Challenging European Identity: Representations of Female Transnational Experiences in *Marrón* by Rocío Quillahuaman

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the representations of female experiences in *Marrón*, a transnational Life Writing text written by Rocío Quillahuaman, challenge a hegemonic European identity. This European identity was forged after centuries of cultural productions, especially narratives, that vouched for its superiority. In our globalized world today, transnational subjects, who mobilize for varied reasons, face discriminatory legislations and unfair bureaucratic procedures based on their backgrounds and affiliations. Although identities may benefit a sense of belonging and camaraderie that are part of living in societal structures, the fact that a hegemonic European identity has been used to discriminate needs to be contested. To accomplish this contestation, the research's method encompasses a close reading of the text with a thematic deductive analytic approach to bring forth the importance that transnational narratives, especially those written by Brown women, have in the new modes of identity construction. Through the representations of female transnational experiences, which I referred to as: 1) the monolingual transnational female subject, 2) the displaced transnational female subject, and 3) the unrepresented transnational female subject, this paper argues in favor of a fluid transnational identity construction that is context dependent and malleable through one's lifetime and physical (dis)placement. [1]

"¿Tú sabes lo agotador que es tener que ser tan simpática todo el rato? Si eres chica, seguramente sepas de lo que estoy hablando y si eres chica racializada, seguramente lo entiendas todavía mejor" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 78).[2]

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[2] "Do you know how tiring it is to be nice all the time? If you are a girl, you probably know what I am talking about, and if you are a racialized girl, you probably understand it even better" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 78). Throughout the paper, I use the original Spanish version of the quotes and translate them myself in the footnotes to celebrate Chicana writers, especially Gloria Anzaldúa, who through the use of both languages would present readers with the uncomfortable task of figuring out the meaning of the text, while creating bridges between cultures.

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1. Introduction

From reading Rocío Quillahuaman's title, *Marrón,* readers are invited into an experience that might not necessarily be their own. 'Marrón' is a color in Spanish. It is a word mostly used to describe the color of an animal, an object made of wood, clothes, or even a person's eyes, but it is not generally used to describe skin color. However, there is a contemporary wave of Spanish speaking writers who have reappropriated this word as a signifier to their identity and a way of asserting their sense of belonging, especially those who experience a transnational identity. Gabriela Wiener is one such writer; a well-known Peruvian-Spanish author who wrote an opinion column for *The New York Times* called "Orgullo Marrón." In her column, Wiener (2020) argues that "[h]oy, una comunidad expropia la etiqueta que servía para despreciar y decide recuperarla resignificada para reclamar una identidad" (para. 3).[3] 'Marrón' is a color that has historically gained a negative connotation due to its association to dirt or that which is dirty. In addition, it has been used to differentiate and discriminate against entire populations based on a scale of skin color where being white implies superiority. To contest this superiority, the present article answers the following research question: How is European identity and belonging challenged by transnational female representations in *Marrón,* written by Rocío Quillahuaman? Through the analysis of the monolingual, displaced, and unrepresented transnational female subjects, this paper brings forth the important role that transnational narratives, especially those written by Brown women, play in shaping new modes of identity construction.

Rocío Quillahuaman was born in Lima, Peru in 1994, and she resettled with her mother and sisters in Barcelona, Spain when she was 11 years old. She is well known for her illustrations and audiovisual work, and in 2022, she published her first book *Marrón*. *Marrón* is an autobiographical book that recounts the impactful moments of Quillahuaman's life, gifting these memories to her readers. The autobiography consists of 17 chapters, a prologue, and an epilogue, and, since she is an illustrator, each section is introduced with one of her drawings, which illustrates what the main idea of the chapter is. Most of these drawings are self-portraits but she also depicts her mother and her husband. *Marrón's* narrator, referred to as Rocío, takes the reader through memories from her life in Peru prior to resettlement as well as accounts of her first visit back. Additionally, she describes some of the racist and xenophobic behaviors that she encounters in Spain in a variety of contexts, such as, high school, university, workplaces, and others. Furthermore, she talks about her writing process, bureaucracy, her family, and her personal journey of navigating between her acquired Spanish and Catalonian identities and her Latina roots. Although there is not a universal transnational experience, Quillahuaman's autobiography offers the opportunity to broaden current public debates on the topic of identity and to offer a more diversely located objectivity from the margins. In the following sections, I first outline the theory that supports this research and briefly historicize the construction of a hegemonic European identity ideal. Then, I define the use of transnational life writing, positioning myself within a diversely objectivity of location. Finally, I develop an analysis of the monolingual, displaced, and unrepresented transnational female subjects in *Marrón*.

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[3] "[t]oday, a community expropriates the label that was used to reject and decides to recover and re-signify it to reclaim an identity" (Wiener, 2020, para. 3). (My translation).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Challenging the Hegemonic Ideal of European Identity

Generally speaking, the concept of identity seeks to answer the question: Who am I? To define 'identity,' we must consider a combination of core beliefs, ideas, and physical and social characteristics that incorporate various axes at once, otherwise called intersectionality. In this paper, I do not look into identity formation per se; rather, my objective is to question the hegemonic ideal of European identity powered by racism, xenophobia, sexism, heterosexism, and transphobia. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said (2003) affirms that his aim is not to deny "national as well as cultural differences in the relations between human beings – but to challenge the notion that difference implies hostility, a frozen reified set of opposed essences, and a whole adversarial knowledge built out of those things" (p. 352). Nowadays, these differences justify hostile legislations that do not benefit transnational subjects,[4] but actually place them in vulnerable situations. Indeed, differences cannot be denied. Even people who share a religion, a language, a race, and/or a nationality are different from one another. Nevertheless, for centuries, a sense of European identity has emerged that is undeniable today and which has served as a basis for discrimination.

Denys Hay (1957), in his book *Europe: The Emerging of an Idea*, traces the word 'European' and its use as an adjective. Hay goes as far back as the Genesis and the Medieval Ages to show how a European sense of superiority has been transmitted through narrative.[5] At first, this superiority was related to Christianity and to Noah's sons. Japheth, who later marries Europa, is the representation of Europe and the noble race, while Shem (Asia) and Ham (Africa) are interpreted as mundane (Hay, 1957, p. 41). From this point on, the division of 'us' and 'them' was based on religious separation. However, in time, the word 'Europe' was meant "ultimately to usurp the place of Christendom" (Hay, 1957, p. 37) and to sustain a false idea of unity. While its use increased significantly in the 14th and 15th centuries, new types of cartographies and works of art reinforced the already existing division. As a result, a conceptualization of a superior European identity was materialized. Nowadays, this homogenizing idea is justified by an acquired citizenship that attains certain civil rights. Adey et al. (2020) refer to this protection by legal citizenship contemplating how the "liberal subject and 'free' citizen forms through rights to (well-regulated) movement, protected by the territorial state; yet this simultaneously produces an 'other' who potentially suffers not only exclusion, enclosure, incarceration, and violence but also coerced mobility via displacement or alienation" (p. 44). As a result, this sense of homogenization translates into an idea of shared identity among the people who belong to a nation or nations which might erroneously be engrained with racist and xenophobic nationalist perceptions.

Overall, by virtue of descent from Japhet, Christianity, politics, culture, and citizenship blended together to unify a hegemonic European identity that is still referred to today. To this mix, we must add the "ideologies of class" (Anderson, 2006, p. 104) and the "solidarity among whites" (Anderson, 2006, p. 106) that have served to further discriminate transnational subjects and maintain unfair bureaucratic procedures within nations in the Global North. Furthermore, the establishment of this expression of European identity is closely related to the development of the nation, which is a key concept in transnational literature since "nothing can be understood

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[4] Due to media usage, terms such as 'refugee' and 'immigrant' are charged with negative connotations. For this reason, I use the term 'transnational subjects' to avoid focusing on people's legal status and/or the reason for resettling.

[5] Similarly, in his book *Culture and Imperialism,* Edward Said (2007) explains how nations construct their meaning through narrative and other cultural creations (p. xiii).

as transcending — or seeking to exceed or cut across — the nation without our having some grasp of the concept of the nation in the first place" (Jay, 2021, p. 12). Nation formation has been largely examined through Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities*. Anderson (2006) defines the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (p. 14).[6] In other words, the nation is a community imagined through horizontal kinship, limited due to its imagined geographical borders, and which upholds governmental freedom as a core pillar. To contrast Anderson's proposal, Partha Chatterjee (2010) critiques the notion of 'imagined communities' claiming that history is one-sided and that "[e]ven our imaginations must remain forever colonized" (p. 26). Feminist and postcolonial studies have adopted the task of challenging the unquestioned truths that have prevailed for quite some time. By bringing forth transnational life narratives into the discussion of identity, this research intends to challenge one-sided storytelling and knowledge construction. Although our imaginations may have been colonized, this colonization does not need to be a permanent condition.

To sustain a hegemonic European identity is to erase people's differences and justify a homogenous expectation. This expectation is problematic in our globalized world, where transnational subjects mobilize and resettle for varied reasons, some without having a choice. Besides, identity "is complicated as well by notions of authenticity and belonging that, while they are meant to define inherent qualities, often tend to essentialize and exclude those marked as Other" (Jay, 2021, p. 133). The problem resides not only in the exclusion of transnational subjects but also in discriminatory legislations and bureaucratic procedures that nurture the current systemic racism. However, some of the arguments used to defend fixed hegemonic identities are related to nation dissolution, fascist political reasoning and political chaos (Barvosa, 2008, p. 9). Maybe nation dissolution and chaos is needed for there to be a paradigm shift. Diversity and heterogeneity within societies is a fact. Consequently, transnational life narratives, such as *Marrón*, prove that there are other ways of existing in European societies.

2.2. Transnational Life Writing

My interest in the life writing genre stems from my observation that readers experience an activation of their empathetic, awareness, and identification systems when engaging with texts (Rigney, 2019, p. 195; Boter & Rensen, 2020, p. 9). This activation is fundamental since even if readers do not necessarily self-identify with a story such as *Marrón*, they may still question their sets of beliefs. Story-telling is a common technique used to engage audiences with unfamiliar topics and to make the content more appealing to the general public. Life writing confronts a more traditional approach to autobiographies "that privileged the history of great (white) men, military leaders, men of state, intellectuals and artists. Building on the democratic ideal that all lives and modes of life documentation are of interest and deserve recognition" (Boter & Rensen, 2020, p. 8). Subsequently, these narratives have become a means for transnational subjects to share their resettlement stories and their identity questioning experiences. Through a first-person narration, *Marrón* presents readers with an account of transnational female experiences that provide alternative insights into the identity debate and the experience of resettlement. Boter and Rensen (2020) defend the importance of the life writing genre in relation to the topic of identity, stating that:

> [Life writing] help gain insight into the multiple ways in which individuals negotiate their attachments to local, regional, national and transnational communities. While the national framework is still dominant in the Life Writing field, new transnational

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[6] Additionally, the quick interiorization of these imagined communities was pushed forward by capitalism, technology of communications, and diversity of languages (Anderson, 2006, p. 38).

approaches are being developed to give a more adequate representation of the lives of individuals who literally crossed national borders, or who implicitly or explicitly renounced a framing of themselves as national citizens. (p. 9)

The constant process of self-negotiation for belonging and attempting to make sense of a transnational life is a topic present in Quillahuaman's autobiographical text. Stories such as *Marrón* contribute greatly to the literary field by recounting with unique transnational experiences that challenge and question hegemonic representations, offering different perspectives on topics related to identity.

Following Paul Jay's (2021) conceptualization in his book *Transnational Literature: The Basics*, there are two ways to categorize transnational literature. Firstly, Jay refers to the geographical locations from which transnational narratives may be developed as "in a wide range of regions including Africa, the Caribbean, Asia, and the Global South that were ignored or marginalized by the largely Eurocentric and Amerocentric nation-state model of literary studies that evolved in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (pp. 51-52). However, the production and dissemination of transnational literature is not limited to the aforementioned regions and it can also be created in Europe and America. Most importantly, "it is associated with authors who have themselves experienced the kind of displacement and mobility characteristic of twentieth- and twenty first-century life under decolonization, globalization, and the proliferation of struggles related to nationalism around the globe" (Jay, 2021, pp. 52), and who write about these experiences. In the case of *Marrón*, we encounter a female author from the Global South who narrates her experience of resettlement as a transnational subject in the Global North. Her struggles to fit within a hegemonic identity, whether South American or European, challenge the extreme conceptualization of identity as a static notion. Despite the uniqueness of Quillahuaman's story, her narrative brings forth a colonial and imperialist European past that cannot be ignored. Although these ideals have been constructed through narrative and cultural creations, it is through these same means that they may be questioned and reimagined.

Historically, humans have internalized what they are exposed to through narrative. Nowadays, human behavior is particularly influenced by the internet and mass media platforms. For this reason, it is important to foreground works written by transnational authors, particularly those by Brown authors from the Global South. On the one hand, "[a] transnational perspective also insists that we think critically about concepts like universality, purity, and homogeneity, especially when those concepts derive from a specifically Western perspective" (Jay, 2021, p. 10). On the other hand, the voices of historically marginalized groups are fundamental to broadening the intellectual and social perspectives that have been largely produced by hegemonic Western knowledges. As Edward Said (2007) remarks, "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them" (p. xiii). Transnational narratives present a different side of the story and allow for new world orders to emerge. If we want to continue challenging colonial and imperialist ideas, we must do so from the so-called margins.

2.3. A Diversely Located Objectivity

To speak and to live from the margins is a topic broadly researched by Feminist and Postcolonial theorists. Inderpal Grewal (1997) confirms that "many life narratives have recently been published in First World locations that are authored by those from the so-called margins" (p. 232). Having varied voices sharing different experiences strengthens the creation of knowledge from a broadly located objectivity. This is important because it presents counter

arguments and diversifies the one-sided stories previously pointed out by Partha Chatterjee (2010). In accordance with this idea of living and performing from the margins is Homi Bhabha's (1990) notion of *in-between* spaces,[7] which echoes Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) theory of the borderland. The first concept refers to the "*in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated" (Bhabha, 1990, p. 4), whereas the 'borderland' refers to "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 3). These concepts relate to the transnational female experiences in *Marrón* because they advocate against static conceptualizations; in other words, they push forward negotiations against essentialist ideals in relation to the creation of knowledge, more specifically the concept of identity.

A diversely located objectivity provided by transnational life narratives is important to consider when questioning the traditional knowledge produced by white European hegemony. There is not a universal transnational experience; rather, "[i]t is precisely in the politics and epistemology of partial perspectives that the possibility of sustained, rational, objective inquiry rests" (Haraway, 1988, p. 584). The coming together of different unique experiences contributes to the shift from homogeneity to heterogeneity, from individuality to collectivity, from traditional objectivity to an objectivity of location, and from a static identity to a fluid (transnational) one. Therefore, "[i]t is imperative for us to examine new forms of subjectivity that are radically different from this European imperialist and state-nationalist subject that is binarily constructed and essentialist" (Grewal, 1997, p. 233). By challenging this long-established idea of superiority, we will continue to deconstruct the supposed hierarchy within the human race,[8] which discriminates and marginalizes those who do not fit certain ideals. Accordingly, this research focuses on those heterogeneous, contradictory and incoherent subjects (Harding, 1992, p. 454), who challenge the status quo through their existence and life experiences.

To accomplish this, I depart from the unique transnational female experiences in *Marrón* to question a hegemonic concept of European identity. According to Sandra Harding (1992), marginalized peoples' experiences "generate illuminating critical questions that do not arise in thought that begins from dominant group lives" (p. 445). Historically, the knowledge constructed from outside the academia has been discredited by scientific objectivity, situating knowledge creation in the hands of privileged groups. Chandra Mohanty (1995) reminds us that "one of the tasks of feminist analysis is uncovering alternative, nonidentical histories which challenge and disrupt the spatial and temporal location of a hegemonic history" (pp. 77-78). These transnational female experiences, communicated through narrative, represent the theory needed to question fixed beliefs and to advance towards a more inclusive society. At the same time, I must acknowledge my privileged position as a researcher at a European university. My readings of the text most likely include biases and "Eurocentric, androcentric, heterosexist, and bourgeois beliefs" (Harding, 1992, p. 454) that I may unintentionally reproduce through my colonized imagination. Nonetheless, a diversely located objectivity positions this research within a broader discussion that challenges hegemonic knowledges and welcomes alternative readings of the text while enriching the conversation on identity from different perspectives.

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[7] Paul Jay (2021) refers to Bhabha's concept from a transnational literature perspective. Jay affirms that "focusing on "in-between" spaces means both paying attention to literature from regions of the world formerly marginalized in literary studies, and from those that cut across — or exist between — the borders of nation states" (p. 72).

[8] "Although most societies no longer defend systematic theories based on an allegedly objective hierarchy of 'races,' a sense of division remains between many ethnic groups, especially towards foreigners of different phenotypes" (Freier et al., 2020, p. 143).

3. Methodology

Through the female experiences in *Marrón*, I argue in favor of a fluid transnational identity that is both context dependent and shifting throughout one's lifetime and physical (dis)placement. Regarding methodology, this research employs a feminist close reading method with an intersectional approach, which considers the influence of more than one simultaneous identity marker on an individual's life. Kiene Brillenburg Wurth (2019) defines close reading as "an attentive, critical, and creative reading and analysis of a text that uncovers patterns and details so as to open up new and underlying meanings of that text" (p. 241). Additionally, a feminist close reading "cannot exclude the context, nor a number of specific problems that are related to the position of the reader," understanding that my reading takes into consideration my own "socio-critical standpoint" (Lukić & Sánchez Espinoza, 2011, p.116). Feminist close readings allow researchers to focus on the topic(s) that are significant to their surroundings, which reinforces my decision to focus on identity and belonging. The topic strikes home because I am a transnational subject myself navigating these waters. Furthermore, feminist close readings grant different interpretations of the same text to enter the discussion and to dialogue with each other to further nurture knowledge creation.

I uncover those patterns and details, mentioned before by Brillenburg Wurth (2019), via Olaf Zenker's (2018) dimensions of identity, which are "nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ability and disability, and … linguistic phenomena" (p. 3). These dimensions resulted in eight categories[9] under which the references to the concept of identity in *Marrón* were clustered, employing a thematic deductive analytic approach.[10] For instance, references in the book to race/ethnicity were transcribed into a separate document to later use them as examples, together with other theoretical sources, to support the analysis. The current paper presents an analysis in reference to 1) the monolingual transnational female subject, which refers to the linguistic dimension, 2) the displaced transnational female subject, which includes the nationality, ethnicity/race, class, and 3) the unrepresented transnational female subject, which deals with the gender/sexuality dimensions. The other dimensions (religion, age, ability/disability) have been omitted because of space limitations and because some are not explicitly mentioned in the book. However, because the intersectional approach is fundamental to the analysis, this categorization cannot be dealt with in isolation and different dimensions of identity may appear intertwined in the analysis.

4. Representations of Female Transnational Experiences in Marrón

4.1. The Monolingual Female Transnational Subject

"[S]i no encajo en Barcelona y tampoco encajo en Lima, ¿dónde diablos voy a encajar?" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 98).[11]

Language is fundamental to the topic of identity because it depicts differences and similarities between groups of people. Through languages, people express and make sense of their internal world and their surroundings and find proximity when communicating with one another. This

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[9] Although there are ten dimensions of identity, ethnicity and race were grouped into one and gender and sexuality were grouped into another one, resulting in a total of eight categories.

[10] A deductive analytic approach refers to the categories to analyze the data from the theory, in this case: Zenker's (2018) dimensions of identity, and conclude "whether [they] exist in subsequent data" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 210). In other words, "[d]eduction is the process that enables us to use theories to explain real-world events" (Rich et al., 2018, p. 22).

[11] "[I]f I do not fit in Barcelona and neither in Lima, where the hell am I going to fit?" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 98).

proximity translates into a sense of belonging within a group, or what sociolinguists terms as a 'language community.'[12] Belonging to a language community may be determined by the language(s) we speak or it may also be linked to other identity markers. This means that speaking the same language is not enough to cultivate this connection. In the case of Rocío, the protagonist and narrator in *Marrón*, she moves from Peru to Spain, more specifically Catalonia, where Spanish is one of the official languages. One could assume that because she speaks the hegemonic language, her transition would be easily accomplished. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Although it is undeniable that she has an advantage compared to those transnational subjects who do not speak the language, she still experiences an estranged sense of belonging with both the host and the home countries. Rocío expreses how she and her family were always "en un sitio al que parecía que no pertenecíamos" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 141).[13] Their feeling of not belonging extendes from their hometown in Peru to Spain. Moreover, this feeling of alienation, referred to by Adey et al. (2020, p. 44), continues through Rocío's high school years and translates into her social relationships. She is never "cien por cien con mis amigas catalanas y nunca estaba con los latinos … Así que no estaba ni en un sitio ni en otro, como siempre" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 38).[14] Rocío's experience suggests that even if transnational subjects speak the same hegemonic language, their sense of belonging may still be compromised due to other identity markers. By presenting heterogeneous (Harding, 1992, p. 454) experiences and representations, transnational narratives, such as *Marrón,* aim to more broadly talk about what has been qualified as the exception or a minority experience.

To generally relate identity to a shared language is a complicated matter because, as intersectionality has proved, there are other identity markers that conform a hegemonic identity ideal and that blur its characterization. In a more traditional sense, for Elie Kedourie (1993), "[a] group speaking the same language is known as a nation" (p. 62). Transnational subjects may be mono- or multilingual, or they may speak a variation of the hegemonic language, but even so, this may not be enough for them to recognize themselves as part of that nation. Even when speaking the country's dominant language and due to the ideologies of class, previously referred to by Anderson (2006), transnational subjects may be exposed to vulnerable situations with limited access to education, the job market, the health care system, and services required to cover their basic needs. In Rocío's experience in high school, "se notaba como, con cada curso que pasaba, había cada vez menos chicos y chicas racializadas, cuando pasé a la universidad la disminución fue brutal. En mi clase de primer año de Comunicación Audiovisual yo era la única chica marrón" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 59).[15] On this topic, the European Council has promoted language diversity through policy making with an emphasis on "integration and social cohesion" (Minuz et al., 2022, p. 13). Even though these actions are beneficial for transnational subjects, as presented through Rocío's experience, speaking the hegemonic language may not enough. The matter is further complicated by the fact that an European identity integrates more than one language[16] (although English is highly used as a means of communication). Besides, there is a hierarchy of languages "that distinguish[es]

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[12] Julie Amberg and Deborah Vause (2009) define the language community as "a particular group of language users who share the use of a specific language adapted to fit their needs" (pp. 3-4).

[13] "in a place where it seemed that we did not belong" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 141).

[14] "one hundred percent with my Catalonian friends and I was never with the Latin people … In that way, I was never in one place nor the other, as always" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 38).

[15] "it was obvious how after each course I passed through there were less and less racialized boys and girls. When I started the university, the decrease was brutal. In my first-year class of Audiovisual Communication, I was the only [B]rown girl" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 159).

[16] Duchêne and Heller (2011) claim there is a phase of standardization "underway to make *multilingualism* the dominant ideal … to conceptually arrange and thereby manage the EU's increasing linguistic "diversity"" (p. 25), however, minority languages continue to disappear surrendering the power to those languages at the top of the hierarchy.

legitimate from illegitimate languages" (Sáenz-Hernández et al., 2023, p. 1) based on their use to conduct business and/or to construct knowledge. For this reason, some transnational subjects may be at a higher disadvantage depending on their first and acquired languages.

When speaking different languages, or varieties of the same language, people may experience changes in their identity[17] related to the language's cultural and historical background. For instance, Rocío expresses how she differentiates her way of communicating between her family and her group of friends:

> En el grupo de mi familia contesto hablándoles de ustedes y en el grupo de mis amigas contesto hablándoles de vosotras. Sigo haciendo esta distinción. Me pongo a pensar en lo confundida que estaría con once años por tener que compartimentar mi forma de hablar de esa manera y me da pena. (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 188)[18]

Even though she communicates in Spanish with both groups, she adapts herself to be accepted both in the new language community and her family, influencing her transnational identity. Language plays an important role because it "reflects both the individual characteristics of a person, as well as the beliefs and practices of his or her communit[ies]" (Amberg & Vause, 2009, p. 1). However, the display of a person's characteristics, beliefs, and practices through language may result in discrimination due to the aforementioned linguistic hierarchy. An example of this in *Marrón* is Rocío's mother, who speaks Quechua, an indigenous language from South America. Rocío mentions how her mother "no quería que tuviéramos la vida que ella tuvo, no quería enseñarnos a hablar quechua, su idioma natal, no quería que limpiásemos casas como ella" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 142).[19] For Rocío's mother, to teach her daughters her native language is to condemn them to poverty. For her, Quechua represents an obstacle to climb the social ladder. Unfortunately, as Rocío's experience shows, even if transnational subjects speak the host country's hegemonic language, they may experience a feeling of displacement. Consequently, a hegemonic European identity that claims unity through language, as proposed by Kedourie (1993), is not sustainable. On the contrary, transnational narratives reclaim alternative stories which disrupt that hegemonic history (Mohanty, 1995, p. 77) and offer a range of options to identify with.

4.2. The Displaced Female Transnational Subject

"Simplemente no pertenecía a esa ciudad. Yo lo notaba y sabía que toda la gente lo notaba también. Era como si fuese un extraterrestre disfrazado de humana, con pavor a que me descubriesen fingiendo ser lo que no era" (Quillahuaman, 2023, 96).[20]

In the past decades, scholars in the field of displacement studies have reevaluated traditional concepts and theories to better adapt them to the current social contexts. 'Forced migration' is one of the reconsidered terms that influences this research. David Turton (as cited in Canuday, 2020) claims that although the term is useful and should not be discarded, it robs transnational

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[17] For instance, Brian King's (2008) study exemplifies how queer Korean men felt more comfortable inquiring about their own queerness by learning English as a second language. They found a greater variety of words to express themselves than in Korean.

[18] "In my family's chat I answer referring to them as 'ustedes' and in my friends' chat I refer to them as 'vosotras.' I keep doing this distinction. I start thinking about how confused I would be at eleven years old for having to partition my way of speaking and I feel ashamed" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 188).

[19] "did not want us to have the life that she had. She did not teach us to speak quechua, her native language. She did not want us to clean houses as she did" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 142).

[20] "Simply, I did not belong to that city. I noticed it and knew that all the people noticed it as well. It was as if I was an alien disguised as a human being with the fear to be discovered pretending to be what I was not" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 96).

subjects of any "independent rational decision making; [assuming] that they are simply passive victims of circumstances" (p. 165). For instance, in the case of *Marrón*, Rocío expresses how her "madre quería alejarse de todo lo que representaba ese barrio por nosotras" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 28).[21] This is Rocío's mother desire. There is a decision made and actions followed, such as "despertarse a las cuatro de la madrugada … coger un bus para hacer una cola de cinco horas … mover las piernas cuando se me agarrotaban … [p]ara luego entrar y hacer una minucia de gestión" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 67),[22] to accomplish this desire. It is not necessarily an imposition, and it is clear how Rocío's mother and sisters actively pursue their objective, simultaneously considering that not every decision is their responsibility. Alternatively, Turton (as cited in Canuday, 2020) proposes the concept of 'displacement' since it encapsulates the hardships of the resettlement experience, but it does not reduce transnational subjects to powerless victims (p. 165). Whereas a hegemonic European identity defends a more static geographical location, a fluid transnational identity illustrates how transnational subjects continue to construct their identities within the process of displacement.

Even though Turton's proposal is highly valuable, we should avoid romanticizing the experience of resettlement. Authors such as Pasquetti and Sanyal (2022) stress that such romanticization "can also be deeply problematic and inattentive to how humanitarianism can be a bureaucratic and oppressive system" (p. 8),[23] extoling a white savior complex harmful towards transnational subjects. In Rocío's narration of her various visits to the Spanish Embassy in Lima, the reader is presented with the complexities of the bureaucratic system. Once inside the embassy, the situation is not any better. Rocío describes how:

> [E]l ambiente era de absoluta hostilidad. Por un lado, estaba el hastio y malhumor de los guardias de seguridad que eran con quienes tratábamos en la cola y, por otro lado, estaba lo de adentro, el terror real. De hecho, los guardias hasta parecían majos comparados con los funcionarios que trabajaban dentro. Supongo que todos, guardias y funcionarios, eran conscientes del poder que tenían sobre nosotros y disfrutaban de ello. (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 68)[24]

In Rocío's experience, the sense of inferiority is visible due to the treatment her family and others receive, and even though she is a child, she senses how they are unjustifiably mistreated. This racist and xenophobic bureaucratic system is a result of the long standing belief in a pure European identity that is threatened when others are displaced into its territory, resulting, as proposed by Paul Jay (2021), in an undeniable necessity to question the universality and purity of traditional Western concepts.

Another concept that has been reassessed within the field of displacement studies is that of 'violence.' When thinking about 'forced migration' and 'displacement' there is a shared emphasis on armed conflict and/or big hazardous events that rapidly force people to move to another country. In fact, such "a narrow definition of displacement, however, threatens to minimize if not obfuscate less sensational, yet nevertheless devastating and traumatic, forms that more gradual processes of displacement can take" (Vaz-Jones, as cited in Tyner, 2020, p.

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[21] "mother wanted to move away from everything that that neighborhood represented for us" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 28).

[22] "wake up at four in the morning … take a bus to stand in a line for five hours … move the legs when they were stiffened … [t]o later go in and conduct a trivial process" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 67).

[23] Likewise, Susan Bordo (as cited in Pyke, 2010) agrees that "the 'postmodern' inclination to emphasize and celebrate 'resistance' mystifies and normalizes domination" (p. 561).

[24] "[T]he environment was absolute hostility. On the one hand, there was the disgust and bad-temper of the security guards who were the ones we had to deal with in the queue and, on the other hand, there was what was inside, the real terror. In fact, the guards even seemed nice compared to the staff that worked inside. I guess that everyone, guards and staff, was conscious of the power that they had over us and they enjoyed it" (Quillahuaman, 2023, 68).

79). James Tyner (2020) presents the concept of 'slow violence' versus the more commonly known concept of 'fast violence' when talking about displacement. Fast violence fails to recognize the struggle of transnational subjects who have resettled for reasons other than armed conflicts. In Rocío's case, her family is not in immediate danger, however, her mother knows that staying in Peru might place her daughters at risk due to the violence and the lack of economic resources available in their hometown. Tyner (2020) defines 'slow violence' as "forms of violence that unfold gradually, indiscernibly, and contribute to forms of slow displacement marked by waiting and endurance" (p. 85). This slow violence is also present in the long and dire bureaucratic processes both in the home country, as mentioned above, and the host country, especially in matters of legal citizenship. For Rocío's family, the wait for her mother's paperwork takes several years, and the waiting contributes to the family's anxieties, fears, and sense of displacement. They want to "vivir con la tranquilidad de que mi madre tuviese los mismos derechos que nosotras. Que locura, ¿no? Todos esos años sin ella, fueron años de incertidumbre esperando algo que debería haber sido suyo porque, al fin y al cabo, es un derecho" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 88).[25] Bureaucratic processes represent power relationships that position transnational subjects at a clear disadvantage due to their uncertain situation and dependency on the system, relegating them to those in-between spaces (Bhabha, 1990) that are not yet recognized as genuine. Unfortunately, even when legal citizenship is obtained, the feelings of "miedo, preocupación y agotamiento" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 90)[26] remain.

I want to highlight the uniqueness of Rocío's story in relation to Turton's argument against the passive labeling of transnational subjects. Turton (as cited in Canuday, 2020) makes reference to the forced migration discourse as a "dehumanizing effect," resulting in states' and organizations' aid responses towards transnational subjects "not as individual human beings, people like us, … but as anonymous and dehumanised masses" (p. 165). This anonymous positioning justifies the unfair treatment that Rocío and her family encounter in the embassy and later in the governmental offices. The anonymity of transnational subjects perpetuates racist and xenophobic systems. On the contrary, to explore transnational subjects' narratives allow for new subjectivities to be created, as supported by Grewal (1997), and it encourages people to question traditional modes of policy making. Although Quillahuaman does not speak for all Peruvians, nor she represents all transnational subjects, her unique story informs the reader of a personal resettlement journey. Besides, feminist studies support the view that in women writings there is an intended collective, or what Emejulu and Sobande (2019) refer to as a "solidarity between different racialised women [that] can never be taken for granted – it must be fought for and in this creative tension exists the possibilities for new insights" (p. 6).[27] In the last page of her autobiography, Rocío pinpoints that "[a]hora sé que mi historia es lo que me hace fuerte y lo que me dará valor para defenderme tanto del racismo como de mí misma, cuando me sienta perdida y desencajada" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 189).[28] It is the uniqueness of her story and the tensions in the system that she writes about that allow new insights into the public identity debate. Her story promotes different representations of transnational experiences and may provide other transnational subjects with a sense of solidarity.

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[25] "live with the peace of mind that my mother would have the same rights as we did. How crazy, right? All those years without it [the legal citizenship], were years of uncertainty waiting for something that should have been hers because, at the end, it is a right" (Quillahuaman, 2023, 88).

[26] "fear, concern, and exhaustion" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 90).

[27] Similarly, Pasquetti and Sanya (2022) reminds us how "all displacements are unique and different – yet operate in relation to one another" (p. 2).

[28] "[n]ow I know that my story is what makes me strong and what will give me the strength to defend myself from the racism and from myself when I feel lost and dislocated" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 189).

4.3. The Unrepresented Female Transnational Subject

"No conocían a ninguna latina con la que compararme, así que siempre me tocaba ser Pocahontas, que ni siquiera era una actriz o un ser humano, era un dibujo animado, joder" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 37).[29]

Representation, or rather the lack of it, is an important topic in Quillahuaman's autobiography. "¡Cómo no va a serlo cuando te intentan borrar de todas partes!" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 6).[30] The lack of representations in narratives, and nowadays in social and mass media, result in xenophobia, racism, and internalized racism that affect transnational subjects directly. There is a crisis in contemporary nation states that opens the way to "xenophobic discourses [that] are politically useful to reassure people of their imagined shared identity in cultural terms" (Freier et al., 2020, p. 145). With the realization that nations are not as easily demarcated as was once believed,[31] the desire to defend what separates 'us' from 'them' becomes a necessity to some. When discussing xenophobia and racism, I refer to Freier et al. (2020) who define these concepts as the "discrimination based on race *and* ethnicity—which we understand as (self) identification based on shared, albeit constructed, physical traits, culture, religion, language, or alike that are perceived as distinctive from an out-group or the 'other'" (p. 144). This definition presents identity markers closely related to those exposed by Zenker (2018); however, in the case of xenophobia and racism there is discrimination based on those identity markers that otherwise would enhance a sense of belonging and of shared experiences.

In *Marrón*, Rocío endures racist and xenophobic treatment from the people around her due to her Latin American background. For example, she notices how some women protect their handbags from her while travelling in the metro (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 76). Also, how in a jewelry store, she is followed by the guard wherever she turns. "Hubiese sido romántico, si no hubiese sido racista" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 77). [32] Once, her boss lends her the office's keys which have the same key ring as her house's keys. When she realizes what she did, she said: "Porfa, no me robes ¿eh?" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 79).[33] These are some of the examples in which Quillahuaman deals with racism and xenophobia while residing in Spain. Although it is not justifiable, Quillahuaman expresses how the lack of Latina/o' representations and their misrepresentations (when available) may influence these behaviors. There are stereotypical ideas of Latinas/os being linked to "violence, precariousness, poverty, [and] drug trafficking" (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2018, p. 103). These stereotypes are based on race and class, which are magnified by narratives and television shows that emphasize the rejection of those who come from Latin America, resulting in the dehumanizing effect mentioned above by Turton (as cited in Canuday, 2020). Rocío recalls how "[l]os inmigrantes latinos estábamos en todas partes … pero no había una representación proporcional en la televisión, ni en el cine ni en los libros" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 164).[34] Due to this lack of representation, she recalls the time when she washed her skin so strongly that she injured herself. She wants to be whiter because of the bullying she is subjected to in school and because she does not have anyone to look up to who looks like her. The normalization of non-whites' inferiority is a dangerous ideology for

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[29] "They did not know any Latina to compare me with, so I always had to be Pocahontas, who was not even an actress or a human being, it was a fucking cartoon" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 37).

[30] "How is it not going to be important when they try to erase you from everywhere!" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 6).

[31] "While recent discussions of migration and Europe and of Fortress Europe seem to assume the concept of Europe as coherent and clearly demarcated, Europe's history shows ambiguity, with a lack of clear delimitations" (Loftsdóttir et al., 2024, p. 1).

[32] "It would have been romantic if it had not been racist" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 77).

[33] "Please, do not rob me, eh?" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 79).

[34] "[t]he Latin American immigrants were everywhere … but there was not a proportionate representation on the television, nor in the cinema or the books" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 164).

European countries and their people, especially for transnational subjects. For this reason, as mentioned by Boter and Rensen (2020), "representation of the lives of individuals who literally crossed national borders, or who implicitly or explicitly renounced a framing of themselves as national citizens" (p. 9) is necessary for a paradigm shift towards inclusivity.

A topic that has gained more attention in the past decades within the field of sociological studies is that of internalized racism though some scholars have been reluctant to its study for fear of blaming the racialized communities (Pyke, 2010, p. 560). Chicana writers, such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, have written extensively about internalized racism from their own experiences. For instance, Moraga (2021) recognizes how "it is frightening to acknowledge that I have internalized a racism and classism, where the object of oppression is not only someone outside of my skin, but the someone inside my skin" (p. 25). Citing Stuart Hall in his essay "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," Karen Pyke (2010) defines internalized racism as "the 'subjection' of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideology which imprison and define them" (p. 552). It is important to take into consideration that, similarly to the sexism that women may reproduce in society, this internalized racism may be either conscious or unconscious. Frantz Fanon (1968) also refers to this phenomenon as "the outcome of a double process: primarily, economic; subsequently, the internalization -or, better, the epidermalization- of this inferiority" (p. 13). Racism, sexism, and classism have been so normalized and they are so damaging that as individuals we have no other choice but to challenge them. However, this is not a single individual's responsibility, nor should those who suffer internalized racism be blamed, because even in cases of internalized racism there may be resistance. We must understand that what needs challenging is the systemic racism and not white folk per se. Although by challenging the first, the latter may continue to gain awareness of their privileges.

Considering representation is important when challenging both racism and internalized racism. "Representation itself has been characterized as keeping the subordinate subordinate, [and] the inferior inferior" (Said, 2007, p. 95). Romero-Rodríguez et al. (2018) conducted an analysis of the different Latin American characters present in Spanish television between 2014 and 2017. The team discovered that out of the 26 codes assigned to describe the characters, 22 of them had a negative connotation (p. 103). Not by coincidence, Quillahuaman refers in her book to the famous character called "Machu Pichu" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 164), a male Peruvian worker who is discriminated against and mistreated by his Spanish boss and who is also mentioned in the study. It is time to stop disguising this type of racism and xenophobia as comedy. Such well known characters present in the Spanish imaginary feed the racist and xenophobic attitudes towards transnational subjects, which in return may adopt these behaviors as their own. Rocío is aware of her internalized racism and how "este miedo es causado por mis propios prejuicios, prejuicios contra mí misma, pero prejuicios que no invente yo. Son prejuicios que me han venido de fuera, que he acabado asimilando y con los que tengo que convivir" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 76).[35] This same internalized racism makes her doubt herself when writing her book. She thought that "[a] nadie le va a interesar ninguna de mis insignificantes vivencias, pensaba. A nadie. Entonces me di cuenta. Cuando pensaba en "nadie", no estaba pensando en cualquiera … ¡Estaba pensando en la gente blanca!" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 5).[36] This section calls attention to the lack of positive representations

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[35] "this fear is caused by my own prejudices, prejudices against myself, but prejudices that I did not invent. They are prejudices that have come from outside, that I have ended up assimilating and with which I have to live together with" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 76).

[36] "[n]o one is going to be interested in any of my insignificant experiences, I though. No one. Then I realized it. When I was thinking of "no one," I was not thinking about everyone … I was thinking about the white people!" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 5).

and abundance of misrepresentations of Latin American people, more specifically Latin women. The few racist and xenophobic (mis)representations are mostly male. Unfortunately, the female transnational subject continues to be obscured, which is one of the reasons why narratives such as *Marrón* are so important in the context of current European identity debates.

5. Conclusion

Through an analysis of the representations of monolingual, displaced, and unrepresented female transnational subjects in *Marrón,* I have challenged a hegemonic definition of European identity that considers a shared language, a citizenship, and a geographical place. Through this confrontation, I have showed how the lack of representation of transnational subjects in mass media and narratives has resulted in racist and xenophobic bureaucratic procedures and the normalization of discriminatory behaviors. First, the representation of the monolingual transnational subjects in *Marrón* illustrates how even if transnational subjects speak the host country's hegemonic language, they may feel alienated from their surroundings. Although speaking the host country's language is important for their social inclusion, there are other identity markers that complicate the identity debate, and which may place transnational subjects at a clear disadvantage. For this reason, considering intersectionality is fundamental to dealing with topics concerning identity. Second, the representation of the displaced transnational female subject demonstrates how, even if identity has historically been closely related to the nation, it is not necessarily geographically bounded especially in Europe's case where the border demarcations are not as clear. Moreover, as a result of such narrow and static delimitations of a hegemonic European identity, the unrepresented transnational female subjects referred to in this narrative, prove how racism and xenophobia continue to be present in society due to a desire "in recent 'returns' to culture and tradition" (Said, 2007, pp. xiii-xiv). The defense of this culture and tradition results in the separation of 'us' and 'them,' which translates into social conflict and marginalization. Homi Bhabha (2004) posits that "the very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities … are in a profound process of redefinition" (p. 7). It was through narratives and cultural productions that this idea of homogeneity was built, and it is through transnational productions, like *Marrón*, that they should continue to be challenged.

To defend a static and traditional hegemonic European identity means to other transnational subjects. Instead, differences should be embraced, promoting opportunities for stability when resettling. Additionally, the current slow and violent bureaucratic procedures that transnational subjects must undergo should be continually reevaluated. People should not have to choose one place or the other to feel that they belong. People may experience belonging with more than one place, within multiple languages and nationalities, or they may experience a sense of alienation to both their home and host countries. Transnational experiences are in many ways connected and related to one another, but it must be remembered that they are unique and that each person lives these experiences differently. Cherríe Moraga (2021) praises the act of belonging to different places as she writes: "I am a woman with a foot in both worlds; and I refuse the split. I feel the necessity for dialogue. Sometimes I feel it urgently" (p. 29). Similarly, some time after Rocío's resettling journey, when she feels more settled, she comes to realize that "[e]s aceptar que no tengo que ser de un sitio o de otro, sino que puedo ser de los dos a la vez. Es creer que si me acepto así, quizá deje de sentirme fuera de sitio constantemente. Es

aceptar mi historia para poder avanzar" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 188).[37] Through her experience, the fluid transnational identity which is context dependent and malleable through time and (dis)placement becomes a reality. Once Rocío stops trying to fit into a place where she does not belong, she recognizes that she is part of that place in her own way. She does not need to follow any other experiences but her own. That feeling of alienation starts to disappear when she embraces the different parts of her transnational identity.

The current paper's findings contribute to broaden theoretical debates on identity as transnational narratives written by women, especially those by Brown women, offer partial perspectives (Haraway, 1988) that have traditionally not been considered in the conversations. Transnational women offer a standpoint which without it any discussion is incomplete. For transnational women writers, "in that very act [of writing] lies our survival because a woman who writes has power. And a woman with power is feared" (Anzaldúa, 2021, pp. 169-170). Black, Brown, and other women of color are reclaiming academia and other cultural spaces to defy the silencing that has been imposed for so long. Gabriela Wiener (2020) refers to this movement in her article by stating that:

> [P]ese a que el acoso racista aún es habitual en calles y redes, la organización y el orgullo son cada vez más fuertes. Hay afrodescendientes y cholos activando y poniendo el cuerpo, haciendo esforzada pedagogía cada día en los medios, publicando libros, ofreciendo talleres y participando en debates y charlas…es resistencia y lucha, desde los cuerpos negros y marrones. (paras. 11-14)[38]

Wiener's words are a motivating call to continue swimming against the current. Many racialized women scholars are putting themselves out there to change the traditional and hierarchical narratives that discriminate and marginalize transnational and racialized subjects. Simultaneously, structural changes are needed to impact this movement and to expose the civil society to a broader variety of representations. Rocío wanted to "limpiar la suciedad de mi piel, quería dejar de ser marrón. Quizás hasta quería dejar de ser peruana" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 105).[39] We must advocate for a European society that welcomes Brown girls and women, instead of a hostile space that might result in them washing their skin so strongly as to wound themselves both physically and emotionally.

6. Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the representations of female transnational subjects in *Marrón*, here are two recommendations for future research on the topic of European identity and belonging from a transnational perspective:

To broaden the pool of case studies and narratives that deal with the topic of transnational female representations and their resettlement processes is fundamental. In the past couple of decades, more transnational subjects have written about their resettlement experiences through life writing narratives, however, many of these authors are based in the United States or they

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[37] "[i]t is to accept that I do not have to be from one place or the other, instead I can be from both places at the same time. It is to believe that if I accept myself like this, I will stop feeling constantly out of place. It is to accept my story to continue advancing" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 188).

[38] "[D]espite common racist harassment in the streets and the media, the organization and the pride are stronger each time. There are Afro-descendant and 'cholos' people doing activism and exposing their bodies, conducting dedicated pedagogy every day in the media, publishing books, offering workshops, and participating in debates and talks … it is resistance and struggle from the [B]lack and [B]rown bodies" (Wiener, 2020, paras. 11-14). (My translation).

[39] "clean the dirtiness from my skin, I wanted to stop being [B]rown. Maybe I even wanted to stop being Peruvian" (Quillahuaman, 2023, p. 105).

are 1ˢᵗ and 2ⁿᵈ generation authors. European publishing houses should continue to offer opportunities to female transnational subjects to share their resettlement stories to expand the cultural representations available to readers.

To improve the resettling processes for transnational subjects by critically discuss and research current situations. With the rise of world movements in the 21st century, the on-going evaluation and enhancement of policies related to this topic is a must. Qualitative and quantitative research that include transnational subjects is necessary to grasp how the situation may be improved. Influential decisions should include a bottom-up participation through the involvement of the transnational population in discussions on identity and bureaucratic processes that affect them directly.

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