other narrative. It is “a system of signification” that “grants meaning to brute past events, turning them into historical facts which are relevant for a given group, society, or culture’s conception of its present and future prospects” (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 96).

History, Edouard Glissant (1981) states, “is a highly functional fantasy of the West” (GLISSANT, 1981, p. 64). Glissant also claims it is the role of the Caribbean writer or theorist to imaginatively reconstruct a past in the void left by Western Historians, re-envisioning and re-creating memory and history by re-writing future pasts in the present, trying to reconstitute a tormented chronology.

According to Julia Alvarez, “history is the story we tell ourselves about what really happened”. She complicates the borders between private/public, personal/political, history/fiction; blurring their limits and inverting the hierarchy of fact and fiction to reveal the constructed nature of historical narratives. She says she wanted to immerse her readers in an epoch in the life of the Dominican Republic that she believes could only finally be redeemed through the imagination (NEA Podcast, 9/2/2010).

Maybe that is why she found it useful to borrow strategies from historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction, as defined by Linda Hutcheon, is a literary form that helps us see how history is just another constructed narrative, deriving its force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth. In historiographic metafiction, the limits and natures of both history and fiction are questioned; the line between both installed and then blurred. Historiographic metafiction “shows fiction to be historically conditioned and history to be discursively structured” (HUTCHEON, 1998, p. 120). This is done through a myriad of strategies: the use of modern self-reflexivity, the centering of ex-centric characters, the use either of multiple points of view or of an overtly controlling narrator, the play upon the truth and lie of the historical record, the problematizing of subjectivity into history and the use of the archive as texts, via notes or epigraphs or epilogues, paratextual elements in general.

All these strategies are present in *In the Time of the Butterflies*. However, some of them have suffered slight adaptations. The intertexts used in the novel, for instance, are oral ones, since there wasn't much written about the Mirabals, which is easily explained by the control a dictator usually exerts upon written media. The political murders or disappearances that happen during dictatorships are not usually recorded in any written manner.

In the Time of the Butterflies problematizes history, inverting the hierarchy of history and fiction's referents, blurring the private and the public, making ex-centric characters the subjects of the history and using as archival sources the oral tales kept by the Dominican population as their version of history.

Julia Alvarez is the author of many autobiographical novels. When asked about why she wrote the story of the Mirabals she says that “it was a story that was a pebble in” her “shoe”, that she could not shake out even after her becoming a writer. And then she asks: “what is the responsibility of those that survive? To remember and to remind.” (NEA Podcast, 9/2/2010)

Her family’s migration to the United States happened due to her father’s involvement in the same political underground movement that the Mirabals were involved, and whose activity led to their assassination. Her family immigrated to the United States so that her father could escape this same fate.

We know the protagonists of this story, of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, are the Mirabal sisters: Minerva, Patria, Maria Teresa and Dedé. We know that Alvarez did a lot of research on the sisters, that many years during her annual trip to the island - a trip she usually took to visit her relatives - she collected as much information as she could about the sisters, she looked for archives, books, newspapers, interviewed people, visited places, visited the Mirabal museum, met Dedé Mirabal and interviewed her. She tells all of it in texts she has written and interviews she has given about *In the Time of the Butterflies*.

But it is curious to see how Alvarez does not place herself in the margins of the story she narrates in the novel. She chooses to represent herself in it, even though her presence was not required. She could have told the story of the sisters without being present in it. She could have sat back and watched it from the margins, but, rather, she chose to represent herself in the novel, further complicating the relationship between public and private, personal and political, memory and history. This is closely connected to what Leonor Arfuch (2010) and Leigh Gilmore (2001) have to say about autobiography.

Arfuch, for instance, presents the notion of the autobiographical space, an integration of all the different genres that concern experience. The texts that inhabit this space, she claims, are not to be defined by their content, but by their use of self-representational strategies. As an example of such strategies, she cites techniques such as the ways of naming (things and oneself) in the narration, the instability of experience or memory, the point of view/ that which is left in the shadow and, more importantly, the story someone chooses to tell about oneself or about another I. These strategies are all present in the novel.

Leigh Gilmore thinks that the matter of truth or lie should not be central in autobiography. She says that many autobiographies lie exactly on what she names the limit of representativeness, a space where the self is inflated to stand for others, where an individual is confused with a collective experience, which is closely related to *In the Time of the Butterflies*. In the novel the story of the life of the sisters and their tragic death and the story of Alvarez's family migration are portrayed as very connected. It is also suggested that the trauma that the whole country went through because of the dictatorship is connected to their stories as well, is metonymically represented in this novel. This is something that Gilmore says: that representing the self is closely connected to representing trauma. She also writes that the matter of the nation is implicated in the autobiography as well because it concerns the matter of who is it that can be represented in an autobiography. It also interweaves private and public, portraying the private experience of people, making their private lives public.

Appropriating herself of the post-memory of the Mirabals, voicing these traumatic happenings, giving testimony to their existence, Alvarez is able to give a resistant account of these events, giving one more step in the direction of healing the national wound of Trujillo's bloody dictatorship.

The other literary form employed by Alvarez in this novel is the *bildungsroman*, a literary form that arose in late 18th century Germany and that traditionally concerns the process of becoming of a young man, as he grows up and gets ready to enter society. He goes through a lot of shaping experiences but in the end, he re-appraises his values and conforms to society.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) claims that the hero of a *bildungsroman* is not made to fit a historical background. The changes he suffers are not his private affairs with only private and biographical results, but have implications in the historical future. Changes in himself change the world around him. He lives in-between two epochs, the transition from one to another is accomplished in him and through him

Alvarez's appropriation of the classically male form of the *bildungsroman* endows her characters with agency, helps de-mythologizing their image and re-constructing a history of the self and of the nation, through a microcosm/ macrocosm paradigm, while drawing the readers' attention to the fact that what she is offering is not a pedagogical assigning of a Dominican identity but just another story of the Dominican past, one that has not been told by official documents or in History books.

An important contribution to the notion of nation is the distinction made by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) between pedagogic and performative narratives of the nation. The nation's people, he claims, must be thought in double-time: they are both the historical objects of a nationalist pedagogy and the subjects of a process that erases the nation-people to demonstrate the living contemporary people.

I argue that Julia Alvarez's performative counter-narrative of the nation disrupts the homogeneity of Trujillo's pedagogical nation. The Dominican nation represented by her is not only made of men. Women play a very important part in it, too. Its people are not only the objects of a dictator, but also subjects who manage to conduct a revolution, fighting for their own freedom. Her people are not one but plural: the nation she represents is not only made according to a Spanish, European cultural model, but it also incorporates African and Indian elements.

As I finish this dissertation, a *coup d'état* takes place in next-door Paraguay. The democratically elected president Fernando Lugo was impeached due to accusations of involvement with social movements. The newspaper *O Globo* quotes Lugo as saying that it was because of his social policies towards the poorest that he was thrown off by the military, the parliament, the capital and narcotrafficking. Lugo also claims he only accepted the result of this unfair political trial in order to avoid bloodshed, but calls the Paraguayan people to peacefully demonstrate their discontentment with the dictatorship of Fernando Franco on the streets. Paraguay is going to be left out of the Mercosul till the next presidential elections, which will presumably take place next year (<http://oglobo.globo.com/mundo/paraguai-sera-afastado-do-mercosul-da-unasul-ate-eleicoes-presidenciais-em-2013-5301933>).

At least so far it seems that Argentina, Brazil and Chile, the other members of the Mercosul, who have experienced similar military dictatorships in the past, have learned their lesson. It is the duty of works such as mine and Alvarez's to keep memory alive, reminding peoples of their past historical experiences so that our political actions can be different in the future.

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