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# Charcoal and Cinnamon

The Politics of Color in Spanish Caribbean Literature

Claudette M. Williams

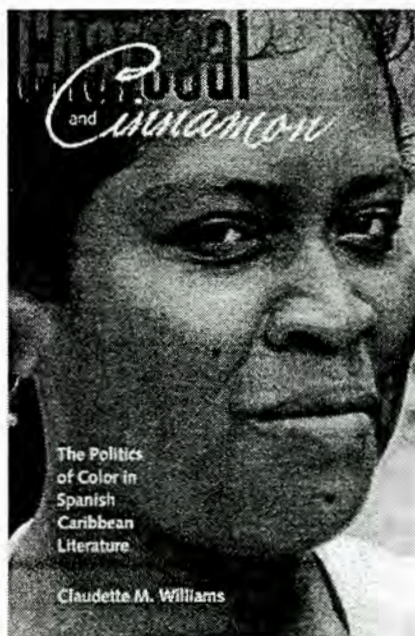
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*Charcoal and Cinnamon* explores the continuing redefinition of women of African descent in the Caribbean, focusing on the manner in which literature has influenced their treatment and contributed to the formation of their shifting identities.

While various studies have explored this subject, much of the existing research harbors a blindness to the literature of the non-English-speaking territories. Claudette Williams bases her analyses on poetry and prose from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic and enhances it by comparing these writings with the literatures of the English- and French-speaking Caribbean territories.

Williams also questions the tendency of some of the established schools of feminism to de-emphasize the factor of race in their gender analyses. A novel aspect of this work, indicated by the allusion to "charcoal" and "cinnamon" in its title, is its focus on the ways in which many writers use language to point to subtle distinctions between black and brown (mulatto) women.

The originality of Williams's approach is also evident in her emphasis on



the writer's attitudes toward race rather than on the writer's race itself. She brings to the emotionally charged subject of the politics of color the keen analysis and sustained research of a scholar, as well as the perceptive personal insights of an African-ancestored Caribbean woman. Though the main focus is on literary works, the book will also be a valuable reference for courses on Caribbean history, sociology, and psychology.

Claudette M. Williams is the author of several articles on the images of women in Caribbean literature and is currently senior lecturer in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica.

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## Omnipresencia Africana en la Civilización Universal

por Manuel Zapata Olivella

En toda cultura, ágrafa o letrada, y en la suma de la civilización universal, subyace el pensamiento del Homosapiens Africano. No existe otro antecedente en la historia.

Afirmar a priori la omnipresencia africana en la civilización universal no presupone originalidad. Del consenso paleontológico que se tiene sobre la formación del primer Homo sapiens en Africa, sólo deseamos recalcar que gracias al culto a la palabra como don sagrado recibido de los Ancestros, los millones de africanos desterrados de su continente pudieron transformar la muerte en vida y la esclavitud en liberación creadora para polinizar la civilización. Nos adelantamos a declarar que no nos anima rebatir a los escépticos de esta verdad de a puño, ni a los eminentes antropólogos y lingüistas que han enriquecido la creatividad africana con sus estudios.

Desde luego, los *prisioneros* africanos, y no *esclavos*, llevados por primera vez a Grecia, Roma y luego a la América, a pesar de estar desnudos y encadenados, eran hombres que no procedían de las junglas, ni mucho menos de las cuevas del Neandertal. Eran células violentamente arrancadas de su constelación cultural, ya procedieran de aldeas campesinas o de las capitales de los esplendorosos reinos de Malí, Ghana, Songhai, Manicongo y Monomotapa. Poseían veinte o más siglos de haber iniciado en su propio continente las primeras civilizaciones de Egipto, Axum y Meroe.<sup>1 y 2</sup>

Para señalar un sólo ejemplo en la simultaneidad histórica de la civilización y la barbarie, digamos que Timbuctú, capital de Songhai, en 1492, año en que Cristóbal

Colón arribó a la América, poseía una universidad en la que enseñaban sabios de Arabia, Grecia, Italia y de la propia España morisca. Filósofos, matemáticos, astrónomos, médicos y sacerdotes cayeron en la red de los cazadores y traficantes de seres humanos. Pero la lucha contra la esclavitud es tan antigua como los "bárbaroscivilizados". Recordarlo es muy importante para conocer quién es el homosapiens retrógrado y quién el liberado.

### La "Substancia" del Pensamiento

En sus conocidas experiencias, Pavlov demostró que el cerebro animal es una caja del resonancia de las sensaciones percibidas por los sentidos, provenientes del medio exterior y del interno. Una capacidad psicomotora mucho más compleja en el hombre que no sólo reacciona con impulsos reflejos condicionados instintivamente, sino apta para dar respuestas racionales e incondicionadas.

Pues bien, el Homosapiens Africano fue la primera sonda lúcida en explorar las fuerzas superiores que rigen el universo. Ignorante de sus portentosos instrumentos sensoriales, debió descubrir por simple praxis existencial que poseía facultades para actuar sobre la naturaleza mediante el acondicionamiento de sus respuestas.

Laboratorio ambulante, anduvo extraviado por milenios circundando la naturaleza como miembro dócil de la manada. Las primeras luces de inteligencia que le

permitieron interrogarse, sin hallar respuestas, sobre los misterios del hambre, la vida y la muerte.

Sin este gusanillo roedor se habría quedado dormido en las cuevas del Cuaternario. Hoy sabemos que no sólo fue filósofo, sino teórico que se permitió plantearse la hipótesis del lenguaje hablado que millones de años después, resolverían las generaciones aptas para articular las primeras sílabas.<sup>3</sup>

Aquellos, fueron los días de la floración imaginativa, cuando el paisaje natural se identificó con los novedosos lenguajes de los símbolos y los gestos: colores, aromas, sonidos, sabores; y se logró la comunicación con los astros y dioses, mediante el baile y los silbos hasta cuando los hablantes pudieron aprisionar la mariposa de la idea en la telaraña de las palabras.

Las experiencias cotidianas sometidas al diálogo reflexivo—agua, tierra, estrella, frutos, prole—pudieron trascender a la metafísica de la muerte y los sueños oníricos.

El prodigio ambivalente de la palabra oral y abstracta que tantos desvelos origina a los lingüistas contemporáneos, ya fue intuido y resuelto conscientemente por el *Homo sapiens Africano* al observar los fenómenos naturales que entretejían la luz y la sombra, el día y la noche, la vida y la muerte en un continuum sin fin. Para la filosofía bantú que recoge las más antiguas tradiciones de la humanidad, el "kulonda", engendrador de la vida, la palabra y la inteligencia, es un don recibido de los Ancestros al sembrarlo en la matriz de la futura madre. Supo desde entonces, que el pensamiento y el lenguaje constituían fuerzas mágicas para dominar la naturaleza tangible y los mundos imaginados, dándose a la tarea de armar trampas para

capturar la substancia misteriosa que animaba a los seres materiales y fantasmas. La hipótesis del lenguaje hablado ya venía gestándose en sus gruñidos.

Según el criterio de los precursores de la antropología—Tylor, Morgan, Lang—esta encrucijada empujó al hombre primigenio a concebir los primeros sistemas filosóficos y religiosos: animismo, animatismo y entre ellos, el más evolucionado, el totemismo en el cual el universo está gobernado por fuerzas mágicas que se combaten entre sí y que los antropólogos han llamado "la guerra de los espíritus".<sup>4</sup>

No son precisas mayores argucias para adivinar que el deslinde arbitrario que pretende hacerse entre el pensamiento mágico y la religión busca amputar la creatividad racional y lúcida del *Homo sapiens Africano*, connotándola, de simple acto "instintivo".

Sigmund Freud fue el primero en reconocer la validez del razonamiento mágico de los pueblos aborígenes. Su análisis psicoanalítico descubrió las raíces míticas de la filosofía helénica y con ello todo el andamiaje de las superestructuras idealistas que enmascaran los impulsos instintivos de la libido.

Recordemos el texto de su paladina reivindicación:

"El animismo es un sistema intelectual.—No explica únicamente tales o cuales fenómenos particulares, sino que permite concebir el mundo como una totalidad. Si hemos de dar fe a los investigadores, la humanidad habría conocido sucesivamente, a través de los tiempos, tres de estos sistemas intelectuales, tres grandes concepciones del universo: la concepción *animista* (mitológica), la *religiosa* y la *científica*.

De todos estos sistemas, es quizá, el animismo, el más lógico y completo. Ahora bien, esta primera concepción humana del universo es una teoría psicológica. Sería ir más allá de nuestros límites, demostrar lo que de ella subsiste aún en la vida actual, bien bajo la forma degradada de superstición, bien como fondo vivo de nuestro idioma, de nuestras creencias y de nuestra filosofía". ("Tótem y Tabú")<sup>5</sup>

Posteriormente C. Levy-Strauss, Joseph Bram, Harry Hoiyer y otros reconocieron como acto previo del lenguaje el substratum ontogénico.

Desde 1800, se había comenzado a revisar la filología tradicional, al comprobarse el parentesco semántico que tenían el griego y el latín con el sánscrito. Hasta entonces el lenguaje se consideraba un sistema autónomo, cuya evolución era independiente de la vida social de los pueblos.

El concepto de isocronía que explicaba el nacimiento y diversidad de las lenguas romances, fue superado y enriquecido con la diacronía social que reconoce la participación creadora de los pueblos hablantes en el desarrollo de los idiomas. No obstante, los prejuicios persistieron y aún campean en su afán de rechazar dicotomías en la raíz del lenguaje.

Paradójicamente, Guillermo Humboldt, iniciador de la tesis del diacronismo lingüístico, se obstinó en separar la cultura y la civilización como ramas divergentes de la creatividad humana, al sostener que la sabiduría empírica acumula los conocimientos del que hacer profano pero no los altos vuelos del espíritu.

Pero la paleontología, más atenta a los fósiles que a los ideales, ha confirmado que la inteligencia nació en la noche selvática africana entre croar de sapos y titilar de

estrellas. Buscarle distinto origen sería reinventar la historia de la humanidad en otro planeta.

Después de analizar el concepto "cultura" a lo largo de la historia, Kroeber y Kluckhonn, concluyen afirmando que ésta pertenece a "una categoría de la naturaleza, y en especial de la índole humana".<sup>6</sup>

Buen estribo para dejar en suspenso al jinete y permitir que cada quien oriente, según su criterio, las riendas del caballo.

Desandaremos las huellas dejadas por el homosapiens africano que no tuvo rumbo prefijado y que al volver la mirada hacia atrás, advirtió que le seguían las sombras de sus Ancestros.

### Los Diez Pilares de la Cultura

En la leyenda griega el gigante Anteo, hijo de la tierra (Gea) y émulo de Hércules, no se cuenta que haya intentado superar los doce trabajos del héroe homérico, levantando sendos monumentos que recordaran a los hombres los pilares de la civilización. Pero, en la historia real el Homosapiens Africano, tal vez por no ser un mito, dejó plasmada su huella en los fundamentos inamovibles de la cultura y la civilización.

Veamos los testimonios que nos aportan las ciencias humanas:

1) La inteligencia creadora del Homosapiens Africano fue la fuente originaria de la cultura.<sup>7</sup>

2) El reconocimiento consciente del parentesco entre padres e hijos por parte del Neandertal africano, dio comienzo a la formación de los primeros núcleos familiares en el seno de la horda o el clan.<sup>8</sup>

3) La invención del lenguaje facilitó al Homosapiens Africano desarrollar el

primer sistema filosófico para la comprensión de la naturaleza, antecedente de la filosofía, la matemática, la religión y la literatura.<sup>9</sup>

4) El lenguaje gestual precedió a la palabra. La mímica, el baile, la música y el teatro ritual iniciaron la comunión del Homosapiens Africano con sus semejantes, dioses y ancestros.<sup>10</sup>

5) La agudización de los sentidos para percibir la realidad desarrolló el instinto de observación del Homosapiens Africano, que conduciría a la astronomía, física, biología.<sup>11</sup>

6) La captura del fuego, por el Homosapiens Africano fue otro gran salto en el dominio de la naturaleza, gracias a él se iluminaron las cavernas del cuaternario. La primera experiencia para extraer de los minerales y cuerpos orgánicos, la chispa, el calor, la electricidad y la energía atómica.

7) La abuela "Lucy" Homo-habilis Africano construyó las primeras herramientas que propiciaron las grandes revoluciones de la cacería armada; la siembra y la cosecha colectivas; el rejo de enlazar para la domesticación del toro; la arquitectura de las pirámides, las artesanías y la navegación por ríos y mares; ¡lo sorprendente que estaría la abuela rodeada de sus tataranietos, las máquinas, los robots electrónicos y las naves interplanetarias!<sup>12</sup>

8) El Homosapiens Africano intuyó desde épocas prehistóricas que en las personas, animales, árboles, astros y fenómenos naturales, habitaban "espíritus invisibles" a los cuales, trató de atrapar con la magia como lo había hecho con el fuego.<sup>13</sup>

Transcurrirían milenios para que la física comprobara la existencia de la energía cuántica.

9) Otro de los grandes prodigios del

Homosapiens Africano, fue la doma de los instintos egoístas del individuo para someterlo a los sentimientos gregarios y amorosos de la sociedad y la familia.

¿Se habrá logrado dos millones de años después?<sup>14</sup>

10) La tradición oral permitió al Homosapiens Africano tener conciencia de la cadena que lo unía a sus difuntos y descendencia, principio de todo pensamiento social y religioso.

Africa, poseedora de la filosofía más antigua de la humanidad, ha recogido en su memoria ancestral los Diez Pilares de la Civilización forjados por la inteligencia y creatividad del Homosapiens Africano en su concepción de la gran familia universal:

"Los difuntos y los vivos hermanados a la tierra, astros, animales, plantas y *herramientas* conforman una sola familia".<sup>15</sup>

En la sociedad actual algo desequilibra la relojería de la fraternidad. Tal parece que la rueda suelta son las *herramientas* inventadas por la abuela "Lucy" para auxiliar a sus hijos y no destruirlos.

### El Arbol de la Palabra y la Sabiduría

Aunque para muchos ilustrados les parezca demasiado rústica la cuna selvática de la civilización, lo histórico de su heráldica es la magia creadora de las palabras elementales y de las manos toscas del primigenio africano.

Somos conscientes de la dificultad de explicar en breves páginas sus prodigios. No obstante lo intentaremos, validos de la omnipresencia africana a partir de las no menos oscuras bodegas de los barcos



traficantes iluminadas por el talento de sus hijos encadenados. Para ellos es preciso no olvidar que esta hazaña prometéica se remonta a la antigüedad grecolatina cuando sus filósofos creían que encarnaban el verbo de Dios. Todos los pueblos más allá de Atenas y Roma pertenecían al Oikounmene, país imaginario, que habitaban los "bárbaros" de Africa, Europa y Asia, por tanto aptos para conquistar y ser esclavizados. Ni el esplendor de Mesopotamia, Egipto y Etiopía, ni el florecimiento de su filosofía, religión, escritura y artes les indujo a pensar que Africa había fecundado a la Hélade.

Otro mito, tan antiguo como el propio hombre africano, recuerda el nacimiento del lenguaje con la imagen del árbol de la palabra y la sabiduría. Por tradición, a la entrada de las aldeas sudanesas y subsaharianas, en el territorio que fuera asiento de los antiguos reinos del Bornu, Malí, Ghana y el Songhai, se haya plantado indefectiblemente un frondoso y antiguo baobab. Afirma la tradición yoruba que en sus ramas, duermen los difuntos. Cada vez que la comunidad delibera sobre decisiones trascendentales, los ancianos se congregan allí para que los Ancestros, iluminen sus palabras con la sabiduría milenaria.

La leyenda agrega que el árbol sagrado reúne simbólicamente en sus hojas los mil y más idiomas africanos conformados en su larga evolución de millones de años. Sus raíces son tan profundas que no ha podido ser destroncado por la cacería de sus hablantes, perpetrada desde tiempos inmemoriales.

Hoy la paleontología y la historia afirman que los tartesios, un pueblo africano, emigró desde el sur del Mediterráneo a la península Ibérica como hombres libres, no esclavizados, ocho

siglos antes de Cristo.

Asentados en una región rica en minas auríferas, hablando múltiples idiomas, comerciaron con caldeos, fenicios, griegos y romanos, tras desarrollar su propio alfabeto a partir del caldeo, sus barcos a vela recorrieron los puertos del Mediterráneo y se aventuraban más allá por las costas e islas del Atlántico. (16)

Veinte siglos después, (1492), descendientes de aquellos políglotas y navegantes, en naos mercenarias arribarían a nuestro continente para enriquecer una nueva civilización con sus manos encadenadas.

#### **Lenguas Imperiales e Idiomas Criollos en América**

Hagamos un parangón entre los fenómenos lingüísticos operados en el desarrollo de las lenguas romances, cuyo substrato había recogido connotaciones semánticas de las llamadas "tribus bárbaras" euroasiáticas, con el proceso que tuvo lugar en América, cuando los idiomas europeos se convirtieron a su vez en lenguas colonizadoras.

En épocas y escenarios diferentes, la aptitud y actitud de los hablantes africanos y amerindios fueron las mismas frente a los idiomas invasores. Sin embargo, pese a tal similitud, lo decisivo en la nueva confrontación fue las diferencias étnicas y sociales:

En la romanización de los idiomas europeos, la lengua conquistadora fue una sola, el arcaico y monolítico latín, pese haber recibido influjos de idiomas más antiguos como el sánscrito y el griego.

Su expansión se realizó en el territorio de un mismo continente, Euroasia, sin océano de por medio.

Los pueblos colonizados pertenecían a

una misma etnia, la caucásica.

El periodo de formación de los idiomas romances requirió ocho siglos, desde la invasión de las Galias e Hispania por los romanos (218 a.C.) hasta el siglo XV, cuando el Emperador Carlos V pudo declarar en el Senado de Génova:

"Aunque pudiera hablaros en latín, toscano, francés y tudesco, he querido preferir la lengua castellana, para que me entiendan todos".<sup>17</sup>

Pese a que el latín había perdido su jerarquía imperial al realizarse la colonización de América, sus trampas semánticas persistían y aún perturban a los hablantes ágrafos y letrados de español, portugués y francés. El inicio de esta alienación tiene fecha conocida, año de 1492, cuando el padre Antonio de Nebrija entregó la primera gramática castellana a la Reina Isabel con el maquiavélico consejo:

"Enfrenta a muchas lenguas y obtendrás la confusión... (la lengua de Castilla) debe ser siempre la compañera del Imperio".<sup>18</sup>

No tardaría el almirante Cristóbal Colón en preparar su tropa de 1,500 soldados en el segundo viaje con claros propósitos de conquista.

### El Maremoto Lingüístico

Cincuenta millones o más de africanos transplantados, y otros tantos de amerindios sobrevivientes de la conquista; cientos de miles de indostanes, malayos y filipinos, sumados al torrente incesante de millones de europeos, provocaron el gran maremoto que trastoca en América los idiomas aborígenes y extranjeros. Jamás

antes ni después se ha dado en la historia otra revulsión lingüística de tal magnitud.

La mirada menos inquisitiva podría advertir que la corriente propulsora de la molienda procedía de Africa. Pueblos enteros, dispersos y refundidos fueron transportados en bodegas herméticamente selladas. En su aparente barbarie al ser desnudados y hacinados, constituían la cepa originaria del árbol de la palabra.

De rechazo a la invasión, América opuso la barrera continental de sus lenguas autóctonas, emparentadas con idiomas afropolinésicos y euroasiáticos. Sus orígenes se remontaban a cuarenta mil o más años de antigüedad.<sup>19</sup>

Un vasto atlas polilingüístico que recogía las palabras heladas de los algonquinos del Artico y de los patagones y mapuches de la Antártica. Y entre estos polos hemisféricos, pululaban lenguas con raíces mongólicas y caucásicas—algonquinos, esquimales, oriones, apalaches, sioux, mohicanos, etc.—en las estepas, lagos y praderas de Norte América; las lenguas olmecas y náhuatl de México; los idiomas y dialectos del Istmo Centroamericana—chorotega, lenca, huétar—ya mezclados con la familia lingüística arawak, caribe, tayrona y taíno del litoral e islas del Circumcaribe.

Al sur, las cadenas de los Andes vertebraban los idiomas igualmente arcaicos del vasto imperio socialista de los Incas—aymará y quéchua—, aglutinando culturalmente pueblos de diferentes etnias por cumbres, praderas y ríos. Desde Colombia, Ecuador, Perú, Bolivia, Brasil, Paraguay, Uruguay, hasta la helada Tierra del Fuego: chibchas, timotes, quillacingas, charrúas, aricas, mapuches, calchaquies o patagones...

Todos emparentados por la lengua arawak, la más extendida por las riberas

selváticas del Río de la Plata, Paraná, Amazonas y Orinoco, ámbitos del guaraní, tupí y caribe que confluyen al circumscribir de los taironas, tainos y olmeca, con lo cual se cierra el universo lingüístico de los amerindios.

El latín nunca navegó tan lejos ni entretejió su semántica con pueblos que defendieron y aún hablan sus descendientes, en los confines de las selvas o enfrentados heroicamente a las lenguas conquistadoras en las "villas miserias" que rodean las ciudades de México, Quito, Lima, Río. Como cautivos de la tecnología moderna, disparan sus palabras mágicas contra los turistas desde las acorraladas "reservas indígenas" de Estados Unidos y Canadá.

¡Nunca morirá una lengua mientras sobreviva el último hablante que monologue con sus Ancestros!

#### **Africa Sacrificada y Renacida**

El prodigio existencial de Africa en América fue renacer de sus cenizas. El mito egipcio del Ave Fénix proyectándose en su diáspora con el auxilio del lenguaje ontogénico y de los Ancestros. No hay otra forma de explicar su resurrección.

Para los transplantados sin más equipaje que la memoria ancestral, la lengua parladora fue semilla de vida. Allí donde la muerte sepultaba la esperanza de sobrevivir, el canto, invocador de los Ancestros, resucitaba a difuntos y vivos.

Después de tres meses o más de navegación, los cautivos arribaban a los puertos reducidos a una tercera parte por el hacinamiento, las hambrunas y enfermedades. Los sobrevivientes, sin contar con un día de descanso, eran sometidos a la expoliación de los trabajos forzados bajo azotes y encadenamiento con tanta saña

que la expectativa de vida útil no sobrepasaba los siete o diez años.

En las proximidades de las construcciones de murallas y fortalezas, existían basureros en los cuales arrojaban a los decrepitos y moribundos, donde algún monje piadoso—en Cartagena de Indias fray Alonso de Sandoval y San Pedro Claver—los disputaban a los babalaos para salvar sus almas. Fueran sepultados con la cruz o los tambores, no tendrían hijos que les lloraran, pero sí sus Ancestros que les esperaban en la otra orilla, Africa reencontrada.<sup>20</sup>

El ininterrumpido secuestro de adultos, jóvenes y niños rompió el ciclo generacional durante siglos al destruir el núcleo familiar. En Africa como en América las más bellas cautivas eran acaparadas por los amos en puertos y subastas públicas para convertirlas en sus concubinas. Esta práctica común en las colonias españolas, portuguesas y francesas, condenó a muchos africanos a morir ágamos sin nunca copular con congénere.

No era menos cruel la suerte de aquellas madres violentamente separadas de sus hijos al ser vendidos para no reencontrarse jamás en la ilimitada geografía de la esclavitud.

A sabiendas del incierto destino que les esperaba, quienquiera que fuese el padre—africano o no—, la madre arrullaba al hijo, recordándole el nombre de "Africa". Con esta sola palabra se mantenía el recuerdo de los orígenes.

#### **Memoria del Lenguaje**

La omnipresencia de Africa en América es tan ostensible en el Caribe, Estados Unidos, Brasil y litorales de Sud América que la mente se resiste a pensar que su

etnia y cultura sean un paisaje transplantado. El afroamericano parece tener la edad, la piel, el sabor y el aroma de la tierra.

Improvisando notas con un saxo en Harlem; bailando samba en las calles de Río; dueño de la pelota beisbolera en el estadio de la Habana o morador en la soledad del litoral Pacífico, obliga a pensar que siempre fue así desde tiempos inmemoriales.

Pero el africano en América no es simple postal de deslumbrados turistas. Mucho más, poeta, maestro, científico y artista. Al hablar con un afroamericano en Puerto Príncipe se tiene la impresión de oírlo en París; o en Sevilla cuando en realidad conversa en Santo Domingo; en Londres si se le escucha como profesor de Harvard; en Lisboa si se le encuentra en Manaos; o en Amsterdam al oír a una recepcionista de Paramaribo. Y aún así, con esta experiencia políglota, el visitante se resiste a aceptar que sea América y no África la que habla, escribe, enseña o canta.

Lo que pudo ocultar la civilización con su maquillaje de códigos, persiste en el substrato de los idiomas conquistadores donde la palabra rebelde, siempre taumatúrgica, connotó la semántica extraña con nuevos significados. La tijera mutiladora nunca pudo cercenar el sentimiento del oprimido.

¿Cómo cuantificar los recuerdos de los prisioneros adultos y jóvenes para no olvidar su familia y la casa recién abandonadas?

La estrategia para abordar este dolor existencial requiere una interpretación ontogénica, la empleada por Freud para desembobinar el inconsciente y consciente de los pueblos. Una tarea para sus discípulos—el psicoanálisis colectivo

—capaz de evaluar los logros y frustraciones de los millones de violentados, distinta a la óptica de los colonizadores. Frantz Fanon la había empezado cuando lo sorprendió Tanos.<sup>21</sup>

### Los Lenguajes Subversivos

Exploremos las claves mágicas del lenguaje, la poderosa arma de los pueblos africanos sojuzgados. Todo cuanto se imagine pudo ocurrir en cuatro siglos de alienación a mano armada, si como se sabe, también se pretendió silenciar su música, cantos y bailes expresadores del sentimiento.

Cada individuo posee formas particulares de sentir y proyectar su condición humana. Y agreguemos que tales facultades debieron hipersensibilizarse cuando fueron millones de hablantes los que sufrieron por centurias la represión de sus idiomas.

Una vez más nos encontramos frente a una tarea paleontológica, reconstruir la osamenta fósil del lenguaje ontogénico. Afortunadamente hoy disponemos también de recursos científicos para comprender las trampas psicológicas de crear idiomas subversivos.

La tradición taína recuerda que el cacique Hatuey antes de ser quemado en la hoguera por brujo, confesó que al sepultar la imagen de Santo Domingo sólo quiso fecundar la tierra estéril por el saqueo del oro, pues le habían asegurado que el santo era pródigo y milagroso.

Algo más debió invocar el cacique a sus dioses tutelares: la protección a sus súbditos contra las mentiras de los predicadores.

¡Fue escuchado!

Las lenguas americanas opusieron sus mitos cosmogónicos a los idiomas invasores. Dos universes contrapuestos

que convivieron como partes recíprocas a las que se sumó el polen inseminador del árbol africano de la palabra, arrastrado por huracanados vientos de la trata mercenaria. Para explicar lo acontecido, acudamos a la lingüística existencial que connota la creatividad humana en todo acto de la palabra viva o escrita.<sup>22</sup>

En los procesos de formación de un nuevo idioma se acumulan conocimientos y experiencias de hombres reales y lúcidos, no simples "piezas de Indias" o "encomiendas", zombis sin almas, como concebían los teólogos y traficantes. La correcta interpretación de estos valores en juego, ya la expresó el genio de Borges en pocas palabras:

"El idioma es una tradición, un modo de sentir la realidad, no un arbitrario repertorio de símbolos".<sup>23</sup>

### **El Bumerang de Doble Filo**

Bajo el orden esclavista donde los amos reforzaron sus idiomas mediante la complicidad compulsiva del hambre, las herramientas y los azotes, el diálogo siempre fue un bumerang de doble filo que hería y beneficiaba al enemigo. La convivencia forzosa contribuyó a la formación de lenguas francas en los puertos de África. Sin embargo, fue en América donde se dieron verdaderos idiomas subversivos por la promiscuidad entre amos y esclavizados.

En el tejido multilingüe de la colonia prodigaron los influjos mutuos debido al mestizaje cultural y las uniones biológicas, ya fuera por violencia o empatía amorosa. Este nudo existencial obligó al esclavista a reconocer la racionalidad de su víctima y a no mutilar físicamente su lengua.

Impedidos de utilizar su propio idioma, los africanos se vieron en la necesidad imperiosa de recurrir a la música, el baile y los gestos como lengua franca para expresar el sentimiento colectivo bajo la opresión. Pero estos lenguajes que habían precedido a la palabra no permitían comunicar el pensamiento reflexivo.

Fue entonces cuando la experiencia políglota y multicultural, convertida en herramienta creadora, les permitió utilizar los idiomas colonizadores como aglutinantes para construir lenguas propias, los "slangs", "patois", "papiamentos", etc., profusamente hablados en las excolonias europeas por sus descendientes afros y mestizos.

### **Las Lenguas Cimarronas**

Amputados drásticamente del tronco genésico de la palabra y huídos de la esclavitud en América, los africanos —criollos, bozales, mestizos y recién llegados—, conformaron las lenguas cimarronas, reconstruyendo la dinámica del lenguaje sin más gramática que la tradición oral. Los lingüistas han señalado toda clase de mecanismos—retenciones de vocablos, y morfologías africanas; préstamos europeos, asimilación de indigenismos; etc.—concluyendo que escapan a los tabúes de la semántica, la filología y de la propia lingüística. El mejor ejemplo para reconocer que la madre natura esconde muchos secretos no revelados por la ciencia.

Existe consenso sobre su originalidad entre muchos lingüistas: Granda<sup>24</sup>, Friedemann y Roselli<sup>25</sup>, Mendonca<sup>26</sup>, Megenny<sup>27</sup>.

Lo insólito es haber podido tejer toda la trama lingüística de sociedades nuevas en un continente extraño, desde el culto

religioso, núcleo aglutinante de etnias e idiomas, hasta la cúpula de un poder centralizado en la autoridad de un rey. A imagen y semejanza de los antiguos reinos africanos, conformaron sociedades jerárquicas en base a una cúpula militar y consejos de ancianos. Sin embargo fue la lucha por la liberación de la esclavitud lo que definió su carácter político.

El idioma constituyó algo más que un instrumento social al convertirse en arma secreta de resistencia cultural y estrategia militar. Los tambores parlantes invocadores de dioses y Ancestros, convocaban incesantemente al gran baile de la vida, el amor y la familia. Cada individuo, varón o mujer, niños y ancianos convertidos en soldados de la libertad, voces hermanas que lograban establecer el diálogo bélico.

La historia descubre a diario documentos que informan de sus inexpugnables reductos selváticos, desde donde mantenían contactos clandestinos con los encadenados en las ciudades, plantaciones y minas aledañas—Cartagena de Indias, Maracaibo y Paramaribo, Recife, etc.—y el comercio con piratas de todas las banderas, intercambiando productos agrícolas por armas de fuego y acero. Sin embargo, la estructura multilingüe del idioma cimarrón prefirió afianzar la red de intermediarios, espías y asaltantes de caminos.

Durante más de tres siglos se mantuvieron en armas contra los esclavistas y firmaron pactos de liberación y paz con los representantes del Rey. También permitieron que algunos predicadores levantaran iglesias y les bautizaran siempre que no interfirieran en la invocación a sus orichas con las voces resonantes de sus tambores sagrados.

Las lenguas cimarronas habían emprendido la emancipación mucho antes

de que los criollos iniciaran sus guerras de independencia. Gunga Zumbi (Brasil), Lemba (Santo Domingo), Benkos Biojo (Nueva Granada), reyes y filósofos que fueron conformando, el genio político y militar de Toussaint L'Ouverture.

Convocado por los tambores, dialogaban con sus Ancestros para que les enseñaran a derrotar los ejércitos europeos. Proclamada la República Antiesclavista de Haití, pudieron suministrar a los patriotas criollos armas, soldados y barcos con la única condición, bajo juramento —¡siempre la palabra viva!—, de proclamar constituciones que abolieran la esclavitud. Pero las repúblicas americanas con su constitución esclavista, nunca acogieron el espíritu libertario de la palabra cimarrona.

El legado del pensamiento libertario del cimarronismo continuo inspirando las luchas antiesclavistas y civilistas de los patriotas que habían traicionado los principios igualitarios de la Revolución Francesa.

Su ideología reverdece cada vez que el hombre, olvidado de los Pilares de la Civilización erigidos por el Homosapiens Africano, retorna a la barbarie del egoísmo y la desigualdad.

### Summun

En toda cultura ágrafa o escrita, y en la suma de la civilización universal, subyace la omnipresencia africana. No existe otro antecedente en la historia del mundo.

*Bogotá, Colombia*

### Notas

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## *Narrative Strategies and Racial Violence in Two Afro-Brazilian Short Stories*

by Carolyn Richardson Durham

Black Brazilian short story writers Luis Silva "Cuti" and Conceição Evaristo use narrative strategies characteristic of African oral traditions in order to describe racial violence in contemporary society. Their point of view represents the concerns of black Brazilians who are the targets of violence and who form part of what writer Márcio Barbosa calls the "culture of the oppressed" (52). Black Brazilians who write to bring about social change act as spokespersons whose perspective constitutes a form of resistance (Alves, 61). The problems of street children, hunger, un(der)employment and poverty are among the themes of black Brazilian literature. These themes, however, are not merely sociological events inscribed on paper. The authors explore society's responses to the presence of the powerless and show that society prefers to rely on violence to obliterate its social problems. This is especially true in Cuti's "Vida em dívida" ("Life in Debt") and Evaristo's "Maria," two stories that portray the protagonists as the victims of violence perpetrated against them because of their race and class.

In his theoretical writing Cuti maintains that Afro-Brazilian literature deals with aspects of the national life that historically have been excluded from public discussion. He states that during earlier eras, Afro-Brazilians were portrayed in accordance with the thematic conventions and stylistic concerns derived from European literary models. He notes that while Afro-Brazilian characters were present throughout Brazilian literary history, such characters usually were not true reflections of Afro-Brazilian life, but

rather stereotypes such as Pai João, Saci,<sup>1</sup> and the mammy. These characters were foils for white protagonists and existed primarily for the convenience of whites. According to Cuti, Brazilian literature has produced few black characters with lives of their own.

Not only do Cuti and Evaristo create black protagonists, but they incorporate African narrative strategies as a means of both telling the story and suggesting solutions to the problems. Frequently they use narrative strategies of Yoruba literary origin such as double voice, dualism, twist of fate, ambiguous conclusions, the play on ambiguous appearances, the themes of the crossroads and the mask, the use of irony, and a communal voice (Gates, 23-43). These literary strategies come from the source of many of the conventions of literature of the African diaspora: the Yoruba deity of communication and interpretation, Eshú. In Brazil, where Yoruba myths have survived and Yoruba ritual is practiced in the present day, the attributes associated with Eshú are well known by many Brazilians. Images of Eshú show a man who has two faces with their respective open mouths facing in opposite directions. He is the trickster, the god of ambiguous appearances and the mask, the lord of the crossroads and the emissary between heaven and earth who facilitates communication between the gods and humans.

"Vida em dívida" ("Life in Debt") examines the reprehensible activity of death squads who defend the rights of merchants by hunting and exterminating children. This concept was not a mere



fiction invented by Cuti to entertain the reading public. Rather, the pervasiveness of death squads was the cause of concern that he and other writers expressed early in 1992 when they lamented the fact that hundreds of children were being routinely killed on the streets of Brazil's cities and that the majority of them were black children. Afro-Brazilian writers throughout the country identified the murder of black children as a cause for concern. A Rio de Janeiro magazine reported statistics showing that in the five years between 1988 and 1992, there were over 1800 children murdered in Rio de Janeiro. The publications blamed police for the massacre of seven children and teenagers at the church in Candelária and of twenty-one people in the favela of Vigária Geral.

Nos dois massacres, as suspeitas se manifestam: os assassinos seriam policiais civis e militares que, com a complacência do Estado, matam impunemente pobres, negros e meninos que quase não tem ninguém por eles. Novamente, o Brasil se transforma no país do massacre, no país onde a vida não vale Nada e o cidadão não tem a quem recorrer. (Pixote, 27)

Cuti remarks in an interview that the brutality and violence directed against black people is seldom perceived as discrimination.

On the other hand, it has Brazilian blacks internalizing discrimination, in a way such that they aren't receptive to how much and how barbarically the black population is discriminated against in Brazil. When there is a massacre like the Candelária one, for the Brazilian population the fact that the majority of the children were black is

just a mere coincidence. When there is a massacre like the Vigária Geral one, the fact the majority of people were black is, for the Brazilian media, for the television, for the press, just coincidence. When 111 prisoners are shot at Carandiru Penitentiary in São Paulo and you verify that the majority were black and *mestiço*, for the Brazilian black mentality that's just a coincidence. ("Interview," 731)

By making the murder of children the theme of "Vida em dívida," Cuti points out that race and class are factors that influence the way in which society dispenses justice.

"Vida em dívida" is a complex, well crafted work about the conflict between social classes in Brazil. The structure of the story incorporates strategies common in literature of the African diaspora such as double consciousness, double plot lines, dualism, and dual forms. The narrative describes the problem of merchants who, after being victimized by shoplifting and petty theft committed by poor children from the slums, retaliate by hiring death squads to kill the juvenile culprits. The story provides insight into the lives of the merchants and children in order to allow the reader to understand what motivates each group. The reader sees what money means to each of the characters. Ironically, it is a matter of life and death for both classes.

The story tells of an incident between a small businessman who owns and operates a bakery and a teenager who lives nearby in the slums. The baker accuses the teenager of stealing, and feels that his business is endangered by shoplifters such as the teenager. This tension-filled situation provides the basis for a conflict that allows the author to develop the two

sides of the story and to simultaneously explore society's attitudes about a controversial social question. The baker takes matters into his own hands and attempts to control his problem by hiring a killer to exterminate the teenager. He considers it as an economic matter that will be expeditiously resolved with economic means. The baker visits a remote site in the city, makes a pact, fixes a date for the murder, makes the down payment of fifty percent and agrees that he will pay the balance upon completion of the "job." On the appointed night, the baker lies in his bed and hears shots fired in the nearby slum and the sound of screeching tires that speed away.

The teenager's story is about the struggle to survive despite extreme poverty. The teenager works to help support his family. While his mother works all day, he sells small items on the streets of São Paulo. Before leaving each day he gives instructions to his younger brother and four-year-old sister who must remain unsupervised in the house. The teenager then ventures into the area surrounding Praça da Sé, where he tries to earn a living. Readers who are familiar with the area will realize that it is a decaying part of the city, with all manner of dangers and temptations. The narrator mentions details about life in the city as he reveals the youngster's thoughts. For example, Paulinho recalls the kindness of Father Batista and wonders why he hasn't seen him lately. This detail is drawn from real life, because Father Batista was a priest known for his work with street children in São Paulo.

The divergent narrative perspectives merge and cross on the night of the fateful arranged murder. The following day, the customers in the bakery can talk of

nothing else. A child was murdered in the slum, and they speculate about the reasons why. The newspaper reports that a white man entered a shack in the slum and killed a child. The article gives two possible explanations for the murder. It speculates that the child's mother was involved in a love triangle, and that the child was mistakenly killed. The other possibility that the article offers is that the murder might have been gang-related. The ambiguous appearance of the murder masks the true reason for the child's death. The newspaper and the communal gossip do not consider that disgruntled Manoel is the person responsible for the murder.

The play on ambiguous appearances from the Yoruba tradition is a constant throughout the story. Rather than being the end of the story, the murder is just the beginning. In the following scene, Manoel returns to the site where he took out the contract on Paulinho's life. It seems that the murderers killed the wrong child. The child who died was Paulinho's little brother. Manoel rants and raves that since he didn't get what he paid for, he will not make the final payment to the killer.

In the final scene of the story, the customers, acting as the communal voice, discuss Manoel's disappearance. They imagine that he is dead, and attribute his presumed death to Paulinho whom they assume has killed Manoel. While the gossip in the community reflects one possibility, the reader realizes that there is another plausible explanation for the ironic reversal of fortune that the baker undergoes. This alternative theory, that the hired killer may be responsible or the disappearance of Manoel, is implied. The author allows the reader to decide which interpretation is more believable.

The irony of the situation is that the

cold, calculating, financial interest that was the motivation for targeting the boy may have impersonally turned against the baker, eliminating him as a problem in exactly the same way as the boy would have died. Just as the merchant attempted to collect for lost money by taking the boy's life, the killer, likewise, may have taken Manoel's life in payment of an uncollected debt.

Central to this story is the exercise and abuse of power. The baker has the ability to pay for the teenager's death, while the teenager is in a position of weakness, struggling to obtain the essentials for survival. The defeat of the baker reveals that underlying principles lead to the triumph of a kind of divine justice. The death of Manoel is the outcome of impersonal forces that he sets in motion against another that are redirected against him. This reversal of fortune, or twist of fate, is the Eshú factor that like the ironic trickster figure, changes the course of events.

The doubles throughout the story are consistent with Yoruba mythology and the deity of interpretation, Eshú. The double meaning of the narrative begins with the title and extends to the conclusion. "Life in Debt" seems to define the existence of the child who lives from day to day with barely enough bread to eat. At the end of the story it is the baker of bread whose life is changed because of his debt. The genre of the narration is ambiguous also. It is written in prose, but it is divided into sections that focus on particular dramatic moments, forming divisions like the scenes of a play. For this reason the reader can visualize the story as a drama as well as a narrative. Not only are there two different story lines that eventually cross and combine, but there are also double

endings that are plausible for each of the characters. This use of doubles replicates the faces of Eshú that look in different directions.

Ironically, the story is almost devoid of any descriptive words about race except for the case of the hit man that is described in the newspapers as a "white man." Yet the absence of racial description should not mislead the reader to think that race does not matter. When the narrator designates the killer as "white" it is an adjective to differentiate the killer from the victims of the incident. Furthermore, by limiting such description, Cuti cleverly manipulates the convention of silence surrounding issues of race. Instead, Cuti frames the story in terms of class, and shows that this is a dispute between a middle class person and a lower class person, caused by issues of economic interests. In this case, as a matter of class, the baker feels justified in hiring someone to exterminate the lower class person whom he views as a threat to his business.

Although Cuti seems to frame the story in terms of class, he actually accesses the visual memory of the readers to whom his work is directed. Someone who knows nothing about São Paulo may imagine all of the characters of the story as Brazilians, presumably of the same color, but those who are familiar with the city will realize that the street children near the Praça da Sé are likely to be black. Visual memory acknowledges what verbal conventions refuse to admit. Cuti calls forth this visual memory as a means of showing that racist behavior in Brazil is the result of what people actually do, not what they say. This is the ironic posture of the writer/trickster who reveals the truth by masking it.

Conceição Evaristo also examines

violence directed against the poor in her remarkable short story, "Maria." She writes about a black woman who supports her three small children by working as a domestic. Evaristo creates a black woman whose primary concern is her own family, and this focus deviates from the way that black women have traditionally been portrayed. Writers who are not Afro-Brazilian women have tended to write about black women whose attention is given to satisfying the needs of the dominant classes. As one of a growing number of black Brazilian women writers, Evaristo has devoted her works to portraying the concerns of black Brazilian women.

The details about Maria's economic struggle replicate the circumstances of real Afro-Brazilian women who barely subsist in spite of working sixteen-hour days at minimum wage. The character's relationship with her children's father did not endure because he could not find employment and was demoralized as a man by his inability to support his family. Poverty, hunger, racism, illness and underemployment all play a part in the details of Maria's life story.

The story takes place on a bus in Rio de Janeiro. While on the bus, Maria's ex-lover boards and sits down next to her. She is happy to see him, pleased that he asks how their son is, and sorry to remember that he left her when he couldn't find work. They speak to each other of their past, of the loneliness and longing that each feels, and their hopes that their son will have a different kind of life. Suddenly, the ex-lover stands up, whips out a pistol and he and another man systematically rob everyone on the bus except Maria and a black man. The thieves jump off the bus, leaving Maria to cope

with the crowd. The people on the bus are convinced that Maria is an accomplice to the theft. Their rage is not limited to the fact that they have been robbed, but it is fueled by their feelings about her as a black woman. The pace of the story accelerates with a verbal confrontation followed by a physical attack on Maria by the passengers. They begin by uttering epithets that are both racist and sexist, indicating the intensification of their anger. Despite the efforts of the bus driver who contends that he has known Maria for a long time and that she is not a thief, the crowd's hostility increases. Although a skinny black man on the bus was not robbed either, the crowd directs all of its anger on Maria, believing that she was an accomplice of the robbers. The truth is that she is so poor that she has nothing worth taking.

And if the robbers had been other men?  
She would have her bag of fruit to give,  
a ham bone, and a tip of 3000 cruzeiros.  
She didn't have any watch on her arm.  
No ring or bracelet on her hands. (772)

The protagonist dies because the crowd seizes her and stomps her to death. The circumstances surrounding the incident are exacerbated because of Maria's race, gender, and class. The language that the crowd uses to demean her clearly shows that these factors influence their aggression.

Conceição Evaristo constructs the story by weaving two narrative viewpoints: Maria's perspective and that of the crowd. Through Maria's thoughts, memories, and feelings, the reader becomes acquainted with the caring, loving mother who feels concern for the future of her children. As the sole provider and caretaker of her

children, she is concerned with feeding and clothing them despite limited resources. Her thoughts are of how to deal with their hunger and poor health. She worries about being able to get to work, for she can barely afford the cost of the bus fare. Her joy in seeing the father of her child again stems from the anticipation of bringing a message of love from him to their son. There is another representation of Maria that the other riders of the bus provide. Those who view Maria are strangers, yet they see her as the object of their irrational, vitriolic hatred. For them, she is not a devoted mother, but rather a "black whore." In their mouths "black" becomes a word of racial contempt heaped on to a sexually charged word of derision. The racial dimensions of the hatred are made clear by the words "Lynch her," words commonly associated with the lawless execution of black people.

In the final sentences of the story, Evaristo juxtaposes the contrast between "Maria-the-subject," the good hardworking mother, and "Maria-the-object" who strangers define by her exterior.

When the bus was empty, when the police arrived, the body of the woman was all cut up and trampled.

Maria wanted so much to tell her son that his father sent a hug, a kiss, and love. (772)

These two viewpoints or identities are tied to the repetition of certain key words within the text: "knife," "cut" and the combination "a hug, a kiss, and love." The knife that cuts to the quick appears early in the story when she slices ham for her employer who later rewards her with the leftover ham bone. When the crowd attacks her at the end of the story, she has

the sensation of being cut by the same knife. It is a force that wounds her on the deepest possible level, spiritually and physically. It represents something that she must deal with but cannot control. The feeling of being cut symbolizes her economic and social marginalization. The "kiss, hug, and love" convey the joy that Maria never achieves because of the way that race, gender, and class negatively influence her life.

By discussing violence perpetrated against blacks because of racial attitudes, Cuti and Conceição Evaristo breach taboos that have been avoided, if not forbidden, in Brazilian literature. Their forays into this subject matter allow them to treat pressing social dilemmas that are seldom the topic of literature. Strategies taken from an African aesthetic system based on dualities and twists of fate enhance their ability to tell their stories. By assembling theme, character, and narrative strategies that reflect both their social reality and their cultural heritage, Cuti and Conceição Evaristo construct a black perspective in literature that confronts the issue of racial violence in Brazil.

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#### Notes

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<sup>1</sup>Pai João and Saci are folkloric figures that originated during the time of slavery. Pai João is portrayed as a kind, old black man similar to Uncle Tom. Saci is a little black boy who is a one-legged elf, known for mischief. According to Cuti, Saci lost his leg because of his mischief. He interprets the figure as an object lesson warning black children that their transgressions will result in severe penalties.

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*Warring Ideals in Dark Bodies:  
Cultural Allegiances in the Work of Walter Mosley<sup>1</sup>*

*by Alice Mills*

Walter Mosley's detective novels, which the critic R.W.B. Lewis considers more a saga than a series, are drawn on the classical model, but despite their apparent simplicity, their hero/narrator, Easy Rawlins, raises complex questions about a person's duties toward his cultural community and country, and, more generally, about his responsibilities towards other human beings.<sup>2</sup> The life and experiences themselves of the detective/hero, an African American born into a poor southern family in 1920, are quite intricate. Black culture in the deep south is only one of the many elements defining the identity of a character whose life leads him beyond the Louisiana bayous and the frontiers of the U.S. to fight in Europe and North Africa during World War II.

The signs of cultural and social belonging multiply as Easy Rawlins changes from being an illiterate black youth in Louisiana and Texas to an American soldier abroad and, finally, an educated property owner in an "integrated" Californian neighborhood. On the one hand, Mosley's hero is always willing to break the law and to lie to those naive enough to trust him, behavior that partly conforms to the cultural traditions of the black community where the ability to lie is considered a gift, lying a form of art<sup>3</sup> and where transgressing the law is historically the most courageous strategy for survival. On the other, he is willing to risk his life to defend the principles of the American Constitution, which preach respect for the law and for truth. Easy Rawlins' attitude constantly reveals the "uneasy" coexistence of his desire both to

revere and infringe upon the rules of his country. The detective/hero's behavior and speech are often stamped with ambiguity as a result of his allegiance to divergent cultural tendencies.

Easy's relations with foreigners are no less ambiguous than are his relations with his country and ethnic community. His adoption of a Mexican child increases the complexity of his cultural and affective loyalties. For the little boy, who is considered neither black nor truly American by the dominant social group, Easy is both an all powerful paternal figure who has saved him from poverty and mistreatment, and an object of compassion whom the child must protect from a racist America. White America's traditionally paternalistic attitude towards its black population makes this inversion of the father/son roles particularly meaningful. Easy himself never fails to express his rage at being called "son" by Whites who are neither his parents nor his elders.

The ambivalence that characterizes Easy's feelings is easily understandable since he encounters courage and kindness as well as cowardice and sadism among both Blacks and Whites. Complex and disturbing questions confront him whenever he feels the least urge to ally himself unconditionally with the African American community. To whom, for instance, should he give preference in the name of negritude? To a Black who lives from robbing and killing other Blacks or to a White who gives aid to the ghetto's weak and helpless? And, if this black killer saves his life, should he nonetheless oppose his evil designs for the good of the

community, or keep his peace out of a sense of friendship and personal gratitude? Easy finds absurd these particular questions of loyalty when measured against the more important questions of the human condition itself which unites people above and beyond ethnic considerations. Consequently, to paraphrase W.E.B. DuBois,<sup>4</sup> limiting the identity of Mosley's hero to a merging of the values of the black minority with those of the dominant society would lead to excessive simplification.

Nonetheless, these questions of ethnic and national allegiance cannot simply be dismissed, because Easy is constantly confronted with them, even if only to transcend them in the end. On the first page of Mosley's first published novel (*Devil in a Blue Dress*), Easy introduces himself as a black man who has killed a large number of blue-eyed, blond-haired men. The immediate implication seems to be that he defines himself as a black man extremely hostile to white American society. But the fact that the young Whites in question were Nazi Germans lends the revelation an entirely different meaning. For having killed these particular Whites, Easy is treated as a hero. He earns prestige from what white America in the 1940s would normally view as the ultimate infamy. The killing of Nazis, doubly Easy's enemies because they are both racist and hostile to his country, is itself presented in an ambiguous manner: "The first time I fought a German hand to hand I screamed for help the whole time I was killing him" (*Devil in a Blue Dress* 54). Easy returns to the theme in *A Red Death*: "I was choking the life out of a blond teenage boy and crying and laughing" (93). The expression he gives to his patriotism is itself quite

equivocal. He speaks as an American when he mentions "our boys' corpses" (*Devil in a Blue Dress* 113), referring not only to black soldiers but to all the Americans who have killed. At the same time, he puts a certain distance between himself and the national purpose when he asks, "why I wanna die in this white man's war?" (*Devil in a Blue Dress* 105).

With whom does Easy identify? His answers, which vary depending on circumstances, do not seem to follow any definite pattern and never really provide a definitive statement of his chosen loyalties. At one point, he states that he admires John Kennedy more than anyone; at another, that Mouse, a black murderer, is his hero. He has barely provided a glimpse of his convictions when he advances a different view, one that is virtually impossible to reconcile with his previous declaration, which he does not even take the trouble to retract. Or again, without further formality, Easy might simply adopt the position of someone who contradicts him. His behavior is as disconcerting as are his declarations. He takes care to speak "proper" English but resents it when members of his community do not use black vernacular.<sup>5</sup> He lives in a middle-class neighborhood well outside the black ghetto to avoid having to deal with criminals, but he lets them know where he lives and incessantly returns to the "street" he claims to have left behind. His denunciation of the brutality of the ghetto's lower reaches is couched in terms more usually used to describe adventure and sensuality and reveals a decidedly ambiguous view of that community. John Lowe talks of Mosley's underworld's "voluptuous realism made more compelling through ethnic verisimilitude."<sup>6</sup>



Because one contradiction can often serve to cancel out another, Easy can appear full of common sense and simple wisdom. In fact, however, he glides effortlessly from one type of reasoning to another and is an adept at comparing things that have nothing in common with each other. The incongruity of his positions is frequently difficult to discern because related elements of a given subject seem to be randomly scattered throughout several chapters of the same book and even from one novel to the next. There is no question that a feeling of compassion emanates from the following description:

"The rooms in the bungalow were like a ship's cabin. There was hardly enough space to turn around. The furniture was mismatched and the linoleum on the floor was rotted around the corners.... I felt kindred to this misery. It seemed to me that my whole life had been spent walking into shabby little houses with poor people bleeding or hacking or just dying quietly under the weight of our liberation. I was born in a house no larger than that one. I lived there with two half sisters and one step brother. I watched my mother die of pneumonia on a bed like Gregory's.... Ella was on the matchbox sofa crying when I left." (*White Butterfly* 94, 95, 97)

Yet we are left to wonder why Easy, who has accounts at numerous banks around town, does nothing to relieve Ella and Gregory's poverty. Similarly, in *A Red Death*, Easy speaks with considerable kindness of his tenant, Poinsettia Jackson, but he nonetheless has her evicted when she is unable to pay her rent. The reader, however, easily forgets that Easy can be so implacable because the detective—reasoning in terms of the integration of

opposites of which he has the secret—so often shows himself to be remarkably generous.

Easy readily adopts a moralizing tone and enjoys discussing ethical principles with seriousness, but he quickly reverts to joking when he catches himself in a blatant act of self-contradicting. Evoking the contemptuous, off-handed manner with which a client drops money on the ground at his feet, he declares:

"I stood there gawking for a few moments, disgusted by money and the way rich people think they can buy you. Then the practical man bent down to gather up the cash." (*Black Betty* 132)

The detective's given names may provide a clue to the ambivalence of his attitude. Mosley's hero seems to be divided between two tendencies—the one characterized by the official "Ezekiel," the second by the familiar "Easy." The first is biblical and can be associated with a sense of duty and of obstacles to be overcome; it implies qualities of commitment and a vision of the future. The second, profane and inclined toward facility, evokes the wisdom of those Blacks who "watch the lazy world go round"<sup>7</sup> without a care for either tomorrow or the opinion of others. Easy's behavior unquestionably reflects this duality. He is capable of radical commitments and of long-term engagements—risking his life to defend his country and, as an adult, undertaking to learn to read and write and even to attend college. His attempt to build an orderly universe, one based on the dominant class's mental structures and linguistic behavior is all the more remarkable in that he comes from a chaotic world which has given him only sporadic parental and

social guidance. Yet he is a caring father, attentive to his children's report cards and saving money for their future. He believes in the American way to success, as taught by protestant ethics, built on hard work and personal merit.

His respect for work is one of the rare elements of his personality which is entirely free from ambiguity, a fact that is easily understandable since work, a value shared by white Anglo-Saxon protestants, has undoubtedly marked the black community more than any other community in the U.S. The passages devoted to the black cabinetmaker<sup>8</sup>, Martin Smith, are a good example. Easy himself always strives to do a job well, whether or not any prestige is attached to it, and whoever it might benefit. As a gardener for the rich, he takes great pains with the plants under his care. He sets the example for his fellow workers in the aircraft factory<sup>9</sup> and, as the maintenance foreman at a high school (*A Little Yellow Dog*), is the first to arrive in the morning. The owner of several buildings, by choice he cleans them himself rather than let some company "steal" not so much his money as the pleasure of work.

Money, however, is important to Easy. At times he likens it to life itself and at one point places it next to God.<sup>10</sup> He dreams of becoming a millionaire, out of both respect for the American dream and a desire to conform with the norm. He makes speculative investments in real estate, and the acquisition of property plays a particularly important role in his life. Throughout Mosley's novels runs a theme common to Toni Morrison's work—the fear of being "outdoors."<sup>11</sup> This fear makes Easy scrupulous to a fault in his attention to the yard surrounding his house, and we have the impression he has

turned it into an English garden.<sup>12</sup> He is amazed that his next door neighbors—who, incidentally, are white—choose to let their yard resemble a jungle, which, interestingly, Easy associates with ideas of temporal and spatial strangeness and obscurity.<sup>13</sup> The negligence of certain other residents arouses in Easy an ardent middle class indignation.<sup>14</sup>

At times Easy's preoccupation with appearances and suburbanite intolerance of the disorderly and unclean verge on the comical. In *White Butterfly*, while his friend Mouse cannot take his eyes off the pretty Marlene's voluptuous forms, Easy only seems to see her sink full of dirty dishes. Easy has no objection to being seduced, and particularly not in the case of his friends' wives, but the meticulous owner of property always overwhelms the aroused male in him. When Gwendolyn exposes her shapely legs by putting her feet on the dashboard of his car, he forces himself to control his emotions because, as he says, "I am not a vain man nor am I picky about my belongings, but I do like to keep my vehicle clean and in decent condition." (*Black Betty* 119) His love of the things he has acquired and his desire to possess them in their tiniest detail are truly remarkable. Advertising junk mail has a precious quality when he finds it in his own mailbox. Obligated in the course of his detective work to hide in the backseat of his car, Easy momentarily forgets the dangers of the situation to observe with amazement, "Here was part of my life and property and I had never even looked at it." (*Black Betty* 244)

Easy's sense of endeavor, work and savings, his aspiration to material success and respect for order and cleanliness are standard elements of the dominant American system of values. However,

despite all his middle class tastes and attachment to American traditions, he nevertheless ends up outside the official American norm and outside the law itself. The legitimate savings produced by his hard work are inextricably mixed up with money of dubious origins. He is unable to legalize the ownership of his buildings because they have been purchased partly with money he has stolen from gangsters. His professional activities as an independent private detective also lack a legal basis. And, he has not even attempted to secure the legal right to adopt his children. His integrity as a parent is severely undermined by this surprising negligence.<sup>15</sup> As a result, Easy finds himself in a permanent state of material and emotional insecurity. At any moment, his property might be confiscated and his children taken away from him. But as much as he suffers from the insecurity of his existence, he derives excitement and pleasure from it. Easy describes having to hide his identity, alternatively as torment and as pleasure.<sup>16</sup> At times, he feels ashamed for lying, but he is nonetheless proud of doing it well. The impression he has that no one sees him as he really is, that he is in a sense "invisible", exhilarates him with feelings of power and impunity. Barbara T. Christian writes that "In his habit of (...) hiding in plain sight, Easy Rawlins recalls the narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*."<sup>17</sup>

Easy wants to have it both ways, and while he readily accepts the inherent advantages of each of his cultural allegiances, he refuses to accept the related disadvantages. He uses his past status as a poor Black to justify living outside the law but lays full claim to his rights as a middle class American. When he is poor, he flees the ghetto. When he is

prosperous, he is on the run from the white tax collector and seeks refuge back among his friends in the ghetto. However, this double allegiance extracts a heavy toll. The interpenetration of the two worlds that he inhabits multiplies their respective forms of violence. Unscrupulous Whites exert pressure on Easy to work as an informer in the black ghetto, and his incursions into the black underworld spill over into the peaceful universe of his suburban life. Ruthless elements from both communities invade his pretty little house more often than would appear normal. In this respect, Fate seems to be animated by a spirit of contradiction comparable to Easy's own. Not only do both Blacks and Whites alike inflict suffering and humiliation on Easy, but the particular agents of his affliction are the supposed representatives of law and order and even brotherhood. In fact, one of the few places where Easy finds an almost truly homogeneous merging of cultures is with the police, who, in their nightmarish brutality, are neither white nor black but form a world apart. This representation of the police is closer to the reality of the Rodney King beating or to the police practices incidentally revealed by the O.J. Simpson affair than that traditionally given by the *noir* genre.<sup>18</sup> In keeping with Mosley's recurring theme of the unexpected, Easy finds solace with the murderers, lunatics and cowards of both communities who repeatedly save and nurture him.

This physical violence is coupled with psychic violence since integration into the dominant social order requires abandoning the black vernacular, the only language in which Easy can truly express himself, and which he calls, "the natural uneducated dialect of my upbringing" (*Devil in a Blue*

*Dress 17*).<sup>19</sup> In its own way, the black community itself also robs Easy of his voice: "Where I came from, you kept everything a secret, survival depended on keeping everyone around you in the dark." (*A Little Yellow Dog* 171). For this reason, he feels compelled to hide his financial success from his friends and even from his black American wife:

I felt safe in my secrets. I kept telling myself that Regina was my wife, my partner in life. I planned to tell her that I had plenty of money in bank accounts around town....But the thought of telling her all about me brought out a cold sweat. The kind of sweat you feel when your life is in mortal danger. (*White Butterfly* 35, 169)

Lying by choice can be a pleasure. Being condemned out of fear never to reveal oneself is of a different nature, and Easy is bothered by having become the accomplice of his own fear:

When a white man of authority would catch me off guard, I'd empty my head of everything so I was unable to say anything. The less you know, the less trouble you find they used to say. I hated myself for it but I also hated white people and colored people too for making me that way. (*Devil in a Blue Dress* 21)

Expressions of self-hatred and self-contempt punctuate Easy's narrative. He often describes himself as "traitorous", "wrong", "guilty", "hypocrite", "evil" and "Judas". His silences and his lies lead him to unbearable solitude: "I ain't got no friends, man" (*A Red Death* 283); "I felt very lonely" (*White Butterfly* 169).

Walter Mosley's *Easy Rawlins* echoes John Edgar Wideman, who, as the narrator in *Brothers and Keepers* declares:

Most of what I felt was guilt. I'd made my choices. I was running (...) from pverty, from Blackness. To get ahead, to make something of myself, college had seemed a logical, necessary step; my exile, my flight from home began with good grades, with good English (...).<sup>20</sup>

Mumia Abu-Jamal's analysis of Wideman's work in some ways applies to Mosley:

(For a black writer), being born in the 1940s and 1950s meant coming to consciousness in an age of social conflict and ferment. (...) To be conscious in this era was to be awake during the lives (and often deaths) of Black revolutionaries Malcolm X, Dr. Huey P. Newton, George Jackson, Robert Williams, Stokely Carmichael and the like. Thus, notions of Black Nationalism, of black revolution, of black self-defense and black self determination radiated among black men born into that era, (and) counterposed the more conciliatory elements of the U.S. civil rights movement which promoted pacificism and integration. For a generation of black thinkers this very integration became a virtual recipe for estrangement—for this new, emergent generation, sprung out of peasantry, and two generations from legal chattel slavery, became a people who were misfits in traditional black cultures and in white culture—folks who were, in the words of Harold Cruse, '(a) rootless class of displaced persons.' They represent the generation not quite at home in the midst of two cultures and

often, two classes, a generational migration from poverty to the middle class, a distance as measurable in miles as in dollars.<sup>21</sup>

For Abu-Jamal, the work which flows from these writers is a reflection of the options they have chosen.

To return more specifically to Mosley's hero and, again, to paraphrase DuBois, it would seem that along with Easy's desire to lose nothing of his blackness and nothing of his status as an American, he also feels the desire to reject both. He is only too aware that the double self can easily lead to a worse self.

Although the paradoxes exemplified by Easy Rawlins can be read as signifiers of social dissonance for African Americans, they should not be interpreted solely as character flaws. Ambiguity, when seen as part of African tradition, is a powerful tool for survival, wisdom and joy. With regard to our main thesis, we find a clue to what is perhaps the hero's basic cultural loyalty in the fluidity itself which carries him from a first pronouncement to its opposite and from one type of ethics to another. Easy's ambiguity is evidence of allegiance to African tradition.

According to Geoffrey Hartman, indeterminacy "acts as a bar between understanding and truth" (Gates, *Signifying Monkey* 25). Easy's strategies are in a way reminiscent of the myths of Esu, whose preferred forms of expression are ambiguity and the co-existence of opposites. Throughout Mosley's entire series of detective stories, the more closely Easy's words relate to his intimate feelings, the more they manifest themselves through the process of modified repetition that is considered essential to the African principle of expression. For

example, the disappearance of Easy's father is related in fragments which are constantly remodeled. Was his father killed in a fight? Was he lynched? Was he arrested and imprisoned? Did he remarry and forget his child? Or, was his disappearance due to some even more mysterious cause? All these reasons are advanced by Easy at one point or another in accordance with the trickster's dialectical process.

Having mentioned the mythical trickster, it seems appropriate to devote a part of the present study to the character of Mouse, who incarnates the trickster and represents an essential aspect of Easy. Mouse might at first seem like a minor character, but he is to Easy what the hidden part of the iceberg is to the whole. He is the detective's instinctive twin and gives expression to those impulses which are socially unacceptable but necessary to survival. In a way, Mouse is Easy's shadow: "In the hard life of the street, you needed somebody like Mouse at your back" (*A Little Yellow Dog* 16); "Maybe I would've died...if Mouse hadn't held me to his black heart" (*Gone Fishin'* 102). Easy is able to maintain his physical and moral integrity thanks to Mouse who protects him by diverting threats and by maiming and killing.<sup>22</sup> Mouse also saves his friend from drifting too far psychologically by reminding him that his college education, "white" accent and suburban house cannot change the fact that, above all else, he is black: "Easy. You be thinkin' like white men be thinkin'. You be thinkin' that what's right for them is right for you... but brother... a nigger ain't gonna be happy 'less he accept what he is." (*Devil in a Blue Dress* 209).

One of Mouse's most interesting aspects is that he is a remarkable

composite of the African American community's entire range of popular mythical heroes. On several occasions, he is described as "a little man with a rat like face," a description obviously recalling the legendary Br'er Rabbit with whom he shares vitality, unscrupulousness and a taste for deception and lies. Like his brother rodent, Mouse is able to turn situations around with disconcerting ease and audacity: when asked by the police to state his identity, he calmly gives the name of his stepbrother, a man eminently unlikely to contradict him since Mouse himself has murdered him. But Mouse does not rely entirely on deceit in order to prevail. "Not being afraid of prison and death" (*A Little Yellow Dog* 16), he proposes attacking a police station by himself, in the insolent daredevil manner of the legendary black outlaw heroes, Stagolee and Railroad Bill.<sup>23</sup> Easy relates that Mouse, "who left more broken heads and more dead bodies than anyone knew throughout Texas and Southern California" (*A Little Yellow Dog* 16), "could put a knife in a man's stomach and ten minutes later sit down to a plate of spaghetti" (*Devil in a Blue Dress* 55) and that "he could smile in your face and shoot you dead" (*A Red Death* 74). Easy is horrified by Mouse's ferocity but fascinated with his complete lack of any sense of shame. Mouse is free. No one, not even his own conscience, can shackle him. In *White Butterfly*, Easy expresses his admiration, "he was the only black man I had ever known who had never been chained in his mind by the white man. Mouse was brash, wild and free." (*White Butterfly* 138)

One can evidently object that the cult of the tough is not an exclusive attribute of the black community. Europe has its

traditions of badmen, white America has its outlaws and there is no shortage of killers amongst the members of other ethnic minorities in the U.S. Perhaps what most differentiates the black badman from the others is his particular style, a style characterized above all by excess, to begin with in his habits of dress. Mouse certainly conforms to this tradition:

There was Mouse, beautiful as he could be. His smile glittered. Some of the teeth were rimmed with gold and some were capped (with silver). One tooth had a gold rim with a blue jewel in it. He wore a plaid zoot suit with Broadway suspenders down the front of his shirt. He had spats on over his patent leather shoes and the biggest pistol I have ever seen. (*Devil in a Blue Dress* 154)

He didn't wear rings or bracelets because they got in the way of weapons handling. (*A Red Death* 72).

He was wearing a bright yellow double-breasted jacket and dark brown pants. His silk shirt was blue and stamped all over with bright orange triangles.... Mouse figured that a man dressed like that just couldn't be killed. (*White Butterfly* 148)

In *A Red Death*, Mouse's appearance evokes that of another major figure of African American folklore, the pimp: "Women dressed him and then took him out to show the world what they had" (148). Easy frequently evokes Mouse's disarming smile, "it was a killer's smile that reminded all the ladies of a sweet loving child" (*White Butterfly* 141). But Mouse's smile would be worthless if it weren't for his extraordinary sexual vitality, once again characterized by

excess, placing him on a par with the African trickster-god Legba (*Signifying Monkey* 27). Mouse, like Legba,<sup>24</sup> and arousing Easy's envy, provokes uncommon ecstasy in his numerous mistresses and even in his wife.

Generally speaking, the badman of African American folklore takes advantage of the retelling of his exploits in order to embellish them. In this, he resembles most closely the African trickster who above all else is a master of words. Thus, the more the badman's boasting is an obvious transfiguration of reality, the closer he is to the gods and the more his prestige increases in the eyes of his audience. Mouse willingly embraces this tradition and spreads the most incredible stories of his own virility and of the beatings he has inflicted on his rivals in love. Mouse is entirely conscious of his gift for rendering believable the highly improbable and takes lying beyond practical matters into the realm of art, a dazzling show free to all comers.<sup>25</sup> He makes a thoroughly unselfish gift of his art to the community so that others too can dream and laugh:

Mouse was a master storyteller. He had every man wondering about his thing ...the men around were all laughing ...they laughed because they loved a well told lie. And (Mouse) did not mind, because he liked to make people laugh. (*A Red Death* 72)

"Lies" being the traditional Afro-American word for figurative discourse, tales or stories (Gates, *Signifying Monkey* 56), the best liar is also the best storyteller, and his community appreciates him as such. Lying is also an essential function of the badman's social and

spiritual being. Mouse, who constantly appropriates for himself the myth of the death defying badman—"he would have lied to God with his last breath" (*White Butterfly* 138), is highly respected by his peers.

Geneviève Fabre observes in her study of the black theater that the badman is an object of contempt only in the eyes of puritanical capitalism.<sup>26</sup> To his peers, he is a cultural hero who enjoys the dangers he confronts, turns threatening situations around and allows others to transform the banal failure of their own lives into exploits. Through their power, the badman's words make virtues of what the dominant group perceives as failures and shortcomings. "Mouse," says the narrator, "knew how to enjoy life" (*White Butterfly* 213). "Mouse had a way of bringing out the love in people.... For the desperate souls in us all, Mouse was the savior. He brought out the dreams you had as a baby. He made you believe in magic again." (*White Butterfly* 208) Mouse is constantly associated with the idea of magic and leads Easy to attribute to him the supernatural powers of witchcraft.<sup>27</sup> "When he wanted somebody to die it was like destiny." (*Black Betty* 116) "He was like an ancient pagan needing to celebrate and anoint his freedom with blood." (*Black Betty* 59) Easy identifies his friend with the Devil on several occasions, and Mouse himself brags that he has signed a pact with Satan—much like Jack in African American folklore, and at one point is convinced that his own son is a demon.

Mouse's rituals, magic potions and voodoo dolls recall the anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston's writings in *Mules and Men*. In Mosley's first novels, Mouse is illiterate (like Easy used to be), reminding us of Hurston's remarks about

magical beliefs being more ancient than writing. Mouse is still close to his roots and nurtured on oral traditions. He is filled with the grace of "words which walk without masters,"<sup>28</sup> and as long as he possesses this living tongue, he overcomes every obstacle—indeed, as if by magic. But, as the series of novels progresses, Mouse learns to read and write and leaves the oral tradition further and further behind. He becomes vulnerable, is imprisoned, then wounded and, in the final novel, we are led to believe, might have been killed.

Mouse, in addition to playing the role of the trickster, also incarnates the southern rural countryside itself. The character is as incapable of expressing regret—"Mouse did not understand guilt or abstract responsibility" (*White Butterfly* 210)—as would be the fauna or the flora of the area he comes from.

"I'ont think it's wrong to kill somebody Easy," he said at last. "I mean, that's what life is all about—killin', killin' to survive. You see it in bugs and animals—hell even plants kill to survive, it couldn't be a sin." (*A little Yellow Dog* 221).

Interestingly, the region itself is constantly defined in the terms of the same lexical trilogy used to describe Mouse—beautiful / senseless / killer: "The desert is like the worst felon in San Quentin. It is a senseless killer barren of any sign of intelligence. But the desert is also beautiful." (*Black Betty* 34).

The narrator's fascination with the natural world of the south runs uninterrupted through the entire series of novels. It deserves particular attention in that, like the character of Mouse-the-

trickster, it is a revealing element of Easy's basic cultural allegiance. This nature, conceived in Mouse's image is, in many respects, in the image of the common people of this "wild and beautiful" countryside. Easy's continual references to the rural south of his youth, from which Whites are virtually absent,<sup>29</sup> have a constancy and solidity often lacking in his stated opinions and say something essential about him. Unquestionably, Easy attempts to escape the constraints imposed on him by the southern community—"all the people around me...wanting me to be the same poor old Easy—not a nickel in my pocket or a dream in my head" (*Gone Fishin'* 237)<sup>32</sup>—and, yet, he is unable to apprehend the world other than through this community. Easy's references to nature, which can be found from the first to the last of the novels in the detective series, are in fact a reflection of his affection for black people themselves. Even a low-class, run-down city hotel is described in terms appropriate to the natural world of his youth:

The carpet...was...edged with color like a dry brown riverbed with dying grasses along its banks.... as I passed we regarded each other as two weary lizards might stare as they slithered across some barren stone. (*White Butterfly* 100)

The reader is reminded of Jean Toomer's *Cane* whose "soil-soaked" city dwellers have strong roots sinking down "through the cement floor", (...) "spreading under the asphalt streets" (30).

The detective "has the map of the south on his tongue."<sup>31</sup> so it is only natural that the narrative borrows its most vivid images from its landscapes. The bayous,



"so hot that even God was sweating" (*A Little Yellow Dog* 240), saturate the stories with their humid heat and the odors of their flora and fauna. Alligators, skunks, catfish, mudhens, wildcats, coyotes, foxes, mice, porcupines, hares, dogs, mules and snakes together with magnolias, carob trees, ferns, moss, watermelons, oranges, lemons, blueberries and cotton flowers are the stuff of Mosley's prose. The inhabitants of the Los Angeles ghetto, mainly ex-country people, are naturally clothed in the characteristics of the plants and animals of the south. Easy sees a watermelon-shaped shoulder, a bear's smile, a snake's "rictus", a tongue shaped like the leaf of a cactus, teeth like tree stumps. Mosley's city dwellers have kept their cedar smell, their mule faces, their chicken shaped bodies; they look like baby birds fallen from their nests, like dogs. Rupert resembles a "big ugly fly who had had his wings clipped" (*A Little Yellow Dog* 177) and Linda "a monstrous chicken" (*A Red Death* 125). The lines separating humans, plants and animals are not always clearly drawn—when Craxton smiles, the spaces between his teeth made him look like an "alligator that had evolved to human form" (*A Red Death* 184).<sup>32</sup> Inhabitants of the city continue to use chicken wire to repair their houses. They cook collard greens and black eyed peas with pig's tails, and the aromas attract clouds of flies. The odors of Louisiana, to which are attached images of black women, permeate Easy's narratives.

Note in passing that although critics tend to find fault with Mosley's depiction of women, the recurring elements in his writing associated with female characters (warmth, tenderness, strength, laughter, pleasure, work, food) speak mainly a language of love and admiration even if

not of fidelity. Within the context of this paper the particular attachment of Mosley's hero to very dark-skinned black women (such as his beautiful wife)<sup>33</sup> and to rural southern black women is one more element which added to, or rather intermingled with, the themes of the trickster and of the natural world of the south give evidence of his ethnic and cultural inclination.

Alice Walker has observed that black men in African-American literature (and, in the case of famous black men, in reality) almost always fall in love with or marry white or near white women, even when these men consciously affirm blackness.<sup>34</sup> Such a remark does not apply to Mosley's hero. Easy claims to be attracted by all women, but, in fact, reserves his feelings of love for black women only. The combination—woman-black-sweet-beautiful—repeatedly occurs in his narrative. When Easy evokes white women—a relatively rare occurrence, they are associated with uneasiness and strangeness more than with pleasure, no matter how well meaning they might be. Only on one occasion does Easy describe an intimate relationship with a white woman, and he says, "Rather than sex it was a kind of spasm, like vomiting or cramps." (*A Red Death* 238)

Not only does he only like black women, he also prefers the hard working ones of his youth in Louisiana:

There is a scene that has been a constant in my life since I was a small boy. Black women. Lots of them. Cooking in the industrial size kitchen and talking loud, laughing and telling stories. But all I really saw was their hands. Working hands. Laying out plates, peeling yams, folding sheets and tablecloths into

perfect squares, washing, drying, stacking and pushing from here to there. Women who lived by working... cooking, yes, but there was lots of other work for a Negro woman.... Working for God in his house and at home. My own mother, sick as she was, made sweet potato pies for a church dinner on the night she died. She was twenty five years old (*A Red Death* 107).

Easy also appreciates the women Langston Hughes described as "huge but shapely" in his plays.<sup>35, 36</sup> In fact, this is the precise term Easy uses to describe the love of his life, Etta Mae:

The biceps of her right arm bulged, because Etta Mae Harris was a powerful woman who in her younger years, had done hand laundry nine hours a day, six days a week. She could knock a man into next Tuesday, or she could hold you so tight that you felt like a child again, in your mother's loving embrace. (*A Red Death* 27)

She "smelled of cleaning wax and bread, of the sweat from hard work." (*A Little Yellow Dog* 61)

One of his earliest sexual experiences is especially rich in olfactory sensations. His seductress, a black faith healer from the swamps, spreads an odor of wood smoke and musk, of clay and manure, even of a horse roasted whole with carrots and potatoes. As incongruous as it appears, the scene of seduction is depicted with a fair balance between the comic and the serious and respectful. After having described the odoriferous Mama Jo in his own words, Easy politely lets her speak for herself: "I've got big bones and I'm taller than almost any man I have ever seen.... I'm better than most men at bein'

like a man.... mens don't like a woman big as I am, not if they manlike too." (*Gone Fishin'* 186, 187). In certain respects Mama Jo's remarks are very close to those of Sojourner Truth,<sup>37</sup>

Easy goes through a string of black women, but he is never the one who breaks the relationship. Black women abandon him. His undeniable need and tenderness for them is marked by loss. His mother, his wife and his two-year-old daughter all brutally disappear, provoking "the same misery." (*White Butterfly* 241) His black mistresses either die or prefer someone else. This flood of separations confirms the stubbornness of a fate which inevitably destroys his affective relationships not only with black women but with all African Americans. His father disappeared when he was young. His closest black friends, his substitutes for a family—Mouse, Mofass and Jackson Blue—are as inclined to abandon, betray and kill him as they are to stand by and protect him. In fact, Easy mistrusts himself probably more than he does anyone else. "'Betrayed by your own blood,' a familiar voice said" (*Black Betty* 148) as Easy dreams that he is slipping on bleeding feet.

Finally, in the last novel in the series, Mosley finally leaves open the possibility of Easy forming a lasting relationship with a young black woman, Bonnie Shay. In this instance, she is from French Guiana, and Easy is surprised and subjugated by the spontaneous ease with which she uses the word "innocent".

"I knew right then she wasn't a fully American Negro. A black man or woman in America, with American parents, knew that innocence was a term for white people. We were born in sin." (*A*

Easy's relationship with a non-American black woman underscores a facet of his relationships with his non-biological children. Both seem to succeed in breaking the circle of rupture and separation that have characterized his emotional life, and, in many ways, reflect the history of the Afro-American community.

The obstinacy of a destiny which inevitably destroys Easy's affective relations with the other members of his community somewhat confusedly seems to threaten the very existence of that community. Easy senses the working of fate even in the laughter of black children deprived of innocence:

It could make you cry just to hear them laugh. Because behind the music of their laughter there was the rattle of chains. Chains we wore for no crime; chains we wore for so long that they melded with our bones. We all carry them but nobody can see it. Not even most of us.... What about all those centuries in chains? Where do they go when you get free? (*Black Betty* 216)

Easy's adoption of a young Latin American boy, born outside the U.S. with almond-shaped eyes and situated on neither side of the black/white color line, might be a way for him to escape the role assigned to him by history. By defining himself his own descendants, to a certain extent Easy defines his own future.

His emotional relationships with non-Blacks, non-Americans and simply non-blood-related people also enable him to find his voice. For the first time, with Bonnie Shay, Easy is able to speak frankly of himself and of his possessions to a woman. In the end, these intimate ties

between people with different origins enable everyone to find their voices. His Mexican son is mute when Easy adopts him, but he, too, is finally able to speak.

Is it fair to conclude that, for Mosley, the future for Black Americans hinges on their ability to form family attachments with the world beyond their community? Easy's evasive wisdom is the only answer he provides us:

"There is no way...to tell the future."  
(*Gone Fishin'* 243)

*Université de Caen*

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#### Notes

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<sup>1</sup>A different version of this study was published in January 2000 in French by the Presses Universitaires de Caen. It was presented in English as work-in-progress at the 1998 ALARA Conference in Santo Domingo.

<sup>2</sup>This study is based on the novels of Walter Mosley which feature Easy Rawlins as their narrator. *Gone Fishin'* as well as his five detective novels are therefore included.

<sup>3</sup>See Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey*.

<sup>4</sup>"One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost." W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (2).

<sup>5</sup>In *A Red Death*, Easy says to a black policeman, "cut that shit out, man.... You dress like them an' you talk like them too." (180). In *Black Betty*, he finds Gwendolyn arrogant because "she sounded just like a

arrogant because "she sounded just like a white woman, there wasn't a hint of down home in her voice." (64)

<sup>6</sup>John Lowe, "Wakeup Call from Watts: Walter Mosley's *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned*."

<sup>7</sup>Langston Hughes uses this expression in *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*.

<sup>8</sup>"He had been a master cabinet maker. All he needed was a pocket knife and a tree and he could make furniture so beautiful that you'd expect to see it in a castle somewhere. We used to go to his workshop when we were children and he'd lecture us about life. 'Always use your own tools,' he'd say.... he made us feel good about work and about who we were." (*Black Betty*, 162)

<sup>9</sup>"The men listened to me. I wasn't a team leader but Benny relied on me to set an example for others because I was such a good worker." (*Devil in a Blue Dress* 69)

<sup>10</sup>"Money isn't a sure bet but it's the closest to God that I have ever seen in this world." (*Devil in a Blue Dress* 128)

<sup>11</sup>"Outdoors, we knew, was the real terror of life." (Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, London, Picador, 1990, p. 11). "I had to smile when I gazed into my own yard. It was an open plot of grass surrounded by bushes that sported large mottled red and yellow roses. It was a picture-perfect yard in my opinion.... I kept neat little islands of flowers in a sea of St Augustine grass." (*Black Betty* 44, 200)

<sup>12</sup>"I kept my side of the yard cut back and trim. But Lucky let the trees hang over the driveway so that you had the feeling you were entering a jungle path, some dark tunnel into another time." (*Black Betty* 44)

<sup>13</sup>See what Mumia Abu-Jamal says in his essay, "The Fictive Realism of John Edgar Wideman," about writers/ narrators who "spatially, and temporally, left some of (their) own behind."

<sup>14</sup>"That was on Courlene, a residential street not far from downtown. It was a small house with peeling white paint and bare brown dirt for a lawn. There was an

overflowing trash can right there on the porch.... I hated that house. I hated the disrespect it showed for the neighborhood and for itself." (*A Little Yellow Dog* 234)

<sup>15</sup>Easy's conflicting attitude of simultaneous acceptance and rejection of American ideology is present at many levels. The complexity of his role as a father provides a telling example. In accepting separation from his legitimate child, Easy acquiesces to the historical and sociological tradition which holds that black fathers abandon responsibility for their children. But, in buying the baby of a white woman and claiming to be its father, just as in claiming to be the father of the young Latin American boy (considered a non-Black in the U.S.) whom he rescues, Easy reverses traditional historical and cultural roles whereby Whites bought the children of Blacks.

<sup>16</sup>"Just the idea that I was there to fool those people, the same way I had fooled Poinsettia with my lies about being a helpless janitor, made my stomach turn." (*A Red Death* 149) "I felt a secret glee when I went into a bar.... I'd ask the bartender his name and talk about anything, but, really, behind my friendly talk, I was working to find something. Nobody knew what I was up to and that made me sort of invisible; people thought they knew me but what they really saw was an illusion of me, something that wasn't real. I never got bored or frustrated." (*Devil in a Blue Dress* 134)

<sup>17</sup>See Barbara T. Christian's "Walter Mosley" in *The Norton Anthology, African American Literature* (2595).

<sup>18</sup>In "Wakeup Call from Watts: Walter Mosley's *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned*," John Lowe remarks that Mosley "problematizes the endorsement of the system that a criminal's capture and punishment supposedly signifies when a detective novel concludes."

<sup>19</sup>It is interesting to note that Easy's interior voice continues to counsel him in the familiar black dialect: "Make believe you

is the night." (*Devil in a Blue Dress* 200)

<sup>20</sup>*Brothers and Keepers* (26-27)

<sup>21</sup>Mumia Abu-Jamal, "The Fictive Realism of John Edgar Wideman" (76-77)

<sup>22</sup>Socrates Fortlowe, the philosopher—but also killer-hero of *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned* is the logical version of an Easy deprived of Mouse.

<sup>23</sup>Tough, incorrigible men play an important role in contemporary ghetto folklore and are the spiritual descendents of both the "bad" slaves, that is, those who defied their masters, and of the African trickster with whom their kinship has been demonstrated by Alan Dundes (*Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel*, Henry Louis Gates Jr., J.W. Roberts, (*From Trickster to Badman*), John Lowe (*Jump at the Sun*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Cosmic Comedy*), and other scholars.

<sup>24</sup>Mouse shares many other qualities with the African trickster god. They are both simultaneously very small and very tall: "Mouse looked like a big man, bigger than life, out in that water. He was taller than the trees." (*Gone Fishin'* 77)

<sup>25</sup>In *The Trickster in West Africa: a Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight*, Robert D. Pelton observes that for the Fons the trickster lies to people only to make them take a new look at things in order to serve their community better.

<sup>26</sup>See Geneviève Fabre's *Le Théâtre Noir aux Etats-Unis*.

<sup>27</sup>In *Black Betty*, Easy recites "the magic words. 'I need your help, man.'" (114). In *Devil in a Blue Dress*, Mouse appears out of nowhere to save his friend from having his throat slit. In *White Butterfly*, he appears "as if by magic" (218) to rescue Easy from his despair and later unexpectedly shows up at the police station to save him.

<sup>28</sup>Zora Neale Hurston uses this expression in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

<sup>29</sup>"It was fine in ...little colored towns like Pariah, usually, because there weren't any white people around for the most part." (*Gone Fishin'* 116)

<sup>30</sup>Jean Toomer, *Cane* (65)

<sup>31</sup>Zora Neale Hurston uses this expression in *Dust Tracks on a Road*.

<sup>32</sup>Gilbert Durand's chapter on "signification du bestiaire, archétype de l'ogre" in *Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* sheds an interesting light on Mosley's work.

<sup>33</sup>Easy's wife, however, plays only a marginal role in Mosley's novels, and her alleged perfection undermines all the more her credibility as a character because Easy has an evident weakness for women with physical flaws. A missing tooth or eyes too far apart are usually a sure way to win his heart.

<sup>34</sup>Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Garden* (302-303)

<sup>35</sup>See *Tambourines to Glory*, *Little Ham* and *Simply Heavenly*.

<sup>36</sup>It could be argued that Easy likes black American women only if they are ignorant, poor, and employed in menial jobs. His description of his sexual relations with an educated African American woman, a school teacher in *A Little Yellow Dog*, seems to confirm this idea. In this scene, Easy uses none of the loving, affectionate terms usually found in his descriptions of his relations with uneducated black women. This can be interpreted in terms of a masculine need to occupy a superior position to women (See Patricia A. Turner's essay "From Talma Gordon to Theresa Galloway: Images of African American Women in Mysteries"), but it can also be read as a natural attachment to the type of women his late beloved mother was.

<sup>37</sup>"I have done a great deal of work; as much as a man," declared Sojourner Truth to the Convention of the Equal Rights Association in New York in 1867.

<sup>38</sup>Easy's notions of "sin" are interesting and seem to be related to the idea of being chained "for no crime" (see the following quotation). The mystery of a sin-crime that no one can see or understand but yet manifests itself in the clanking of chains is

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## *Oliveira Silveira e a poesia afro-gaúcha*

*por Ana Beatriz Gonçalves*

Quando se pensa no sul do Brasil, especialmente no estado do Rio Grande do Sul, nos vem a imagem de pessoas de descendência européia, geralmente alemã ou italiana. Entretanto, quando nos aprofundamos na história do estado, percebemos que essa imagem não é totalmente verídica, ou seja, a presença negra no estado e a sua contribuição na formação econômica do mesmo, apesar de não valorizada, é marcante. Desmistificando esses "pré"-conceitos estão os vários intelectuais que tentam mostrar que na região sul a presença negra também foi e é importante. Entre eles está Oliveira Silveira, poeta, gaúcho, negro, quem, através de seus poemas afirma e reafirma sua identidade de negro e gaúcho. Este trabalho se propõe a verificar os elementos que fazem parte do processo de afirmação de uma identidade afro-gaúcha na obra do referido poeta.

O estado do Rio Grande do Sul é a "região mais meridional do Brasil, situada na zona temperada do continente" (Bakos 39). No início da colonização do Brasil, essa região não recebeu muita atenção da metrópole; deste modo, "permaneceu cerca de dois séculos... como terra de ninguém" (Bakos 39). Entretanto, a partir do final do século XVIII, com o objetivo de impedir a expansão espanhola nas terras da colônia portuguesa, "as atenções da metrópole começaram a voltar-se para o extremo-sul" (Bakos 39). Sua ocupação oficial data de 1737, quando a Coroa portuguesa "para consolidar seu domínio na área enviou a expedição do Brigadeiro José da Silva Pais, que... fundou a fortaleza-presídio de Jesus-Maria-José" (Pesavento 20). Estabelece-se oficialmente a posse portuguesa da área.

Apesar de ser uma região "geralmente tida como exclusivo produto do trabalho livre" (Maestri 9), isto é, de imigrantes alemães e italianos que se instalaram na província, a participação da mão-de-obra escrava em sua formação foi fundamental. Diferentes autores divergem quanto à época em que o negro escravo foi introduzido na província. Segundo Maestri, a presença negra é anterior à ocupação oficial da região.<sup>1</sup> Bakos, entretanto, aponta 1783 como o ano de chegada da mão-de-obra escrava na província.<sup>2</sup> Não obstante, todos concordam que a partir do final do século XVIII, "com o início da produção de charque em grande nível, se estruturou um sólido polo escravista no Brasil Meridional" (Maestri 27). Obviamente que a mão-de-obra escrava foi utilizada em todos os setores da vida sulina, tanto na rural como na urbana mas, foi na produção de charque onde realmente destaca-se sua presença.

O charque, ou seja, a salgação da carne para que possa ser transportada para outras partes do país e para o exterior foi, durante mais de cem anos, a principal atividade da região.<sup>3</sup> Esta atividade "apoiou-se sobre as costas e o suor anônimo do trabalhador negro escravo" (Maestri 39). Charque, então, significava "negro cativo, assenzalado, maltratado, trabalhando duro e vivendo mal" (Maestri 42).

Entretanto, como em outras regiões, o negro escravo não aceita passivamente sua condição. Deste modo, surgem diferentes formas de resistência, que, segundo Maestri, eram "algumas vezes imperceptíveis" (52), mas que fizeram parte do cotidiano escravista. Tais formas eram: o aquilombamento, o suicídio, a fuga, as



insurreições, as rebeldias, o desamor ao trabalho, entre outras.

Essa resistência à escravidão contribuiu para a formação de estereótipos que perduram até os dias atuais. Se um escravo não "dedicava-se" ao trabalho como se esperava, todos os negros eram considerados preguiçosos, malandros; se a negra escrava não resistia aos assédios sexuais de seu senhor (obviamente que não podia resistir), todas eram consideradas prostitutas; se um negro, em seu desespero, matava o capataz ou qualquer outra pessoa, todos eram considerados perigosos. Deste modo, o negro vai perdendo sua identidade própria à medida em que certas características lhe são atribuídas.

Os processos políticos brasileiros tampouco ajudaram ao negro escravo, ou seja, independência não foi sinônimo de abolição. A Constituição de 1824, "expressão do regime liberal" (Freitas 85), não dá aos escravos, mesmo aqueles nascidos no Brasil, o direito à cidadania.<sup>4</sup>

Após a proibição da importação de escravos, em 1831, verifica-se em todo o país um grande tráfico interprovincial.<sup>5</sup> No caso do Rio Grande do Sul, além do grande número de imigrantes alemães e italianos que chegavam à região, substituindo a mão-de-obra escrava, os altos preços dos escravos nas regiões cafeeiras atraem aos donos de escravos gaúchos.

Quando finalmente foi proclamada a abolição no Brasil, em 13 de maio de 1888, o número de escravos na província era mínimo (pouco mais de oito mil, segundo Freitas). Alguns haviam sido vendidos às regiões cafeeiras e os que não morreram na Revolução Farroupilha, conseguiram sua alforria por haver lutado pela nação brasileira.<sup>6</sup>

O negro alforriado, entretanto, não passa

a fazer parte da força de trabalho; o que em realidade ocorre é precisamente o contrário, ou seja, uma total marginalização na sociedade. Essa marginalização, obviamente, reforça os estereótipos criados no período da escravidão. O negro segue sendo, deste modo, considerado preguiçoso, malandro, ladrão, entre outras coisas.

No entanto, do ponto de vista legal, brancos e negros têm os mesmos direitos, gerando, assim, uma idéia de "democracia racial", uma vez que legalmente não há discriminação.<sup>7</sup> Além desse fato, a mestiçagem no Brasil "não é punida mas louvada" (Ribeiro 225), resultando no que Darcy Ribeiro chama de "racismo assimilacionista", ou seja, "se dilui a negritude numa vasta escala de gradações, que quebra a solidariedade, reduz a combatividade" (226). Segundo Ribeiro,

o aspecto mais perverso do racismo assimilacionista é que ele dá de si uma imagem de maior sociabilidade, quando, de fato, desarma o negro para lutar contra a pobreza que lhe é imposta, e dissimula as condições de terrível violência a que é submetido. (226)

Assim sendo, o papel do intelectual negro será árduo, uma vez que deverá lutar dentro de uma sociedade onde, pelo menos teoricamente, não existe racismo, uma sociedade onde as "formas de conduta e de etiqueta dos brancos bem-sucedidos" (Ribeiro 226) predominam.

Em outras palavras, será necessário que antes de mais nada auto-defina-se para, então, definir seu papel dentro de sua sociedade. Assim sendo, seu esforço será, segundo J. Abílio Ferreira, "maior do que qualquer outra categoria de escritor" (*Reflexões* 32), uma vez que "é-lhe essencial o posicionamento crítico e

cuidadoso frente a uma questão sempre negada e encoberta" (32).

É precisamente nesse contexto de questionamento e auto-definição que se insere Oliveira Silveira, poeta, gaúcho, negro. Ao depreender-se sua trajetória poética, pode-se observar que cronologicamente existe um processo de amadurecimento por parte do poeta quanto à sua identidade negra e gaúcha.

Assim sendo, *Germinou*, seu primeiro poemário, publicado em 1962, será o princípio de conscientização em relação a essa identidade que tenta definir. Observa-se, portanto, o surgimento de um *eu enunciativo* que dará início ao estabelecimento de uma voz poética reivindicativa de uma identidade própria, que pode ser também representante de todo um grupo, como se verifica em "Razão", um dos poemas contidos em *Germinou*: "Lapidemos também nossa garganta / Não podemos calar se temos voz" (5).

Também em *Germinou* verificamos o desejo de continuidade, ou seja, a voz poética deseja que sua mensagem não seja transitória, e sim permanente. Por esse motivo, há um desejo de que essa poesia não seja como a água corrente nem como o vento, por serem estes elementos passageiros:

Que eu não passe  
como a água corrente.  
Que eu não passe  
como o vento leve ("Roteiro I" 15)

*Poemas Regionais*, publicado em 1968, dá continuidade à obra poética de Silveira. Como o próprio título indica, o poeta evoca aqui elementos relacionados a sua região de origem: o Rio Grande do Sul. Verificamos, assim, a utilização de um vocabulário típico da região: pampa,

minuano, chimarrão, boleadeiras e ponche são alguns dos elementos tipicamente gaúchos presentes nessa obra. Deste modo, pode-se dizer que segue o processo identitário iniciado em *Germinou*.

Em "Restinga" observa-se a ênfase em mudanças e a necessidade de seguir em frente:

Cortando a terra pampiana  
em sua sonora andança  
vai refletindo mudança  
mas sempre, sempre avançando (sem página)

"Evocação" representa a apropriação de elementos do sul e a evocação desses elementos de maneira possessiva, afirmando, assim, sua identidade gaúcha:

Meu serigote chapeado  
meu ponche de melhor pano  
meu pampa sem aramado  
e o meu vento minuano. (sem página)

A referência à raça negra aparece em "Gaúcho de Cor Mateando" onde se observam elementos gaúchos e negros: ao tomar chimarrão (mate para alguns), uma bebida amarga, lembra-se de suas raízes e sente o amargo se sua vida. Nota-se também, pela primeira vez, o uso de uma palavra relacionada aos escravos: banzo, "nostalgia mortal dos negros da África" (*Novo Dicionário* 230):

Meu requimado porongo  
preto aconchego do amargo  
sinto em mim quando te afago  
velhas raízes do Congo  
.....  
Cada gole, cada gôta  
tem o sabor de dois mundos.  
E vou bebendo a cicuta  
de um banzo que vem do fundo. (sem

página)

Inicia-se, assim, o estabelecimento de uma identidade negra e gaúcha ao mesmo tempo.

Entretanto, antes de estabelecer tal identidade, a voz poética retornará às suas raízes africanas, afirmando, desta forma, sua origem negra. Como parte desse processo de afirmação, o poeta evocará a África, que será um dos temas principais de *Banzo, saudade negra*, publicado em 1970.

A trajetória do negro africano desde seus tempos de liberdade no continente africano até os tempos de trabalho forçado no Novo Mundo é o tema de "Parte da Crônica", onde o eu lírico, usando o modo imperativo, ordena que seja contada a verdadeira história do negro africano, desconstruindo a história oficial:

Contem, costas d'África  
a história dos que eram  
nas florestas e savanas  
pássaros num céu  
azul sem obstáculos

.....  
Arrepios de frio?  
vestes de chibata.  
Séde e muita fome?  
quando chegar come.  
E grillhões nos pés  
E algema nas mãos. (6)

As barbaridades da escravidão aparecem em "Faz Muito Tempo". Aqui, o eu lírico, apesar de consciente de que os tempos mudaram, assume a dor de um antepassado, simbolizando a dor de toda uma raça, afirmando que a dor da escravidão passa de geração em geração e dificilmente será esquecida:

Já faz muito tempo

é o tempo mudou.  
Mas eu assumo a dor  
do meu tataravô  
.....  
Já faz muito longe.  
Eu não vi  
não ouvi  
mas ecoou em mim  
e eu não esqueci. (37)

Em *Praça da Palavra*, publicado em 1976, o poeta segue sua trajetória identitária sob uma nova perspectiva. É a partir dessa obra que Silveira fará parte de um grupo que se caracteriza pelo que Bernd denomina de "consciência trágica" (81), ou seja os poetas que pertencem a esse grupo "buscam, por um lado, atrair a piedade ou simpatia do leitor... e, por outro, provocar o terror e a angústia"(81). Assim sendo, nesse poemário o poeta abandona a temática negra propriamente dita para dedicar-se a problemas sociais brasileiros de modo geral como a fome, a pobreza, a discriminação e a exploração.

"O Favelado", por exemplo, aborda os contrastes de uma cidade como o Rio de Janeiro, onde a miséria e a riqueza vivem lado a lado:

Que fazia aquele favelado  
na praia de Copacabana  
fitando à esquerda o Pão de Açúcar  
com fome e amargura  
vendo à direita o velho Forte  
ele, tão novo e fraco?

Nota-se um contraste entre a fome e a amargura do favelado e a presença do Pão de Açúcar, sua fraqueza diante do Forte de Copacabana, mostrando que todos são parte da paisagem carioca.

"Pobre menino Preto" é um retrato da discriminação racial, onde o menino "se imagina mocinho" (14) mas não pode

fazê-lo porque “os mocinhos são brancos” (14); não pode ser Tarzã “porque eles o imaginam / chita / macaco / chimpanzé” (14). Através da figura do menino, o poeta questiona os valores de uma sociedade onde o negro está destinado a ser o *outro*, uma vez que:

não pode brincar de Zumbi  
ou Toussaint-Louverture  
porque são heróis de verdade  
que ninguém conhece  
nem ele mesmo nunca ouviu falar. (14)

Em outras palavras, os verdadeiros heróis da história do Novo Mundo são desconhecidos pela maioria da população, incluindo os negros, já que se trata de sociedades cujos valores fundamentam-se nos mesmos valores dos conquistadores europeus.

Com *Pêlo escuro*, publicado em 1977, “atingirá o pleno domínio de uma vertente por ele chamada de *afro-gaúcha*” (Bernd 126). Esta coletânea, segundo Bernd,

apresenta uma grande unidade que é dada pela recuperação da trajetória do negro no Rio Grande do Sul: de seu processo de tomada de consciência à sua participação em quase todos os ramos da atividade. (126)

Observa também que “inserem-se o manancial do falar gauchesco e o quadro referencial do pampa aos quais vêm associar-se elementos da cultura negra” (*Poesia negra* 95).

Deste modo, a recuperação de lendas como a do “Negrinho do Pastoreio”, a participação da mão-de-obra escrava nas charqueadas, nas lavouras de trigo, nas estâncias e nos trabalhos domésticos e a atividade guerreira serão temas constantes

neste poemário. Estarão também presentes “elementos que evidenciam a preservação, pelo negro, dos rituais da tradição africana” (Bernd 126). Assim sendo, vemos que, para atingir o nível de auto-conhecimento desejado, Silveira resgata elementos de sua origem negra, combinando-os a elementos tipicamente gaúchos.

A combinação de elementos de origem negra com elementos gaúchos aparece no primeiro poema de *Pêlo escuro*, “Gaúcho Negro Mateando”, onde compara-se cada detalhe do hábito de tomar chimarrão, típico do Rio Grande do Sul, à experiência negra. Este negro ao “matear” lembra-se de “velhas raízes do Congo” (1); utiliza como cuia o porongo, planta de origem africana cujos frutos sãoocos e de casca dura, o que o faz lembrar de “a forma quente das mamas / de uma crioula retinta” (1); a erva colocada na água “são ondas verdes de mar / navio negreiro singrando” (1); todo o ritual “tem o sabor de dois mundos” (1), para concluir que “vou bebendo a cicuta / de um banzo que vem do fundo” (1); combina-se a cicuta, planta venenosa de origem européia com o banzo, uma doença tipicamente negra, o que representa a verdadeira morte do negro ao ser trazido ao Novo Mundo.

A participação guerreira do negro na história rio-grandense está evidenciada em “Lanceiros Negros (Revolução Farroupilha)”. Durante esta luta pela independência, foi prometida a liberdade a todos os negros escravos que participassem, havendo, assim, uma grande adesão de negros à causa revolucionária. Neste poema o lanceiro negro é comparado à noite e cada negro morto é noite “que ficou / para sempre libertada” (4), a morte é ainda a única maneira de alforriar-se.

“Negro no Sul” enumera todas as

contribuições do negro à formação da província, indicando a adaptação nessa sociedade. Põe também em evidência a conservação de rituais tradicionalmente africanos. Entretanto, apesar de sua participação ter sido e continuar a ser de grande importância, segue discriminado. Assim sendo, vemos que "ao lado do enaltecimento do valor de um povo está a crítica à ação dominadora que perdura até os dias de hoje" (Bernd 127):

No sul o negro charqueou  
lavrou  
carreteou  
no sul o negro remou  
teceu  
diabo a quatro  
o negro no sul congou  
bumbou  
batucou  
a negra no sul cozinhou  
lavou  
diabo a quatro  
no sul o negro brigou  
guerreou  
se libertou  
quer dizer: ainda se liberta  
de mil disfarçadas senzalas  
prisões  
diabo a quatro  
onde tentam mantê-lo agrilhoado. (4)

Um aspecto interessante a ser destacado é o fato da voz poética, apesar de louvar o negro, o faz desde um ponto de vista distanciado, ou seja, o uso de verbos na terceira pessoa do singular evidencia que a posição do *eu* não é aqui assumida. Não se pode dizer, entretanto, que a voz negra é neste caso o *outro*, aquele que não tem voz. Ao contrário, o que em realidade ocorre é a super-valorização desta voz desde um ponto de vista distante.

A participação do negro nas charqueadas

de Pelotas, município do Rio Grande do Sul, é exaltada em "Charqueada", onde a voz poética por um lado valoriza a contribuição negra e, por outro, mostra a falta de opção do escravo:

Os negros estão despidos senhora  
pelotense  
trabalhando no sol.  
Os negros estão desnudos senhora  
pelotense  
trabalhando no sal.

Eles vieram de longe  
de campos tão distantes  
repostados pela estrada  
com seus mugidos fundos. (5)

Outro aspecto da influência negra no Rio Grande do Sul é a lenda do "Negrinho do pastoreio", recontada aqui em três versões: "Negrinho e Variações", "História do Negrinho" e "Negrinho". Em todas as três, exalta-se a figura deste negro escravo: "O negrinho nestes pagos / guarda a tropilha de um pêlo" (8) e se critica o fato de ter sido injustamente castigado por seu amo: "Lhe entregou mão malfazeja / pras formigas de sua cor" (8). Compara-se a injustiça sofrida por ele à mesma sofrida por todos os escravos: "A tua história / negrinho / é lenda / ou será verdade?" (9) e, finalmente pede proteção para todos os negros: "E peço: clareia o rumo / negrinho / de teus irmãos cor de fumo" (9).

O apego à terra e a afirmação de uma identidade gaúcha são temas presentes nos três últimos poemas de *Pêlo escuro*: "Sou", "Obrigado, Minha Terra" e "Sim: Querência".

Em "Sou" observa-se uma voz poética que reclama suas origens negra e gaúcha:

Sou a bombacha de santo,  
sou o churrasco de Ogum

Entre os filhos desta terra  
naturalmente sou um.

Sou o trabalho e a luta,  
suor e sangue de quem  
nas entranhas desta terra  
nutre raízes também. (14)

A combinação de elementos tipicamente gaúchos (a bombacha, o churrasco) com elementos africanos (Ogum) afirmam sua identidade afro-gaúcha. É interessante notar a figura de Ogum, geralmente associado à luta e a conquista. A escolha deste orixá é, deste modo, muito significativa, uma vez que simboliza as lutas e conquistas de todo um povo representado pelo eu lírico do poema.

O amor à terra demonstrado por meio da participação do negro na formação rio-grandense é o tema central de "Obrigado, Minha Terra". Aqui "o poeta glorifica as lutas inglórias do negro no Rio Grande do Sul" (Bernd 127), exaltando de forma positiva todo seu sofrimento: "Obrigado lavoura / pelas vergas no meu couro" (15). Entretanto, não deixa de "denunciar o preconceito, introduzindo no poema os estereótipos construídos pelo branco" (Bernd 127):

Muito obrigado  
pelo ditado  
"negro em posição  
é encrenca no galpão"  
Obrigado pelo preconceito  
com que até hoje me aceitas. (15)

Apesar de estar consciente de que é objeto de discriminação, não sente desejo de sair desta região. Ao contrário, "é por sentir-se profundamente ligado a esta terra... que pratica a denúncia dos fatores que a deprimem, como o preconceito e a

discriminação" (Bernd 128). Assim sendo, observa-se em "Sim: Querência" uma grande denúncia: "me agrilhoaram", "me charquearam", "me barram na porta de emprego" (16) junto a um profundo apego: "Querência sim / cada vez mais / queiram ou não" (16).

Pode-se afirmar que *Pêlo escuro* reflete o questionamento de uma identidade por muitos negada ou rejeitada, ou seja, uma identidade afro-gaúcha. Para tal, o poeta se vale de uma série de elementos típicos do Rio Grande do Sul e os combina a sua herança negra. Deste modo, desmitifica uma série de estereótipos pré-estabelecidos à medida em que afirma a presença do negro na formação deste estado sulino, construindo, assim, uma nova cosmogonia.

Em *Roteiro dos Tantãs*, publicado em 1981, o discurso poético torna-se, segundo Bernd, "o lugar privilegiado da purgação e enfrentamento do poeta consigo mesmo" (128): por um lado, nota-se "a preocupação com as origens, a ligação com a África e a solidariedade com os irmãos do Caribe" (Bernd 128); e, por outro, "a acusação contra a forma preconceituosa com que o branco estabelece as regras de relação com o negro" (Bernd 128).

O tantã, instrumento de origem africana torna-se símbolo de união entre todos os negros do mundo:

Longes vozes chamaram  
na voz do vento leste  
nas correntes marinhas  
nas veias sangüíneas  
no tantã do trovão  
e meu coração tantã  
respondeu  
Aqui estou! (2)

As origens africanas se faz presente em

"Encontrei Minhas Origens", que representa, dessa forma, uma tomada de consciência por parte do eu lírico:

encontrei minhas origens  
na cor da minha pele  
nos lanhos da minha alma  
em mim. (3)

Essa tomada de consciência o conduz a um reconhecimento e valorização de suas raízes africanas; daí a imagem do filho distante de sua mãe, como por exemplo em "Elo" que, de acordo com o próprio título indica uma forte ligação com o continente africano:

Aqui meu umbigo túmido  
receptor da seiva  
neste lado do mar  
nesta longe placenta  
E África lá está  
na outra extremidade do cordão. (3)

Entretanto, apesar do reconhecimento de suas raízes africanas, que é simbolizado pela imagem de uma África provedora da "seiva" que o nutre, vemos que se trata de uma ligação emocional, uma vez que seu habitat, sua "placenta", encontra-se deste lado do oceano. "Elo" expressa, então, a união de duas identidades: a africana e a brasileira.

A importância dos rituais religiosos de origem africana no Brasil é ressaltada em "No Mapa", que é uma síntese da influência da religião africana em todo o país:

Pelo litoral  
ficou  
de norte a sul  
nagô.  
Ficou no Recife:  
xangô.

Na Bahia ficou:  
candomblé.  
No Rio Grande é o quê?  
—Batuque, tchê. (17)

Com a publicação de *Poema sobre Palmares*, em 1987, retoma-se a história do quilombo dos Palmares, desde a sua fundação até a conquista por mercenários a mando dos portugueses. Tendo sido o maior quilombo do Brasil, talvez de toda a América, Palmares torna-se um símbolo de liberdade, um exemplo de resistência a ser seguido. Por isso, a principal mensagem desse longo poema é a necessidade de aquilombamento como a única maneira de salvação, ou seja, de preservação de identidade:

Nos pés ainda tenho correntes  
.....  
na alma um pouco de banzo  
mas antes que ele me tome  
quebro tudo, me sumo na noite  
encontro meus irmãos  
é Palmar  
estou salvo! (1)

Zumbi dos Palmares é lembrado como símbolo de resistência, como contestador do sistema oficial: "Zumbi--nome gravado /... / a fibra na alma forte dos negros!" (2)

Apesar do quilombo não ter resistido aos ataques portugueses, a memória de Palmares e de seu principal herói, Zumbi, não se apaga. Ao contrário, estará sempre presente em todos os negros que resistem à assimilação e lutam pela recuperação de uma identidade negra, diferente daquela que lhe é atribuída. A necessidade de aquilombamento como mecanismo de preservação de identidade é, deste modo, fundamental nesta verdadeira luta onde o branco sempre ditou as regras.

Pelo exposto, podemos afirmar que

dentro da trajetória poética de Silveira, observamos um processo de amadurecimento do poeta quanto à sua identidade negra e gaúcha. Verificamos que ao longo desse processo sua obra apresenta algumas constantes, tais como o surgimento de um *eu enunciador* que assume sua identidade afro-gaúcha, a estruturação do universo negro e gaúcho, onde se resgatam elementos relacionados à sua presença no Rio Grande do Sul e a valorização do negro na região. Assim sendo, podemos afirmar que a poesia de Silveira além de representar a afirmação de uma identidade afro-gaúcha, é uma resposta aqueles que não querem ver a importância do negro no estado.

*Universidade Regional Integrada do Alto Uruguai e das Missões*

#### Notas

<sup>1</sup>Maestri afirma que "o escravo negro estabeleceu-se nos atuais territórios gaúchos antes do início da ocupação oficial do Sul (1737)" (26).

<sup>2</sup>Segundo Bakos, "os primeiros contingentes de escravos vieram para trabalhar na plantação de linho-cânhamo... Essa atividade começou em 1783... O objetivo primordial era fornecer a matéria prima necessária para o fabrico de cordas e o velame dos navios portugueses" (42).

<sup>3</sup>Segundo Sandra Pesavento, em 1780 expande-se o charque e em 1870 a charqueada sulina entra em crise devido à falta de mão-de-obra escrava e à concorrência com o Prata.

<sup>4</sup>O direito à cidadania só ocorre após a Proclamação da República, em 1889.

<sup>5</sup>Apesar da proibição, continuam chegando no Brasil navios negreiros. Segundo Freitas, o último desembarque de escravos ocorreu em Pernambuco, em 1855.

<sup>6</sup>Maestri dedica um capítulo de seu livro à

participação do negro na Revolução Farroupilha.

<sup>7</sup>Para uma melhor compreensão da situação do negro no Brasil ver: Pierre-Michel Fontaine, ed. *Race, Class, and Power in Brazil*.

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PALARA

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## *El racismo: "Pecado original" de la identidad nacional Argentina*

*por Lucía Dominga Molina*

*Dedicado a la memoria del Compañero JOSE DELFIN ACOSTA MARTINEZ, asesinado por la Policía Federal Argentina, en un incidente racial producido en Buenos Aires.)*

En líneas generales es habitual la consideración de que no hay negros en Argentina; no solo en el ámbito de nuestro país, ya sea a través de lo que dictamina la "Historia Oficial", o bien lo que expresan los medios o también la opinión pública; sino que incluso en los estudios y trabajos sobre la Diáspora Africana, de importantes investigadores extranjeros, pocas veces se toma en cuenta o se habla de la indiscutible presencia histórica, y mucho menos de la actual o del aporte fundamental que el negro hizo a nuestra cultura y nuestra identidad.

Es así que los Afroargentinos, y más si no vivimos en una gran urbe como Buenos Aires, vemos día a día acrecentar una gran herida sobre nuestra autoestima, atacando, quizás lo más esencial de nuestra integridad psíquica: NUESTRA IDENTIDAD. Día a día soportamos preguntas, tales como: ¿Y Ud. de dónde es?, O aseveraciones indiscutibles: "Ud. es Brasileña, ¿NO?, Ah ... entonces, sus padres lo eran, y así recorren una larga línea sucesoria que raras veces llega a la realidad: SOMOS ARGENTINOS DE MUCHAS GENERACIONES, seguramente, algunas más que las del que hace la pregunta.

Creemos que esta pregunta refleja un síntoma de lo que la sociedad argentina pretende reprimir: No hay negros. Somos europeos. Claro que, en muchos casos descendemos de los barcos, y en otros de los aborígenes de estas tierras, pero antes de los barcos de la inmigración europea

llegaron los barcos negreros, y Buenos Aires fue una de los grandes puertos donde se hizo el infame comercio. NO OLVIDEMOS ESTOS HECHOS.

Buenos Aires fue un importante puerto negrero por donde fueron introducidos miles de esclavos. Ricardo Rodríguez Molas sostiene que posiblemente no menos de doscientos mil esclavos ingresan en los doscientos treinta años posteriores a 1580 por los puertos de Buenos Aires y Montevideo. Los que quedaron en Buenos Aires fueron utilizados para el servicio doméstico y también para actividades económicas artesanales. Más tarde sirvieron en los ejércitos, llegando varios de ellos al grado de oficiales e incluso comandantes. Otros fueron trasladados por tierra hasta Potosí o a Chile, quedando muchos en las ciudades que jalonaban esas rutas, y en general en todas las ciudades españolas coloniales ya que todas las familias consideradas importantes poseían esclavos, como así también las órdenes religiosas. En algunos casos como en Corrientes, los jesuitas, los franciscanos, los mercedarios y los dominicanos fueron los más ricos propietarios de esclavos.

Para tener idea cierta de la importancia de la presencia negra en la época colonial, basta con repasar los datos del Censo de 1778 (Cuando se crea el Virreynato del Río de la Plata) en las tres zonas que conformaban la llamada "parte civilizada", o sea Tucumán, Cuyo y el Río de la Plata, que registran una población total de 210,000 habitantes, 80,000 eran negros,

mulatos y zambos, o sea casi un 40 %.

En Buenos Aires hasta 1810 el porcentaje se mantiene en el 30%. En el interior se registran los siguientes índices de población negra: Santiago del Estero 54%; Tucumán 64%; Catamarca 50%; Salta 46% y Córdoba 44 %. En Mendoza, La Rioja y San Juan encontramos entre un 15 a un 25% de negros. En Santa Fe, según la historiadora Catalina Pistone, habría un 27%, pero sin tomar en cuenta la zona rural. En Corrientes cifras de 1782 dan menos de un 20%.

En Buenos Aires para 1822 el porcentaje de Afroargentinos baja al 25%, en 1827 constituimos el 2% del total poblacional; entre 1836 y 1838 sorprendentemente crece el promedio, llegando al 26.8%. Puede especularse que el incremento fue producto del tráfico clandestino de esclavos, posterior a la prohibición del Año 1813, que hicieron corsarios porteños a partir de 1827. Otra posible explicación podemos encontrarla en la reapertura legal del tráfico que hace Juan Manuel de Rosas entre 1831 y 1833.

El periodo que va desde 1838 a 1887, es crucial en el proceso de la supuesta "desaparición" de los Afroargentinos. Los datos estadísticos son poco confiables y discrepan con los comentarios de visitantes, y la importante Prensa Negra que existe hasta finales del siglo XIX en Buenos Aires. Por otro lado no queda muy claro el tema de las diferencias raciales.

Durante los gobiernos de Rosas (1829-1832 y 1835-1852) los Afroargentinos recibimos por primera vez atención desde el poder, lo que nos convirtió en una fuerza política que debía ser tenida en cuenta, y un importante apoyo para el federalismo, que, para los unitarios, sus adversarios políticos, era sinónimo de barbarie. Al caer Rosas y producirse el

acceso al poder de los unitarios, se exarceba el temor a lo que significaba la presencia negra frente al proyecto liberal, y la situación algo favorecida que supuestamente gozamos los Afroargentinos, durante el período rosista, desaparece rápidamente, sobre todo por las políticas y la filosofía puesta en práctica por los unitarios.

La Constitución de 1853 declara a todos los ciudadanos argentinos oficialmente iguales ante la ley, y por lo tanto declara abolida la esclavitud. Esta disposición solo se efectiviza en 1861 para Buenos Aires, cuando ésta se une a la Confederación. Pero las consecuencias del sistema sumamente discriminatorio que se desarrolló en la época colonial, son una pesada herencia que no va a olvidarse con facilidad y que en los hechos, como sostenía al principio, aún se mantiene. La manifestación más intensa de lo antedicho se da en el plano educacional donde persistió la segregación oficializada, con escuelas exclusivas para niños blancos y escuelas para niños negros. También en el período posterior a la Constitución de 1853, se excluía en los teatros y otros espectáculos públicos a la gente de color, por lo menos hasta finales del siglo XIX. **NO PODEMOS PERDER MEMORIA DE ESTOS HECHOS.**

Lo antedicho genera escasa posibilidad de trabajo para los Afroargentinos una vez abolida la esclavitud. La salida laboral más común sigue siendo el ejército, la policía y los trabajos peores remunerados, pero aún aquí los Afroargentinos nos vemos desplazados por las oleadas de inmigrantes europeos, lo que genera un enfrentamiento que puede seguirse en los numerosos periódicos negros de finales del siglo pasado. Es así que los negros, nos vemos obligados a replegarnos en los sectores de

servicios, convirtiéndonos en sirvientes domésticos, músicos, trabajadores del espectáculo (por ejemplo, bailarines en las Academias de Baile) y empleados del gobierno de nivel inferior.

Tradicionalmente los historiadores intentan explicar la supuesta "desaparición" de los Afroargentinos con algunas de las siguientes causas:

a) La participación en las guerras: desde las invasiones inglesas, los ejércitos revolucionarios del período de la independencia, las innumerables guerras civiles intestinas, las campañas contra el indio, la guerra contra el Brasil y fundamentalmente la guerra de la Triple Alianza contra el Paraguay.

b) El mestizaje: muchos autores ponen el acento en la mezcla racial que se produce debido a la escasez de varones negros combinando estos con la masiva afluencia de inmigrantes europeos blancos. Suponen además que las mujeres negras desearían tener hijos de piel más clara con fines de movilidad social.

c) La bajas condiciones económicas y sociales en que vivían los negros: varios autores suponen una natalidad baja y una alta mortandad provocada por la pobreza, la mala calidad de las viviendas, el alimento, la vestimenta y asistencia médica. Este argumento presenta a la epidemia de Fiebre Amarilla de 1871 como el golpe de gracia a la población negra.

d) La abolición del tráfico de esclavos de 1813; aunque en los hechos ingresaron africanos hasta por lo menos 1840, se atribuye a esta causa la desaparición de los negros.

Evidentemente estas causas no explican la supuesta declinación demográfica, distorsionan nuestra verdadera historia de Afroargentinos y ocultan el hecho real: que

NOS BORRARON DE LA HISTORIA.

No vamos a entender esto si no nos detenemos en el proceso de blanqueamiento que, considero, es la génesis de la filosofía racial que consolida a fines del siglo pasado y comienzo del presente al Estado Argentino y que nos excluye totalmente junto con los hermanos aborígenes.

A mediados del siglo XIX, en Argentina como en casi todos los países latinoamericanos comienza a desarrollarse la creencia que para formar una nación moderna se necesitaba población europea. Los intelectuales americanos reciben el impacto de lo que se conoce como el "Racismo Científico". Doctrina ésta, que surge a través de los trabajos de autores como Louis Agassiz, Joseph Arthur de Gobineau a Houston Stuart Chamberlain, quienes presuponen la innata superioridad de la raza blanca y la inferioridad de los aborígenes americanos, los africanos y las demás razas no blancas. También se reciben las doctrinas del denominado "Darwinismo Social" y fundamentalmente del Positivismo.

La idea de la inmigración europea surge ya en 1820 entre los unitarios, se intensifica en 1850 y se promueve oficialmente con la llamada "Generación del 80" que es producto de la fusión de los intereses de la burguesía mercantil porteña (netamente unitaria) con la burguesía ganadera de la provincia de Buenos Aires (ex- federal). Está imbuida del liberalismo positivista europeo. La idea—la fuerza es el Progreso y la doctrina económica: el librecambismo. Autores como Sarmiento, Alberdi, Ingenieros, entre otros fundamentan este diseño excluyente y francamente racista que me lleva a concluir que el racismo es el "Pecado Original" de nuestra supuesta nacionalidad. "Pecado

Original" que generó y genera lamentables exclusiones. Será necesario un profundo proceso de desaprendimiento, de concientización y de actitud crítica, frente a una historia que falsea y oculta elementos fundamentales para su comprensión, para poder superar casi un siglo de confusión y error. Error que es carne dolida en millones de "cabecitas negras" (Esos descendientes de negros, mulatos, aborígenes y mestizos) que como consecuencia de este "Pecado Original" han destruido sus lazos históricos, afectivos y culturales con sus etnias de origen, para aceptar e intentar integrarse en una sociedad que no nos integra, nos discrimina, nos margina, nos expulsa e incluso nos mata.

Por lo tanto concluyo que más que una declinación demográfica lo que hemos padecido los Afroargentinos es una pérdida de los valores afro y fundamentalmente nos faltó un proceso de "ORGULLO NEGRO". Esto ha generado la FALTA DE CONCIENCIA, de quienes somos, de nuestro valor, de nuestra historia, de nuestro sufrimiento y de lo que verdaderamente significó y significa en Argentina SER NEGRO.

Creo también que al negar la existencia actual de negros en Argentina e incluso ocultar y "olvidar" la indiscutible presencia histórica africana y el importante aporte que ésta hizo a la cultura argentina, se está negando nuestra propia identidad nacional. El periodista Narciso Binayán Carmona, afirma rotundamente: "NO ES POSIBLE UNA DEFINICION DE ARGENTINIDAD QUE EXCLUYA UNA DE NEGRITUD. SIN EL NEGRO LA ARGENTINA NO HUBIERA SIDO COMO ES."

El no comprender o aceptar este concepto fundamental es grave, ya que si como pueblo nos separamos de nuestras

raíces históricas, seremos como hojas que el viento lleva a cualquier lugar: PASTO DE DOMINACION. De allí, la imperiosa e impostergable importancia de la reivindicación de la presencia africana en la República Argentina.

*Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana  
Santa Fe, Argentina*

*Comparsa "Los negros santafesinos":  
Presencia negra en la ciudad de Santa Fe  
(República Argentina) en la primera mitad del siglo*

Mario Luis López

EL ORIGEN

En la madrugada del 25 de diciembre de 1900, por las calles de Santa Fe de la Vera Cruz, nueve amigos, que recorrían las noches brindando serenatas, comienzan a pensar la posibilidad de constituir una comparsa para los carnavales. Es así que, al día siguiente, Demetrio Acosta (El Negro Arigós), Pedro Paz (Mandinga) y otros se reúnen en el almacén de Don Goyo, en el Barrio Sud y dejan constituida la Comparsa "Los Negros Santafesinos".<sup>1</sup>

Comienza así una tradición, que es ahora casi mítica, de medio siglo de presencia ininterrumpida en las fiestas de Momo.

CARACTERÍSTICAS PECULIARES

Esta Comparsa, que difiere de otras similares de Argentina y Uruguay, incorpora de entrada elementos culturales afro, mixturados con otros de origen indígena y europeo<sup>2</sup>. La Comparsa estaba conformada casi enteramente con negros (En 1902 desfila ya con 110 integrantes) pero también participaban blancos (con la cara tiznada)<sup>3</sup> y también indios. Dice al respecto Agustín Zapata Gollán: "Con los negros, de muy remota, aunque auténtica ascendencia africana, marchaba, formando parte de la comparsa, un grupo de indios, emplumadas las cabezas y las cinturas, mezclados con el candombe africano."<sup>4</sup>

Este grupo, además presentaba como novedad el hecho de que sus integrantes pertenecían en su totalidad a los sectores populares, a diferencia de las otras comparsas, formadas por representantes

—de las familias tradicionales de Santa Fe, como ser: "Marinos Argentinos", "Unión Pelotaris", "Orfeón Italo-Argentino". Decía una nota periodística de aquellos primeros años del siglo: "Los Negros Santafesinos llamaron su atención por su número y por su correcta formación".<sup>5</sup> La indumentaria de los también denominados "Escoberos de Arigós", destacaba blusas blancas cruzadas por una banda roja, con sombreros de anchas alas con espejuelos.

La Comparsa "Los Negros Santafesinos" aparece como un conjunto coral que se acompañaba con guitarras. (En 1902 ya cuentan con más de 20 guitarristas, entre ellos inmigrantes italianos y españoles, como Pacual Serrao, o un almacenero de apellido Beltrocco)<sup>7</sup>, y con bombos y tambores que aparentemente eran prestados por la fanfarria de un regimiento militar de la zona. Eran peculiares también los adornos de los integrantes de la Comparsa: collares, cuentas de colores, grandes aretes y abalorios.

Dice en un reportaje periodístico Doña Leopoldina S. de Acosta (esposa del Negro Arigós), al ser interrogada sobre si era indispensable ser pardo para integrar La Comparsa: "...No, pero en su mayor parte lo eran. Les llamamos Negros, porque quienes no eran pardos tenían, la obligación de pintarse el rostro. Esa tarea de pintarlos estaba a mi cargo. Posteriormente he confeccionado los trajes para muchos carnavales y en ocasiones con verdadera falta de recursos. Pero todo había que hacerlo para que 'Los Negros Santafesinos' no dejaran de aparecer."<sup>8</sup>

ANTECEDENTES

Podemos citar como antecedente a la Comparsa "Los Negros", que salió a partir de 1883, bajo el mando de Pedro San Martín, e integrada por "hombres de la clase principal" conjuntamente con artesanos y obreros; criollos, negros e indios. Era un famoso integrante el guitarrista afro-argentino Benito Ortogosa (Negro Santa Fe). Es interesante recuperar una letra de "Los Negros":

"Indios alerta  
Que los cristianos  
Quieren ufanos  
Nuestra opresión.  
Flechas al arco  
Blandir la lanza  
Que dónde hay tardanza  
No hay salvación."<sup>6</sup>

También desfilaron en los carnavales fineseculares: "Los Artesanos" (1883), "Obreros" con más de 60 integrantes (1896), y "Los Artesanos del Sur" (1896), entre otras.

LOS CANTOS

Singularmente importantes eran los cantos con que se acompañaba la Comparsa, que año tras año eran festejados por el público y llevaban premios de los jurados del carnaval. Estos hablaban, en un principio, de la "amita" y del "Tata Viejo". Eran canciones que el Negro Arigós recordaba de su infancia en Paraná.

Zapata Gollán dice, con indisimulado acento despectivo: "Al compás de bombos y tambores, presidía la Comparsa un mulato de cara y manos embetunadas, en un incesante y violento bailoteo, agitando, como un enorme sistro, una escoba con

campanillas, sonajas y cascabeles, en bárbaro y exhuberante ejercicio coreográfico de gambetas, zancadillas y brincos de felinos, mientras entre salvajes alaridos y en una ensordecedora chillería aludían a los prohibidos amores de los negros, cantando a coro "Tata Viejo", que aparecía enamorado de una niña, la única mujer blanca de la Comparsa."<sup>9</sup>

Vamos a citar una de las letras de las canciones que incitaban al baile, con claras resonancias religiosas y palabras de origen africano:

"Orixá, musimba, musimba,  
Molena, molena, molá,  
Que vende escoba y plumelo  
Y nadie le quieie complá.

Mucumbalibá, balincumba, licumba  
Libá,  
Una Molena que quiela bailá.  
Oooorixá, Oooorixá, Oooorixá,  
Musimba, molena, molá.  
Macumbalibá, balincuba, licumba.  
Libá."<sup>10</sup>

LOS CARNAVALES DE SANTA FE

Los carnavales de Santa Fe, surgen posiblemente, después de 1853, y se festejaban con un corso por la calle principal, donde vivía la elite y con bailes en la plaza central. Era común que las comparsas y conjuntos musicales recorrieran las casas de las familias más prominentes, tocando y cantando. Cuando la pequeña aldea comienza a crecer hacia el norte, los vecinos nuevos organizan su propio corso, llamado despectivamente "de los carboneros". Luego ambos se unen por la calle San Martín, desde el sur hasta los barrios nuevos<sup>11</sup>. Era tradicional también por esa época la "Quema del Judas" (Muñeco relleno de bombas de estruendo y

fuegos de artificio), en el entierro del carnaval. Allá por los años '30' esto se realizaba en los concursos de carnaval (Primero en la Sociedad Rural y luego en el Club Unión). La crónica periodística recuerda, por ejemplo, la "Quema del Judas" del 21 de febrero de 1931, "Que fue acompañada con los bailes de la comparsa Los Negros Santafesinos".<sup>12</sup>

A partir de 1933 se hace el "Curso Popular" de la Avenida del Oeste (Av. Freire) organizado por apoyado por las Comisiones Vecinales del Barrio Oeste, el Barrio Sud y el Barrio de Barranquitas, que desde el comienzo se transforma en una gran fiesta popular. En la despedida del año 1933 se juntaron más de 60,000 personas.

En 1933 comienzan los cursos de la Avenida Costanera (Sector elegante de la ciudad), a decir de los informantes: "El curso de los ricos". Este festejo era organizado por la Comisión Oficial, que no escatimaba recursos para su éxito, mientras que restaba apoyo al curso popular, que por ejemplo, contaba con escasa iluminación. En 1940 ya empieza a llamarse el "Curso Blanco" al de la Costanera.<sup>13</sup>

#### OTROS GRUPOS AFRO

Hubo otros grupos de negros o con características afro en el carnaval, como los "Negros del Sur" de las primeras décadas. Ya más cerca en el tiempo se recuerda la murga "Los Negros Africanos" de 1931, o "Los Tapes del Sur de 1937". En el carnaval de 1941, se incorpora la categoría "Conjuntos Típicos de Negros" en los concursos del carnaval y participan "Conjunto de Candombes" y "Conjunto de Escolares y Candombes de Santa Fe". En 1944 participa el Conjunto Orquestal "Los Escoberos del Sur". Después de la

desaparición de la Comparsa "Los Negros Santafesinos" salieron otros grupos como: "Vuelven Los Candombes Santafesinos" o "Los Negros de Mamá Inés", o "Los Hijos de Mamá Inés".

#### EL NEGRO ARIGOS

La figura del Negro Arigós, era toda una institución en el carnaval santafesino: "El Negro Arigós no faltó a la cita del curso. La presencia del héroe inmutable de los carnavales santafesinos, cabalgaba un asno de marcha lenta y solemne, vestía chaqueta y pantalones rojos, mientras sobre la cabeza canosa descansaba un gran chambergo de paja... Las murgas a su paso enmudecían y algunos estandartes se inclinaban a sus pies, reverentes; desde las aceras lo aplaudían los niños arrojando serpentinas y el homenaje era sin duda melancólico, pues aquello también pertenecía a un pasado remoto. Cuando empezó a marchar por la calle San Martín, al paso lento de su asno, el cronista pensó en la entrada de Jesús de Nazaret."<sup>14</sup>

#### LA SUPUESTA DESAPARICION

Era el año 1933 y ya comienzan a aparecer en la prensa los lamentos por la supuesta muerte del carnaval y la inminente desaparición de "Los Negros Santafesinos". En 1937 aparece una nota casi necrológica donde se informa que se duda de la participación de la Comparsa y se sostiene que los carnavales ya no serán los mismos, recuerda la figura del Negro Arigós de hace 20 años: "... Mariscal perpétuo e indiscutible... Quien no escuchará otra vez, pese a la ausencia de Los Negros Santafesinos del carnaval de Santa Fe, aquella extraña melopea de ese negro, generalmente robusto, siempre muy



ágil, que abría el camino a la comparsa y lanzaba el provocativo:

Arecumbá-recumba-recá  
Aquí viene este nego  
Que quiele peliá ...

Y acompañaba el ritmo del canto con unos pasos mil veces repetidos y unos golpes graciosos de esa escobita absurdamente pequeña que llevaba en sus manos.<sup>15</sup>

Pero sorprendentemente, un día después, el mismo diario anuncia que Demetrio Acosta (El Negro Arigós) presentó una nota pidiendo a La Comisión del Carnaval que se los exima de concurrir a los dos corsos todas las noches, ya que la comparsa estaba compuesta por ¡180 integrantes!, de los cuales 50 eran niños, pidiendo de asistir noche por medio a cada corso. Un día desaparecía y al día siguiente reaparecía con una conformación monumental, que recuerda casi a la de las mejores épocas, en las que salía con más de 200 integrantes.

#### EL FINAL

Luego sí, vendría, lentamente la decadencia. Cada vez con menos integrantes, con el Negro Arigós muy enfermo y casi inválido, sacado al frente de su comparsa, en andas o con muletas, o en un carricoche de dos ruedas, bajo un dosel de percalina y hojas de palma, fiel a un juramento hecho en el Teatro Municipal un ya lejano carnaval: "Mientras tuviera una guitarra y me acompañaran cuatro negros, Los Negros Santafesinos han de salir a la calle para estas fiestas."<sup>16</sup>

Días antes del carnaval de 1951 (justo cuando se cumplirían 50 años de la primera salida) muere este personaje inolvidable, este humilde trabajador (Tenía

un puesto de flores en el Cementerio Municipal) que mantuvo encendido por medio siglo el orgullo y la dignidad de la negritud.

#### RACISMO, OCULTAMIENTO Y TRASCENDENCIA

Es interesante comparar las pocas menciones en la prensa, la total falta de interés de los investigadores por este fenómeno impresionante de cultura popular que significó la Comparsa, con la intacta y rica memoria de casi toda la población santafesina mayor de 55 años que hemos consultado.

ES QUE ESTA PRESENCIA ROMPE CON UN MITO QUE DESDE HACE MUCHO VIENE ELABORÁNDOSE SOBRE LA DESAPARICION DE LOS NEGROS, Y ROMPE FUNDAMENTALMENTE CON UN PROYECTO, EL DEL "BLANQUEAMIENTO" DE LA SOCIEDAD Y SU CULTURA A TRAVES DE UNA CONCEPCION PROFUNDAMENTE EUROCENTRICA.

Leamos algunos ejemplos del diario decano de la ciudad de Santa Fe:

"Ensayo la murga con sus estridencias de bombos y latones y sus bailarines inventan inverosímiles contorsiones de candombe africano... Absurdas, tristes y groseras piruetas y contorsiones... El espectador siente una sensación mixta de piedad y simpatía."<sup>17</sup>

"Fiesta agónica, pero lo que más se oye en el corso es el isócrono redoble de murgas cuyo ritmo lúgubre evoca la sensación de un rito fúnebre africano..."<sup>18</sup>

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## PALARA

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"Ni trompetas, ni cascabeles, la llegada del carnaval de hoy se anuncia con un estruendoso tám-tám de negros."<sup>19</sup>

Cuando después de más de 40 años queremos reavivar el fuego de una raíz y de toda una tradición, lo hacemos en la convicción, qué nosotros, santafesinos de hoy, tenemos el derecho y la obligación de recuperar esa parte sustraída de nuestra identidad. En una ciudad donde decir "Negro" tiene profundas características peyorativas, donde todavía hoy, se le dice como un estigma, "raza puta" a los seguidores de un club de fútbol que se asocia históricamente con los negros, LEVANTAMOS ORGULLOSOS EL ESTANDARTE DEL NEGRO ARIGOS PARA TODOS, Y POR TODOS.

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### Notas

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<sup>1</sup>Nota del Diario "EL LITORAL" de Santa Fe, del 27 de febrero de 1944, pág 5, sin firma, titulada: "DESDE HACE 43 ANOS EL NEGRO ARIGOS RINDE CULTO A MOMO AL FRENTE DE SU COMPARSA LOS NEGROS SANTAFESINOS".

<sup>2</sup>Consideramos importante destacar que en Santa Fe, el uso popular de la acepción "negros" implica a todos los "no blancos", afroargentinos, aborígenes y mestizos.

<sup>3</sup>Nota de *EL LITORAL* del 27-2-44, ya citada.

<sup>4</sup>ZAPATA GOLLAN, Agustín. "EL CARNAVAL DE SANTA FE, ARGENTINA". Trabajo presentado en el 36 Congreso Internacional de Americanistas, Vol. 2, págs 443 a 444, Sevilla, España.

<sup>5</sup>*EL LITORAL* nota del 23-2-52, "LOS CARNAVALES DE 1900", pág. 2, sin firma.

<sup>6</sup>PAREDES, Clementino, "LOS CARNAVALES DE LA VIEJA SANTA FE",

Editorial Castelví, Santa Fe.

<sup>7</sup>Nota de *EL LITORAL* del 27-2-44 ya citada.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup>ZAPATA GOLLAN, Agustín, ya citado, pág. 442.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibidem*, pág. 443.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibidem*, pág. 443 a 444.

<sup>12</sup>*EL LITORAL*, 22-2-31, pág. 2.

<sup>13</sup>*EL LITORAL*, 5-2-40, pág. 3.

<sup>14</sup>*EL LITORAL*, 23-2-33, pág. 3.

<sup>15</sup>*EL LITORAL*, 4-2-37, pág. 3.

<sup>16</sup>Nota de *EL LITORAL*, ya citada, del 27-2-44.

<sup>17</sup>*EL LITORAL*, 19-2-33

<sup>18</sup>*EL LITORAL*, 23-2-33, página 3.

<sup>19</sup>*EL LITORAL*, 4-2-37, pág. 3.

The "Afro-Mexican"<sup>1</sup> and the Revolution: Making  
Afro-Mexicans Invisible  
Through the Ideology of Mestizaje<sup>2</sup>  
in *La raza cósmica*<sup>3</sup>

by Marco Polo Hernández

The African presence in Mexico as a whole has historically been minimized, if not ignored or even denied  
Francis D. Althoff Jr.

[O]ne of the most interesting cases of the Negro in Latin America is the Negro that no longer exists  
Richard Pattee<sup>4</sup>

Homogenization as a civilizing act finds its greatest expression in José Vasconcelos' racism  
Miguel Alberto Bartolomé

### Introduction

José Vasconcelos (1882-1959), was the minister of education in Mexico from 1921 to 1924 at the onset of the cultural phase of the Mexican Revolution. His ideology on *mestizaje* has been studied from a historical perspective by Alan Knight in an essay titled "Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*: Mexico, 1910-1940" (71-113). Knight identifies him as one in a string of eugenicists<sup>5</sup> found all throughout Latin America and Europe at the end of the 19th century through the beginning of the 20th century when the independent Latin American states were trying to become nations. Knight believes that Vasconcelos' racism is "reverse discrimination,"<sup>6</sup> and, as Carlos Monsiváis,<sup>7</sup> claims that Vasconcelos "shifted" to the "right" later on in life. The premise of this paper is that Vasconcelos personified the right in the Mexico of his days: his racist views, which from the

onset affected almost every dark Mexican—over 80% of the total population, were European racism *criollo* style, a type of racism proudly described as "La cultura criolla" (criollo culture) by Samuel Ramos in 1963 (91-109). Miguel Alberto Bartolomé in 1997 explained that "homogenization as a civilizing act finds its greatest expression in José Vasconcelos' racism." He states that for Vasconcelos "the mestizo would be the 'cosmic race'" a sort of synthesis of all known "races called to hold world supremacy in the future" and therefore the logically determined referent in the process of national construction (28: n. 7). The present study, meant to complement the above-mentioned works, through literary critical analysis, will concentrate on Vasconcelos' essay, *La raza cósmica: misión de la raza iberoamericana* (1925).<sup>8</sup>

*La raza*, a book-length essay and travel memoirs, is a pillar in the foundation of modern Mexico's national identity. Vasconcelos' philosophy regarding "racial"<sup>9</sup> and cultural mixing, manifested in *La raza*, had as central goal the homogenization of all ethnicities in post-Revolution Mexico under the ideology of *mestizaje*.<sup>10</sup> Miguel Alberto Bartolomé clarifies: "After the Revolution of 1910 when the repression of cultural plurality became more intense, despite the rhetorical exegesis about the indigenous past, it was assumed that cultural homogenization was a necessary condition for the configuration of a modern nation" (27). To this explanation should be added that

Vasconcelos' plan to Hispanicize Mexico, beyond its cultural aspects, possessed a racist<sup>11</sup> agenda whereby Afro-Mexicans were portrayed as inferior and caricatured.

This current study analyzes, by going back in time with "new" critical tools, the ideology of *mestizaje* in *La raza* and the white aesthetics upon which it is based. While recognizing that said ideology affected all "minorities" in Mexico, this work concentrates on how Vasconcelos' program affected children, women and men of African descent however inter-mixed in various proportions with Amerindians and Spaniards. It analyzes particularly, the manner in which the discourse contained in the program was used as a foundation of an ideology that, from the onset of the cultural phase of the Mexican Revolution in 1920, made Afro-Mexicans completely invisible officially at least until the mid 40s and that until today has blurred their collective existence and cultural contributions to, what González El-Hilali has called, "mexicaness" (125).

To carry out the task set forth, the Afro-Hispanic-American critical approach followed in this paper is first introduced. Second, a brief historical account is given as background, starting with the African Diaspora to New Spain and quickly placing the reader at the time immediately after the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution when Vasconcelos enters the picture. Thereafter, Vasconcelos' beliefs are examined through the lens of Jackson's "black phobia and white aesthetics," paying special attention to the first 40 pages of *La raza* where Vasconcelos exposes his "doctrine for social and biological formation" (35).

It is demonstrated that in spite of a supposed total biological and cultural assimilation of Mexicans of African

descent, (Sepúlveda 101, Garrido: 1, 60)<sup>12</sup> in today's Mexico there are a number of largely Afro-Mexican communities<sup>13</sup> in more than one state. It is also shown that, due to the power of Vasconcelos' illusion, the existence of Afro-Mexicans was not acknowledged until the mid forties when the ethnologist and historian Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán carried out the first fieldwork in some communities with an obvious Afro-Mexican presence in the state of Guerrero on the South Pacific coast of Mexico.

The present work deals with what has been called the "racial" aspects of *mestizaje*, an ideology that while it has been frequently understood as a breakaway move from the Euro-centric worldview, in fact only perpetuated racism under a different guise.

This investigation incorporates Richard L. Jackson's perspective whereby he explains:

Following a tradition dramatized in Hispanic Literature from Lope de Rueda's *Eufemia* (1576) to the present, the heritage of white racial consciousness, in Spanish America, as in Brazil and the non-Iberian countries, defines superior and inferior as well as the concept of beauty in terms of light and dark, that is, on the strength of the amount of whiteness one has. ("Black Phobia..." 467)

It is also argued that Jackson's views on the ideology of *mestizaje* stand acceptable. For Jackson, *mestizaje* is "the process of restoring whiteness by bleaching out black people," a method called "ethnic lynching" that "has long been accepted in Latin America as a means of solving social and racial problems." A solution, as he points out, based on "the expectation that the

biological superiority of the white race, augmented in number through European immigration, would impose itself on the non-white races" (*The Black* 3). Jackson also stresses: "the process of *mestizaje*, though of questionable value to the development of the black identity, is nevertheless, an indisputable fact of the black experience in Latin America" (*The Black* xv). Attention should be drawn to the fact that the same applies in other parts of the "New World."

### Historical Background

The black African slaves taken to New Spain, today's Mexico, arrived mainly through the port of Veracruz. From there, they were taken all over the colony. The exact number of slaves taken to New Spain "legally" and illegally is unknown. It is generally estimated that hundreds of thousands were taken there. What is known is that their presence became noticeable by the third quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and that by the time of the War of Independence (1819-1821) black African blood, in different proportions, ran in the veins of the majority of Mexicans, who, until then, had been classified into more than a dozen "racial" mixes known as "castas"<sup>14</sup> or "mezclas" from which about 80% refers to "racial" mixes where the black African element is present. It is also known that from the beginning of the African's arrival in New Spain, just as in other places of the New World, many of the slaves ran away and formed villages in hard to reach places. These rebels would be known as Maroons and the stories of their sagas became part of a narrative yet to be explored.

In Mexico slavery became illegal in 1829. By then the large amount of

"castas", and the cheap labor they represented, made the importation and keeping of slaves a luxury. Meanwhile, the newly created nation was up for grabs and undergoing a series of internal struggles for power. It is at this juncture that the idea of *mestizaje* emerged. The State, which still was not a nation, was searching for a formula, an idea that would serve as cohesion for a deeply fractured population. According to Agustín Basave Benítez, the idea of *mestizaje*, in the beginning, ascribed the lack of order and anarchy to the "racial" varieties found in the population and therefore it sought to eradicate them. The idea of *mestizaje* became then "a long-lived nationalist intellectual movement that presented *mestizaje* as the quintessence of mexicaness" (15).

Basave cites Jose María Luis Mora, priest, politician and author of *México y sus revoluciones*, as expressing in 1849, "The need not only to end the uprisings of the castas, but to make them impossible thereafter, and the only way to achieve this is the fusion of all races and colors present in the Republic into one" (Basave 24). The idea of *mestizaje* continued to grow under the shadows of other Euro-centric ideologies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as liberalism, and it was not until after 1920 that it was put into practice during Alvaro Obregón's government.

After ridding himself of Venustiano Carranza (1859-1920), Alvaro Obregón (1880-1928) became president of Mexico on November 30, 1920 as the armed phase of the Mexican Revolution was coming to an end. Obregón appointed José Vasconcelos as his minister of education (Ramírez 217). This appointment would have dire consequences for non-Spanish ethnicities, which reverberate throughout

Mexico to this day. Blacks, Amerindians, and dark mestizos,<sup>15</sup> the majority of the Mexican population, with their languages, and cultural complexity, from the onset of the birth of modern Mexico would be cut off from Vasconcelos' vision of a super "race."<sup>16</sup>

The Revolution of 1910-1920<sup>17</sup> became, toward the end, an all out war of small armies, each led by a "caudillo," which further divided a State that had been trying to emerge as a nation since the War of Independence against Spain (1810-1821). Many people, tired of divisionism and fighting, embraced at face value Vasconcelos' program of one "Latin-American" Mexico for all. What they may not have understood, however, was that by carrying out his education program, Vasconcelos would not only try to impose the European Spanish language upon all,<sup>18</sup> but would sow his views on "race," obscuring the true ethnic make-up of most of the fourteen million people who survived the Revolution.<sup>19</sup> Although *mestizaje* ideology had been in the making for quite some time in Mexico,<sup>20</sup> Vasconcelos is a key figure because he was encouraged by those in power to put theory into practice. Hugh Thomas mentions: "In Mexico over 6,000 schools were built by the villages themselves, without cost, by men on holiday, according to the ideas of a 'missionary' turned architect. Anexos (in the shape of shower baths, sports fields, kitchen, etc.) were sometimes added" (702 n. 32). Gabriela Mistral, as cited by Itzhak Bar-Lewaw, recounts that Vasconcelos was given great resources to "civilize Mexico" and that "for the first time in the history of [Latin American] countries an education budget surpassed the United States education budget" (Bar 38). Paradoxically,

even she believed that for the first time American gold was being used for the superior interests of a people (Bar 39).

But what were the majority of people, the so-called minorities, saying about the government program of "education" meant to assimilate them into a culture that in fact excluded their ethnicities? After three hundred years of colonial rule, where education for the vanquished did not exist, and another one hundred years of factional wars, illiteracy in Castilian Spanish was widespread in the Mexico of 1920. Spanish was the language of the ruling class. The majority of Mexican people spoke either Spanish as a second language, Pidgin Spanish, or did not speak Spanish at all.

Compounding the problem for the majority of Mexicans, although some means of communication had been established during the Porfiriato (1876-1910)<sup>21</sup>, on one hand, was the fact that Mexico's interior was still largely cut off from the urban centers. On the other hand, the small towns and villages were cut off from one another, thereby making it nearly impossible to organize any meaningful opposition. Toward the end of the armed phase of the Revolution, the population at large literally had no voice, and where spokespeople had emerged, like Emiliano Zapata and Francisco Villa they had been silenced. In some cases, such as Venustiano Carranza and Alvaro Obregón, the spokespeople became the oppressors.

Moreover, another consideration regarding the majority's silence may be found in the following clarification (that although taken from the Antillean context is relevant here) cited by Komla F. Aggor, where Frantz Fanon elucidates: "Persons of African heritage tend to dislike and be ashamed of their own race not because of

any intrinsic inferiority complex but as the result of being made inferior" (Aggor 503). This becomes pertinent here after considering that the great majority of Mexicans by the 1900s were the descendants of "mezclas" or "castas" of which, as mentioned before, about 80% included the black African element at a greater or lesser percentage.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, according to the criollo creed on "races," the Amerindians were inferior too and the criollos continued to make Amerindians and their descendants believe so as well. That is, the black and Amerindian roots involved in the make-up of these people had been, and continued to be, regarded as traits of inferiority by all. What could these "minorities" do in such a situation? For the most part, they became taciturn and as inconspicuous as possible and in this manner they cooperated by omission with Vasconcelos' program for uniting the nation through homogenization. In this way, the path to achieve the total denial of the African component in Mexico's true identity began (Vincent 1-9).<sup>23</sup>

In 1971 Aguirre Beltrán, looking retrospectively, would declare in an updated prologue to his 1946 *La población negra de México (The Black Population of Mexico)*: all one has to do is take a quick look at the literature of 1910 to 1940, the crucial years of the revolutionary movement, to notice the preponderance of social studies on the Indian and, consequently, the absence of any mentioning of blacks as a sector of the population that in one or another manner could have contributed in the formation of the Mexican nationality. (Aguirre 9) The "racial" and cultural ideology disseminated under Obregón and Vasconcelos in the early 20s through the Secretaría de

Educación Pública (Ministry of Education) and via other means of mass persuasion such as the use of missionary teachers, radio, cinematography, literature and art, made "minorities" of black African descent invisible<sup>24</sup> in Mexico.

Aguirre Beltrán would find out in the mid 40s that

in all cases where *mestizaje* in Mexico is spoken of, the authors make exclusive reference to the mix of the white dominating population and the defeated American population. Nobody is careful to consider the part that belongs to blacks in the integration of a culture in Mexico. (9)

Nina S. Friedemann, referring to the process of making a people invisible in Colombia applicable to the case of Afro-Mexicans here, explains:

The invisibility in sociocultural processes is a strategy that ignores the present, the history, and the rights, of ethnic minorities. Its exercise implies the use of stereotypes, understood as absurd reductions of the cultural complexity, which pejoratively blur the reality of the groups thus made victims. (138)

In 1971 Aguirre Beltrán, 46 years after the publication of *La raza*, still not free from Vasconcelos' spell, and under the belief that the black population in Mexico would bleach out eventually, referred to this blurring as "integration." And although at the end of his complex explanation he concedes, "there are few black nuclei," he considers "integration" as an ongoing "process" (Aguirre, 277-280). Nevertheless, 28 years after Aguirre's revision, these black enclaves continue to

flourish, although until very recently they have been excluded from the national imaginary by first diluting their very existence and then by caricaturing or ridiculing their image later.

Bobby Vaughn, based on the 1990 population census, reports "29 Largely Afro-Mexican Communities" in Guerrero and Oaxaca alone with a total population of 66,381.<sup>25</sup> Luz María Martínez Montiel explains, "[a]lthough strongest in black enclaves like Costa Chica, the African presence pervades Mexican culture. In story and legend, music and dance, proverb and song, the legacy of Africa touches the life of every Mexican" (2). She emphasizes the difficulty of tracing any one tradition as purely African after "five hundred years of blending with traditions of Indians and Europeans" and points out:

Compounding the difficulty is the fact that the African elements in Mexico's culture are not acknowledged as they are in other countries of the Americas. In fact "el *mestizaje*," the official ideology that defines Mexico's culture as a blend of European and Indigenous influences, completely ignores the contributions of the nation's third root. (2)

Worthy of mention here is that in spite of Friedemann's perspective about the negative impact of the blurring of ethnic complexities, Aguirre Beltrán's outdated views (of a supposed integration process of Afro-Mexicans) are still being taught in Mexican schools (Garrido: 1, 60) (See note 12).

Carlos Monsiváis points out that Vasconcelos, under the belief that "to educate" is "to populate," sought "[t]he incorporation to the nation of the indigenous minority through the national

school system," because Vasconcelos thought that Amerindians were "Mexicans first and then Indians." Moreover, Monsiváis explains that Vasconcelos was convinced that, "the indigenous dialects [could] not be educational tools," that "they [should] be eliminated giving way to the Spanish language," and that "the Indians (would) have to make this last acknowledgement of the victory of the conquerors." According to Monsiváis, Vasconcelos opposed Manuel Gamio's plan for 'integral action' (where he had "broken the nation into ten Indian regions for betterment and educational special projects") under the argument that "the politics of educating the Indian... in accordance to separate norms of any kind, not only is absurd among us, but it would be fatal" (1419).

This, of course, must not be construed as implying that Manuel Gamio (1916- ) was opposed to Vasconcelos. Although, Gamio is one of the precursors of "indigenismo" (the Mexican counterpart of Indianism), and he encouraged Aguirre Beltrán to study Afro-Mexicans, Bartolomé indicates that for Gamio,

the idea of nationality pre-supposed the homogenization of cultures (he called it 'fusion'), of the races and the linguistic unification of the State's inhabitants, this perspective guided the indianist scholars for more than a half a century in their fundamental task: help in construction of the nation. (27: n. 7)

According to Santiago Castro Gómez "the reduction of all cultural differences to one principle—a *mestizismo* or romanticized *indigenismo*—was the route to insure the emergence of a popular State that would guarantee at the same time



'national unity'" (142). This homogenizing strategy was a vehicle to take control of the nation. The criollo minority wanted to take the power from the mestizo majority. By implanting the illusion of a super or "cosmic race," which everyone belonged to, the criollos, who already had the power of the Spanish language at hand, would gain and monopolize power by promoting the idea that everyone had a common past. Suddenly—as if by magic—Cuahutémoc and Moctezuma would become their "cultural" if not their "racial" ancestors. Meanwhile ethnic expressions that were popular, such as the *son jarocho*, the *mariachi*, the *chinaco* and the *china*, *menudo*-stew, and the word *chingar*, would be "adopted" as well while neglecting the Afro-Mexican contribution to the development of these stamps of Mexican national identity (Hernández 3-4).

Carlos Monsiváis states that in the 40s Vasconcelos, worn out and petrified by an ideological precipice, was supporting dictatorships such as Franco's in Spain, and thereafter became a symbol for the extreme right. He also points out that, therefore, the reconsideration of his works has been made difficult (1428). Notwithstanding, the following reading of *La raza* will reveal that, in fact, Vasconcelos' views since 1925 reflected the same extreme right tendencies of two of the most influential Latin American "homegrown racists" who adopted, with extreme ease, European versions of racism, namely, Carlos Octavio Bunge and José Ingenieros (Jackson, *The Black* 36).

Now at this juncture, two points should be emphasized: (1) that Vasconcelos was not alone in his eugenicist thinking for he belonged to a string of like-minded individuals of his time; and (2), that

thinkers such as José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi (1776-1827), José Martí (1853-1895), and W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963), among many others were accessible to him. Therefore, Vasconcelos' thinking cannot be dismissed on the grounds of being "a product of his time" alone since the "lenses" to allow him to see, well beyond the colors he chose to see and induced a whole nation to see, were at his disposal at least since the publication of *El Periquillo Sarniento* (1816) by Lizardi.

#### Black Phobia and White Aesthetics in *La raza cósmica*

At first glance *La raza* is a manifesto in defense of humanity, a declaration based on the concept of a universality full of love and understanding for the oppressed. When viewed under Jackson's lens on white aesthetics, it is clear that Vasconcelos' understanding of universality is intolerant of diversity.<sup>26</sup> He rejects the concept of a sum total of parts forming a whole. Instead, he sees a whole made by the disintegration, assimilation, eradication, or homogenization of the cultural diverse presence and roots comprising "mexicaness",<sup>27</sup> at the time he is formulating his doctrine.

Vasconcelos named his higher "race," "the cosmic race." According to him, this man would result from the natural and voluntary mixing of the best traits of all "races." His "cosmic man" would be superior to all known men (14-15). He claimed that love, specifically Christian love, was the foundation of his program (35). According to Santiago Castro Gómez: "Idealizing *mestizaje*, Vasconcelos speaks of a 'cosmic race' that will unify the planet in a community ruled by willing union, harmony and beauty,"

Castro places him among late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century modernists, like Leopoldo Lugones and José Enrique Rodó, who exalt the aesthetic values of the "Latin culture," sharing this romantic eagerness for unity, happiness and redemption (141).

Vasconcelos utilizes the first forty pages of *La raza* to spell out his doctrine on a superior being comprising what he calls "the fifth race" or "the cosmic race." He began his recital by explaining his theory on the evolution of the human species. He believed that "a race developed, and after progressing and decaying was substituted by another" (2). According to Vasconcelos, there had been four stages of human development: he places the "black" man in the beginning of the process, in the second stage he mentions a "red" man, in his third stage appears a "yellow" man, and in the fourth, or most advanced stage of his evolution theory he places the "white" man (1). This posture echoes the Frenchman Joseph Arthur Gobineau's views (1855) on the hierarchy of "races": white, yellow and black. According to him, only the "white or 'Aryan' race, the creator of civilization, possessed the supreme human virtues of love of freedom and honor.... His essay was used by the Nazis as proof of their racial supremacy" (Simon 1).

Vasconcelos divides white people into Saxons and Latinos, the former represented by English and Dutch, the latter by Spanish and Portuguese. Vasconcelos concedes that Saxons have the political and economical control of the Americas, and uses these pages to issue a call for Latin Americans to transcend their political divisionism (of Saxon creation according to him) and to unite to confront the Saxons (4-8). Castro Gómez explains:

In Vasconcelos we find also an identification of the "Latin spirit," characteristic in Hispanic America, with the intuition of life, with feeling, with the irrational and beauty. (Vasconcelos) affirms that while Saxon civilization is founded in human dominance over the material world, in Latin America a race of synthesis is being formed that will seek, not in pragmatic reason but in the feeling and love, the orientation for its conduct. Such a contrast between "Latin" and "Anglo-Saxon" symbolizes, at the bottom, the opposition between order (embodied in the idealism of the Hispanic-catholic culture) and "chaos" (embodied in the North American pragmatism and voluntarism), where order is understood as a synonym of harmony, and "chaos" as a synonym of "dissonance." In this manner a social imaginary is created where society and culture are governed by ideals of universality and consonance. (131)

Vasconcelos' theory of "racial" evolution is a contradiction to modern scientific evidence. According to Luz María Martínez Montiel the existence of humanity can be traced back two and a half million years. She explains:

The history of Africa in its beginning is the history of the appearance and evolution of man, the development of human groups, their dispersion and the formation of societies whose way of life, technical inventions, traditions and cultures have a significant place in universal history. Its importance is definitive among the rest of nations and peoples of the world; notwithstanding, that history is little known. (*Negros* 25)

José Vasconcelos failed to understand that all human groups including those present in Mexico actually are, all and each one,

the product of millions of years of evolution of the *Homo sapiens* species.

Vasconcelos proposes in *La raza* a type of *mestizaje* that will allow what he calls "inferior races" to transcend their biological, social and spiritual condition. Pointing out similar characteristics of inherent superiority Jackson denotes two patterns in Latin American ethnic relations: one to be found wherever there were black women and men "followed a pattern characterized largely by white racism, slavery and racial oppression....," and the second "is embodied in the concept of miscegenation or *mestizaje*, a process that, while loosely defined as ethnic and cultural fusion, is often understood to mean the physical, spiritual and cultural rape of black people" (*The Black 1*).

Moreover, in his study of Afro-Mexico, Patrick Carroll describes:

given their slave condition, their ethnic group and color, the Spanish saw Africans and their descendants whether enslaved or free, with their discernible physical characteristics as inferior. Indians also found reasons to limit their contact with black Americans, identifying them, just as Spanish did, as foreigners based on race and ethnic group. (432)

Carroll explains, "the Catholic church supported secular authorities in maintaining the system of castas...", and by studying marriage records reports that in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries he found that, white women, although still relatively few, "would hardly marry outside of their racial group" (413), and that during the same periods white men, "kept compromise with the racist and ethnocentric social order" with few of them marrying outside of their racial

group" (415).

According to Vasconcelos the "fifth universal race, fruit of the ones before, and betterment of the past ones" (4) finds its origins in "the abundance of love that allowed the Spaniards to create a new race with Indians and blacks" (14). While it is true that there was a wide process of amalgamation of various human ethnicities in Mexico, most of the mixing of whites with Amerindians or "castas" took place outside of wedlock for the marriage records and the physical characteristics of the Mexican population are contradictory. On one hand, Spaniards would seldom marry outside of their group and, when they did, it was with "criollos" or, as a last resort, with Euro-mestizos.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, according to Aguirre Beltrán, by 1570 the growing mestizo population in New Spain reflects a greater amount of mixing activity between the Spanish, the Indian, and castas populations (Aguirre 210). This indicates: (1) mixing between whites and their supposed inferiors took place more than accepted officially and, (2) that bastard<sup>29</sup> children or "hijos de la chingada"<sup>30</sup> were walking everywhere as living proof of their fathers' actions. In further support of this Enrique Florescano has said:

Even when the castas were numeric and socially important from the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they are almost not registered in that century or in the following. Since they were offspring of non-formalized sexual relations, they had an occult or disguised social life. This group came to be the more discriminated by written and non-written laws, and the greatest social prejudices were concentrated against this group. (211)

Was that the result of love? According to Martín Luis Guzmán, who knew Vasconcelos personally,

this Spanish man that Vasconcelos describes—and of whom we can speak of with total frankness because we all are a reference to him—is so nonexistent and arbitrary that, page by page, the history of Hispanicism denies it. (1402)

Vasconcelos' understanding of history and worldview did not end there. He also mentioned "Chinese who reproduce as mice" and saw that as "proof of lower zoological instincts;" he sympathized with and justified the rejection of this "race" by "the superior ones" (17). His charge against Asians continued where he described "the Mongol with the mystery of his oblique eye, that sees all in accordance to a strange angle" (19). According to José Jorge Gómez Izquierdo "xenophobia and racism acquired a presence in the ideology of the Revolution from its onset. This ideology helped to create the sense of national identity among Mexicans" (88).

Jackson draws attention to the fact that negative images of dark skinned people "reflecting nineteenth century mentality on race, surprisingly, have not been completely discarded in the twentieth century" (*The Black* 36). Furthermore, this ideology in post-revolutionary Mexico beyond being embraced was promoted; it was used as a foundation in the making of "the modern social order" (Carroll 403). Jackson points out that the negative opinions "of New World intellectuals" are inherited from "the old prejudices of the colonial ruling classes" who had these intellectuals "convinced of the inferiority of the dark races" (*The Black* 36).

Vasconcelos portrayed blacks as "eager

for sensual happiness, inebriated with dances and wild lust" while he presents whites as having a "clear mind... similar to their complexion and their fantasies" (19). The sensuality ascribed to blacks, the dance and lust, are examples of "preconceptions, misconceptions and stereotypes" that "while giving false if not one-sided images of the black, at the same time help indicate racist feelings toward black people among Latin-American authors." They are prejudices that, beyond damaging the black image, perpetuate the myths that "depict blacks as an inferior jungle beast, a provider of [entertainment]" (*The Black* 45, 46). Vasconcelos' literary representation of whites, blacks and others evokes the two separate worlds that existed in Mexico after the arrival of the Spanish and may help explain further, how such mentalities as his were formed:

The Mexican elite had mansions, a university, monasteries, numerous cities to visit in, great governmental buildings to hang out in, and had the bishop cloister for social teas and poetry readings. A tight and exclusive circle of wealthy whites and their lackeys hid in the mansions drinking Spanish wine, eating "white" bread, and practicing the 'Minuet.' Out in the town square, the dark hued people created Mexico, with tequila, tortillas and La Bamba. (Vincent 5)

Bans were issued on musical expressions from beginning to end of the Colonial period because they "allegedly caused delinquent behavior and exhibited licentious African body movements" (Vincent 5). Arturo Melgoza says, "We know that blacks would gather in the central square of Mexico City to sing and dance..." He allows the reader to perceive

the cultural value of the African manifestations of self-consciousness in Mexico (73), something that José Vasconcelos failed to understand.

Vasconcelos accepted what he called "the higher ideals of white men" (23) and envisioned that "perhaps among all characters of the fifth race white characters will dominate." He explained also that, "such a supremacy must be the fruit of free election" (23). His subscription to the bleaching out of dark people is evident when he said, "in the Iberoamerican world... we have very few blacks and the majority of them have been transformed already into Mulatto populations" and that "the Indian is a good bridge for *mestizaje*" (25).

Vasconcelos' aesthetics, the white aesthetics, found in the literature of other parts of the Americas, materializes when he asked, "why should it matter that all races mix if ugliness will find no cradle?" He predicted that in his utopian nation-state "the poverty, the defective education, the scarcity of beautiful types, the misery that turns people ugly," will all disappear (29). He explained that if up to his time there had been no great improvement of the species, it was due to the living conditions of "agglomeration and misery, where it has not been possible for the free instinct of beauty to work." He believed that "reproduction has been carried out like beasts without limit in quantity and without aspiration for improvement" and to satisfy the sexual appetite anyway possible while ignoring the spirit (30).

It becomes obvious that Vasconcelos thought very little of the physical and cultural mixing that had taken place for over four centuries, up to the post-Revolutionary era when he says: "we are not in condition to even imagine the

modalities and the effects a series of interbreeding truly inspired." He believed that "unions founded in the capacity and the beauty of the type, would have to produce a great number of individuals gifted with the dominant qualities." Vasconcelos saw them "electing immediately, not through reflection but by taste, the qualities that [he] wish[es] to predominate." He was certain that "the recessive offspring would not unite among themselves, but instead would search for quick improvement or would extinguish voluntarily all its desire to reproduce physically." He expounded, "from this, the black man, for example, could redeem; and little by little, by voluntary extinction the ugliest types [all non-'White' people] would give way to the more beautiful" (29-31).

In Vasconcelos' view:

The inferior races, after becoming educated, would be less prolific, and the better specimens will ascend in a scale of ethnic improvement whose ultimate type is not precisely the white man but a new race that whites themselves would have to aspire to be in order to conquer the synthesis. (31)

In Vasconcelos' model "the Indian, by miscegenating with his related race, would jump the thousands of years that mediate between Atlantis [where they originate according to his theory] and our epoch" (31). He believed that "in a few decades of eugenic aesthetics blacks could disappear next to the types that beauty marks as fundamentally recessive [and therefore] unworthy of reproduction" (30-31). Vasconcelos' doctrine for *mestizaje*, as depicted above, was based on the extinction of what he saw as lower types

of humans. However, he explained clearly that his theory differed from "brutal Darwinism selection" due to the fact that "interracial" mixing in his model would be a result of taste (31). In his doctrine he found justification for his perspective because he was willing to mix with other "races" while the English would not dare because they "think blacks are a species closer to apes than to white man" (32). He taught that "every ascending culture needs to construct their own philosophy" and he saw himself as the philosopher of Mexico and charged that "we have been educated under the humiliating influence of a philosophy developed by our enemies" and that because of it "we ourselves have come to believe in the inferiority of the mestizo, in the non redemption of the Indian, in the condemnation of blacks, in the irreparable decadence of Orientals" (33).

Vasconcelos proposed the need to "reconstruct our ideology and organize according to a new ethnic doctrine our continental life as a whole" (33). He underlined that "Christianity frees and engenders life because it contains a universal revelation in itself" and sees Jesus Christ as "the author of the greatest movement in history" (34). There are two points to be emphasized here. On one hand, Vasconcelos, still a symbol of a secular revolution, promoted religion although it had been constitutionally banned from education since 1857 after the Reform War. On the other, the Cristero war (1924-1929) was brewing during the time of his conceptions in *La raza*, and his thinking could not be construed as helping the side he represented.<sup>31</sup> Vasconcelos saw "Christianity consummated not in the souls but in the roots of the beings" (37).

Vasconcelos believed that all factors, needed for his "fifth race," were present in

the Iberian part of the continent alone, namely: spirit, "race," and land. He explained that there and then "the universal era of humanity could be started" because the "Nordic man, master of action," was present along with "the black man with a reserve of potentialities that come from the remote days of Lemuria"<sup>32</sup> (39) and "the Indian that saw Atlantis perish but keeps a quiet mystery in his conscience" (39). José Vasconcelos thought that all peoples and all abilities were there and that the one thing lacking was "the true love to organize and set on its way the law of history..." to create "the first universal culture, truly cosmic" (39).

#### Making Afro-Mexicans Invisible

José Vasconcelos' views on *mestizaje* have started to be questioned recently, perhaps as a result of the Civil Rights, Black is Beautiful, and Chicano Power movements in the United States, the Cuban Revolution and other no less important movements in favor of a black identity throughout the Americas and the world. This can be observed where Patrick J. Carroll mentions that there are two ways to understand how blacks were "almost forgotten" even when "their descendants supplied one of the greatest—if not the principal proportionally speaking—contributions to the *mestizaje*" (404). He analyzed Afro-Mexicans in Veracruz and concluded, "An initial analysis of Afroveracruzanos suggests that their role, active or proactive, in the process of social interweaving between whites and Indians, eventually drove them to become almost racially and ethnically extinct," but points out:

A more detailed analysis offers an

alternative reading of history; the Afroveracruzanos mediating vision helped in creating a social order of castas. This new social system did not predominate in central Veracruz or in the rest of the nation until the end of the XIX century, when the castas came close to the status of being the majority among the general population. The modifications/ mediations of the black Americans left a heritage in the region, which evolved in spite of the persistent social and legal pressures from Spanish and Indians against them. (436-437)

Carroll also raises the question as to whether Veracruz' situation may be typical of the Mexican nation as a whole or just a sum of rare regional variants in the evolution of Mexico's *mestizaje*, and concludes that the case in Veracruz is typical of the role played by Afro-Mexicans in the process of *mestizaje* in New Spain (429).

In terms of how the Afro-Mexican was finally erased officially as a "racial" and ethnic minority<sup>33</sup> from the national imaginary after the Revolution, Juan Carlos Ramírez<sup>34</sup> Pimenta's comments, unknowingly, offer an interesting insight:

Education is going to become one of the main factors for cohesion in post-revolutionary Mexico. In fact almost immediately at the end of the armed phase of the Revolution Alvaro Obregón appoints José Vasconcelos as the Minister of Education. He starts immediately an ambitious literacy campaign. The object—says Heuer—is to bring spiritually closer all groups in the country, that is to say, homogenize Mexicans by giving them a federalized education, in other words, the same history, with the same heroes, same past and the same country to sacrifice

for. (217)

Vasconcelos' doctrine regarding a *mestizaje* creator of a cosmic man, in fact, masked Mexico's heterogeneity. This doctrine, while supposedly aimed at bringing everybody to an illusory mainstream, in truth was targeted at doing the opposite. His ideology was put into practice through an all out government campaign to create one country through education, art, and mass media. "Vasconcelos was the first to capture and realize, while being minister [of education] the functional concept that modern aesthetics has found in the phenomenon of mural painting and on the diffusion of music for the humble Mexican masses" (Bar 76). This campaign blurred all Mexicans who were not white enough from the nation-state project<sup>35</sup> particularly the "mezclas", "castas" or Afro-Mexicans.

For instance, the mestizos who did not look white enough were not represented in cinematography during the first half of the 20th century. In this manner they were made invisible and cast out of the national imaginary through one of the most popular means of mass persuasion. Jackson cites Richard Pattee as pointing out that "[o]ne of the most interesting cases of the Negro in Latin America is the Negro that no longer exists" (*The Black* 3). Moreover, the most famous images of the Mexican Indian in cinema were cast by actors like Pedro Armendáriz and Ignacio López Tarso i.e. Euro-mestizos. Ramírez asks: "is it possible to think that the PRI-government<sup>36</sup> did not design and implement a cultural policy to help it stay in power?" and explains: "[w]e can think that this project is only a manifestation, the most important perhaps, the branch of a nationalistic unifying intention that as

well covers literature and the plastic arts" (Ramírez 211).<sup>37</sup> At the end of his essay Ramírez inquires whether Mexico's homogenizing policy worked and responds, "Yes, to a certain point although it started falling apart during the sixties<sup>38</sup> and the student revolt." He also points out that the late Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas (1994-) is proof that there are still "great sectors [of the population] that were never part of the national project" (Ramírez 221).

The Afro-Mexicans, once out of sight, were soon forgotten.<sup>39</sup> And all of the blacks who appeared to be Euro-mestizos or Indo-mestizos quickly learned to deny their heritage. María Teresa Sepúlveda's 1983 ethnohistorical work is an example of the far-reaching effects of Vasconcelos' policy of the 20s where she professes:

[t]he black ripped naked from his region of origin, was unable to construct in New Spain the culture he belonged to; being a minority he was soon forced to mix biologically and culturally with the indigenous and mestizos adopting behavioral patterns from these groups. (Sepúlveda 101)

Sepúlveda acknowledges that in cases where blacks were really isolated they were able to keep some of their African cultural features, but erases them physically from the population and finds that Mexico inherited from black Africa only some magical beliefs (101-103). Sepúlveda appears unaware of today's Afro-Mexican population, and is unaware that black Africans contributed to the creation of new cultural manifestations such as the *jarocho son*, the *mariachi*, the *chinaco* and the *china*, the *fandango*, *menudo* stew, and the word *chingar*, among others, which are

among the most telling signs of Mexican identity. She disseminates another two-pronged myth when she proposes that blacks were "imported," due to their physical strength, to do the work that "frail" Indians could not do. On one hand, it should be asked how the fierce warriors encountered by the Spaniards became "frail"? Was it not the inhuman treatment received and the imported diseases that nearly extinguished the Amerindian population? (Galeano 58, 59; McCaa 11-14). On the other hand, as far as the black man's strength is concerned, Aguirre Beltrán explains:

When it was a matter of justifying blacks' enslavement and their introduction to American lands, it was said that a black man was worth four Indians, meaning that the work effort of a black man was equivalent to that of four Indians. Later on it was even said that a black man could resist rougher work than the white man. In this manner the myth of black man's physical superiority over the Indian and the white man was established as a means of subjecting the black man to the most barbarous exploitation (180).

Aguirre emphasizes as well that blacks were capable of doing more work not due to the fact that they were black, but because they had been hand picked for the task: the majority of black men and women brought "legally" to the "New World" under the slave trade were on average between the ages of 18 and 22 "being the majority 18" (180). These black men were in the prime of physical strength due to both age and to the fact that the trader would normally pick the biggest and strongest among all to receive a better price. Even so, there was a 15%



death rate in the ocean crossing, and once at the work site, due to the inhuman treatment, they would last an average of "7 to 15 years" (Aguirre 180-182). Thus, Sepúlveda's teachings, under new light, can now be seen as influenced by José Vasconcelos' racist ideology of *mestizaje*.

But what happened to the Afro-Mexican after Vasconcelos' ideology became a "reality"? In 1946 Aguirre Beltrán declared that in Mexico "especially after the Revolution there [was] no racist consciousness." He argued that in the Mexican census the data on "race" [were] not collected because "it is the law," and because "in a hybrid population as ours such data would be illusory." He pointed out that even the word "race" ha[d] the tendency "to disappear from the official terminology" (178).

The key to understanding what happened to blacks in Mexico after the Revolution can be found in two of Aguirre Beltrán's words "law" and "official." The existence of a law and an official doctrine that made all Mexicans "equal" served only to mask what Aguirre identified elsewhere as the genuine "racist thinking of the conqueror" (172), a white racist thinking adopted and cultivated hundreds of years among the Mexican population at large. Regarding this dominant ideology in Mexico, José Revueltas explains:

The rareness, the strangeness of the dominant ideology, already institutionalized as a whole in the Constitution of 1857, of laws and of juridical policies of the State, rests particularly in the fact that the great indigenous masses are kept cut off from it, they don't belong to it, they are 'foreign' to that national consciousness, yet to become a total historical auto-consciousness. (149)

Now, it is true that in Mexico since 1921 "the distinctions by color of dermis disappeared officially" (Ochoa 38). Also, it may be correct to say that the majority of the population in Mexico are mestizos but only in the sense of the word that describes humans that have living blood from all other humans, from black African and Amerindian blood, as much as Spanish, if not more. It is also true that among the population today there is still a preference for the Euro-Mestizo.<sup>40</sup> A good example of this can be found in popular sayings such as "*la mona aunque se vista de seda, mona se queda*," (an ape dressed in silk, still is an ape), or "cafre," "grifo," and "coyote," among other words that, although today signify something other than the original meaning which referred to "race" mixtures, were nevertheless adopted with negative connotations into Mexican Spanish.

Another example can be found in the Mexican immigration laws where the history of white racism is well documented. For instance, a certain Francisco Pimentel is recorded as saying in 1866 that Mexico needed foreign colonization to "augment and improve..." the country's population (González Navarro v. 1,500). Also, in the same source, public opposition to black immigrants is documented in the newspaper, *El Monitor Republicano*, where blacks are characterized as "lazier, dissolute, and less intelligent than the Indian;" while white people are said to be "... the most active, the most intelligent, in one word the most civilized" (González Navarro v. 11, 185). Between 1926 and 1931 the immigration to Mexico of foreign workers was restricted and "justified with openly racist arguments" where it was officially declared in 1928

that "it was mandatory to improve the race through *mestizaje* and this could not be achieved by yoking Mexicans with individuals from insignificant lineage." In the following paragraph it is explained that a great effort was made to impede the entrance of blacks under the light of this opinion (González Navarro v. 111, 34). But perhaps the most illustrative example can be found in the images of the "Mexican prototype" found in movies, television, newspapers and magazines.<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusions

The consequences of the racist mentality and the white aesthetic reflected in *La raza* have yet to be fully studied because as Bartolomé highlights:

Even today, and in spite of the pluralist discourse and rhetoric, the concrete ideological and political practice reproduces the constituted historical block and points toward the homogenization of diversity assuming that differences are a motive for inequality. One of the dramatic concrete consequences of this political model has been the destruction of a great number of native societies: that induction to the cultural suicide called ethnocide. (29)

An ethnic relations' policy that ignores, dilutes and/or makes people disappear at will should be questioned at its roots. It must be traced through history in all forms of expression and/or means of mass persuasion, including literature (canonic and popular) and cinematography. This has to be accomplished with the new tools provided by multidisciplinary perspectives inclusive of the Black Experience and the vision of the vanquished in order to discover all evidence possible, including

what has been kept silent or conveniently forgotten, if a fully informed debate, based on all evidence no matter how shocking or disturbing, is to take place.

Under existing legal and academic views it should be clear that "what was considered a civilizing act, based on a universalistic humanism, now is practically definable as a major offense—ethnocide" (Bartolomé 28). The homogenizing activities started by Vasconcelos in the 20s and carried on by many others in Mexico until today need to be investigated further to understand its consequences, that is, the manner in which they have affected and are affecting humanity directly and or indirectly. The existence of an Afro-Mexican population and an Afro-Mexican ethnic heritage is little known in Mexico and in the world at large. The Afro-Mexican contributions to Mexican society as a whole and to humanity as a whole, by extension, are yet to be recognized.

The black phobia and white aesthetics in aspects of Mexican literature and the arts embraced officially and even academically, are part of a pattern in the Americas wherever there have been and there are black men and black women. Perhaps this is why what is discussed here may not appear new and may even seem to be a "worn out issue." In Mexico, progress in the area of ethnic relations will be difficult unless a closer look is taken at the ongoing debate on ethnic relations in other parts of the Americas such as Brazil, Cuba and the United States, and among other countries where black populations are developing a sense of ethnic identity and a feeling of self-worth. Mexico as a whole, by denying its roots, will sadly continue to be a case of mistaken identity. On the issue of diversity in Mexico, Victor

Zúñiga explains that following the Revolution of 1910-1920, new forms of rhetorical inclusion of "minorities" were designed in Mexico: "the existence of a Mexican mosaic" was admitted, "but this didn't change substantially the nineteenth-century project for social balancing supported until today by the myth of *mestizaje*" (246).

Mexico's project for entering modernity, as far as it relates to its social and ethnic diversity, was nearsighted. It was developed upon 19<sup>th</sup> century beliefs: "it did not take into consideration the presence of the 'others'... an enormous number of Mexicans that do not fit into the official definition of the nation" (Zúñiga 247). Moreover, and as Zúñiga continues: one of the most surprising characteristics of the historical and political discourse about the nation in Mexico is its marked resistance to consider openly the question of cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences. Until very few years ago we lacked all types of juridical or political discourse, no matter how weak, about the question of differences. (248-149)

Rowe and Schelling, in dealing with the problem of identity in Brazil, point out how Gilberto Freyre's transformation of the *mestizo* and characterization of Brazil as a "racial democracy," reinforced the ideal of whitening because it led to the widespread notion that Brazil's racial problems were being solved through ethnic integration, whose goal remained white civilization." They also explain that it was Abdias do Nascimento, an Afro-Brazilian playwright, who pointed out that "a crucial consequence of the persistence of this ideal... [caused] the absence of a significant black consciousness movement" that prevented the achievement of "racial" identification thus self-

determination. Rowe and Schelling highlight as well that in do Nascimento's view "concepts such as miscegenation, acculturation and assimilation are in fact euphemisms for the sexual exploitation of [Afro-Brazilian] women and the gradual annihilation of [Afro-Brazilian] culture" (Rowe 42).

In Cuba, the debate on Afro-Cuban expression, and curiously enough "the dialogue" with the United States on the subject, can be said to be established. Cuba, as in the case of the United States, has fostered the academic literary study of its African component, and although it may be argued that there is still much to accomplish, what cannot be denied is that the Afro-Cuban presence and literary contribution to Cuba's, and by extension to Latin America's, identity is a fact today.<sup>42</sup> Cuba's achievements in ethnic relations, despite allegations that it is lagging behind, could represent a source of light to the problem of ethnic relations in Mexico.

Moreover, African blacks of the Diaspora to the Americas, in general, had very similar experiences in the European colonies on this continent.<sup>43</sup> In all instances they were enslaved, relegated to forced labor, and in all colonial societies there is plenty of documentation about their use and sexual abuse. The Africans of the Diaspora to the United States were no exception; they came from different ethnic groups as all Africans of the Diaspora to the rest of the American continent, and are *Fromestizos* as well, in the sense of having Amerindian and European blood in them, just as Afro-Mexicans do.

One may ask: how is it that African-Americans have developed a sense of identity and self worth, even when "mestizo-scholars" argue that Anglo-

Saxon racism is the worst type? This while the presence of people of African descent in Mexico is still being denied or dismissed by the prejudicial, absurd, and simplistic argument that chants in Mexico "we all are Mexicans"? Is there a "better" type of racism? What will it take to implement international charters, constitutional laws, decrees, declarations, policies on paper that have been officially condemning racism in theory for quite some time? When and how will it be learned that racism is but an attitude generated by sheer ignorance and that the very idea upon which this attitude is based is a fallacy, a socially defined illusion, a fruit of a poisonous tree that has caused, and continues to cause, an unacceptable level of human suffering?

It should be obvious that a full answer to these questions is beyond the parameters of this work, but for the expressed purpose here it may suffice to state that while people who respond to that mentality in Latin America were and have been engaged in "confusionist" ideologies like Vasconcelos' *mestizaje*, trying to bleach out its black populations, their Northern counterparts had a clearly marked apartheid system, a system that even today collects census based on "race"<sup>44</sup> where all Afro-Americans and Afro-American-mestizos are grouped together, paradoxically, making them a very visible "minority."

It was precisely this apartheid system that forced African-Americans to look into themselves in search of identity, as there was no hope of entering the mainstream. Langston Hughes (1902-1967) in a video tape explains that, "In the case of the Negro [in the USA] of course we have been free for one hundred years, but aren't integrated to democracy..." and points out

that, "people who are apart from the mainstream of life develop... ways of their own" (Voices). These views—the African-American experience, clearly reflected in literature, music, dance, and cinematography among other genres—form a voice universally known today.

What is the connection of the above with the Afro-Mexican situation? What if Afro-Mexicans just want to see themselves as Mexicans, period? What if they are content with things as they are? It is the premise of this paper that all humans as individuals are equal and have an equal right to self-determination. The arguments that "there are but relatively few "mestizos" in Mexico with African characteristics left today" and that "they are on their way to extinction," or "undergoing a process of integration" are not sufficiently valid in themselves to continue disenfranchising a single person in Mexico. It is anti-constitutional to do so and violates the United Nations Charter on Human Rights. Moreover, to allow materials like *La raza cósmica* to continue to circulate unchecked is inconsistent with the Modern Language Association's resolution of December 28, 1973, cited by Jackson on "lingering racist ideas and materials" where the academic community is urged to "organize and support activities to...expose the antihumanist and unscientific character of racist materials..." (*The Black* xiv).

The racist ideas spelled out in the prologue to *La raza* by José Vasconcelos and camouflaged in the rest of his memoirs fall clearly under the above-mentioned resolution. His white aesthetics and phobia for non-white people are worthy of study only as far as they open up a window to a world view that pervaded Mexico at the turn of the century

and that still lingers on today among many of the Mexicans from the many Mexicos that are to discover a truer picture of themselves in the "buried mirror." Given his influence, Vasconcelos must be studied in order to understand the process of disenfranchisement that so-called minorities—including Afro-Mexicans—underwent as the homogenizing ideology behind *mestizaje* was put into practice and propagated through schools, art, and mass media channels of persuasion.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The prefix "Afro" refers to persons of African descent who constructed "New World" Afro-Mexican communities (Bennett i). The prefix is used today all over the Americas to signify the presence of African heritages and identities. For instance: Afro-Americans, Afro-Antilleans, Afro-Argentineans, Afro-Colombians, Afro-Cubans, Afro-Dominicans, Afro-Peruvians, Afro-Uruguayans, and Afro-Venezuelans, among others.

<sup>2</sup>In the *Pequeño Larousse* dictionary of the Spanish language *mestizaje* is defined as the action and effects of adulterating or crossing races; it also defines a group of *mestizos* i.e. those born to parents of different races. And "mestizo" is a synonym of bastard or hybrid. This is noted since from its inception the term is charged with negative connotations as do all terms that imply "impurity" of a sort or compare *Homo sapiens* to other animal species or plants. *Mestizos* are pure *Homo sapiens*, not plants nor any other type of animal species, and therefore terms, e.g., "mulatto," used for plants or other animal species would have also a derogatory effect.

<sup>3</sup>Echoing the words pronounced by Nelson Mandela in 1962 during his trial in Pretoria, South Africa it should be made clear that none of what is said here is based on

personal considerations, but on important questions beyond the parameters of this work itself. It should also be mentioned that there will be references made to Euro-centric ideology and white people, and that terms such as "Black," "Amerindian," and "minorities," among other heavily charged abstractions or "untruths," will be used and therefore from the onset it has to be reiterated that "I am not a racist, that I despise racism, because I consider it a barbarous thing, whether it comes from a black man or a white man. However, the nature of this work forces the utilization of the terminology to be employed" (Mandela 19).

<sup>4</sup>As quoted by Richard Jackson (*The Black* 3).

<sup>5</sup>For a full account on eugenics in Mexico and other Latin American countries see Nancy Leys Stepan's *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

<sup>6</sup>After a brilliant presentation of the political events that served to shape the modern nation Knight concludes that Mexican intellectuals of the time were all practicing "reverse discrimination" whether by oppressing or by so called defending the vanquished. What he fails to see is that, on one hand those in power to enact the racist project of nation, oppressors and self-appointed defenders, were generally the sons of Europeans born in America, the *criollos*; on the other hand what he sees as "reverse discrimination" is applied in such a manner that could neutralize any further debate regarding racism and therefore racist practices and attitudes could not be debated leaving racism unchecked. It must be made clear that reverse discrimination would be possible presumably, if, and when, a group of the formerly called "inferior races" would ascend to sovereign power and then justify abusing to death children, women and men, sharing the same territory and time, on the basis of an idea of "otherness" such as that of "white supremacy."

<sup>7</sup>Monsiváis, Carlos. "Notas sobre la cultura mexicana en el siglo XX." p. 1428. Full citation in bibliography.

<sup>8</sup>(*The Cosmic "race": Mission of the Ibero-American "race"*). I have made all translations unless otherwise stated. Cited hereafter as *La raza*.

<sup>9</sup>Alan Knight in *Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: Mexico 1910-1940* proposes that the commonly used category of "race" has been rightly questioned. However he calls this category "a belief of great power" deserving "analysis irrespective of [its] untruth" (75). This work subscribes to this premise.

<sup>10</sup>Populist movements were sweeping the whole continent. The states created during the colony were trying to become nations and the idea of "civilization," inherited from Europe, was equated with making all "minorities" into one homogeneous mass to the like of the leaders who either were *criollos* or people who believed as they did, that only white was beautiful.

<sup>11</sup>Patrick J. Carroll defines racism as "a delineation and discrimination mainly based upon perceived physical characteristics, in particular the color of the skin (Carroll 403). This definition is adopted in this paper.

<sup>12</sup>Felipe Garrido coordinated the edition of two volumes under the title of *Lecciones de historia de México, History Lessons of Mexico*. They are particularly interesting because on the one hand they are free texts from the ministry of education (SEP) utilized to teach what may be incomplete information as far as Afro-Mexicans go. On the other hand, they are to be noted because they are utilized as means for shaping the imaginary of Mexican grammar school students today.

<sup>13</sup>In support of this see "The Afro-Hispanic Speech of the *Municipio* of Cuajinicuilapa, Guerrero" (1998), (Althoff); "Lovers, family and friends: The formation of Afro-Mexico, 1580-1810" (1993), (Bennett); "Performing *Mestizaje*: Official Culture and Identity in Veracruz, Mexico"

(1997), (González-El Hilali); "The Black Mexico Home Page" *Online* (Vaughn).

<sup>14</sup>Cecilia Rabell Romero defines *castas* as racial hybrids of black people of African descent (Carroll 431).

<sup>15</sup>Concerning *mestizos*, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán in *Los Negros de México* (Blacks from Mexico) differentiated between Afro-mestizos, Euro-mestizos, and Indo-mestizos (Aguirre 222). The dark *mestizos* referred to here are the *castas* or *mezclas* which comprised the majority of the population and who had black African blood in them.

<sup>16</sup>In a *post-scriptum* to a 1904 edition of *War and Peace*, Leo Tolstoy discusses how no individual alone makes the history of the life of nations (Tolstoy 429). This work subscribes to that view.

<sup>17</sup>An 1810 population census conducted by the Spanish stated that the African and Afro-Mexican population in Mexico was reported at 10%. By 1910 there are no numbers to be found but it may be presumed that the percentages remained the same for there are no reports to disprove this (Vincent 2).

<sup>18</sup>According to Martín Luis Guzmán, Jorge Vera Estañol, Minister of Public Instruction in the later part of Díaz's dictatorship wrote the "Escuelas Rudimentarias" 'rudimentary schools' project. Its purpose was: "to teach Castilian, the alphabet, and the fundamental rules of arithmetic to the *irredenta* indigenous class, particularly to those living away from civilized centers, in the mountains and in the country" (Guzmán 21). Vasconcelos receives recognition for his "ambitious campaign *Alfabeto, pan y jabón* [alphabet, bread and soap]" that basically is the twin of Vera Estañol's project (Garrido 2: 80). Agustín Basave Benítez points out as well that Vasconcelos' ideology was influenced by his "good friend" Andrés Molina Enriquez, a *mestizófilo*: a scholar of Mexican *mestizaje* (Basave 72, 114).

<sup>19</sup>Garrido says that according to the population census of 1910, at the beginning of the Revolution there were more than

fifteen million people and in 1921, following the Revolution the population was about fourteen million (Garrido: 2, 92).

<sup>20</sup>For a comprehensive account of the history of *mestizaje* in Mexico see Agustín Basave Benítez's *México mestizo: Análisis del nacionalismo mexicano en torno a la mestizofilia de Andrés Molina Enriquez*. México, D. F.: Fondo, 1992.

<sup>21</sup>It is interesting to note that the former general Porfirio Díaz, an Indian from Oaxaca who distinguished himself in the battle of Puebla against the French Invasion during the Juárez government, despised his fellow Indians, called them "boys", became a positivist and a Francophile. Also, "Porfirian prosperity didn't reach the majority of the population. The millions of pesos [profit for concessions of natural resources made to England and France] were kept in the hands of an aristocracy small in numbers and dressed in frock coats, and of a growing middle class with half a million members dressed with slacks and coats. Almost none of Mexico's wealth reached the masses who wore shirts and white indigenous *calzones*" (Garrido 2: 63).

<sup>22</sup>This colonial racial classification is explained in detail in Aguirre 163-179.

<sup>23</sup>Ted Vincent notes that "Mexico has a fourth race if one adds the descendants of the 100, 000 Asian slaves brought to Mexico on the colonial Manila to Acapulco route, since the law decreed that only Africans could be slaves, and the Spanish wanted more slaves, the Asians were declared Africans" (Vincent 2). For a complementary study on racism and xenophobia against the Chinese part of the Asian population in Mexico see *El movimiento antichino en México (1871-1934)*. It should be added that actually there were other racial and ethnic components. It is true that black Africans were the majority of the slaves brought to New Spain, but not all the Africans were black, there were Arab slaves, Greek slaves, and the slaves from Levant (Aguirre 99-113).

<sup>24</sup>According to a recent unpublished

commentary made by Richard Jackson "invisible" is a "key word all over Latin America" (November 1999).

<sup>25</sup>Reports on the number of Afro-Mexicans in the country as a whole vary from 200, 000 to 600,000, and of course these numbers, arbitrary as they may be, do not include the millions of Mexican "Blacks" who appear white, "Amerindian", or "mestizo" (Esteve-Fabregat 305). Even so, Colin A. Palmer expressed: "as their ancestors did, the few remaining persons who are visibly of African descent continue to be productive members of society. But history has not been kind to the achievements of African peoples in Mexico. It is only within recent times that their lives have been studied and their contributions to Mexican society illuminated. Suffice it to say that contemporary black Mexicans can claim this proud legacy and draw strength from it..." (Palmer 3).

<sup>26</sup>For a deeper insight beyond the issue here, see Martín Luis Guzmán's *Obras Completas* 1: 1399-1404; and 1443 where Miguel de Unamuno is cited as referring to Vasconcelos as a "confusionist."

<sup>27</sup>It may be interesting to point out that Webster defines "Mexican (1604)" as "1 a: a native or inhabitant of Mexico; b: a person of Mexican descent; c: Southwest a person of mixed Spanish and Indian blood."

<sup>28</sup>Aguirre Beltrán, in an effort to explain *mestizaje*, further calls Euro-mestizos those predominantly white, Afro-mestizos those predominantly black, and Indo-mestizos those predominantly Indian (210). He creates absurd categories based on outward physical appearance alone.

<sup>29</sup>See footnote 3 above. Also, Basave Benítez points out that soon after the new "race" was being created "Mestizaje" and "Bastard" became synonyms (Basave 18).

<sup>30</sup>As Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes have noted, the verb "chingar" is intrinsic to mexicaness; it contains a crucial part of the Mexican culture and identity of today. For a linguistic study on the black African origin

of the Mexican verb "chingar" see "El verbo Chingar: una palabra clave" de Rolando Pérez Hernández in *El rostro colectivo de la nación mexicana*. María Guadalupe Chávez Carbajal, coordinadora. Michoacán: Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás Hidalgo, (1997): 305-324.

<sup>31</sup>I thank my brother and colleague for reminding me that the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM, (The Mexican National Autonomous University) owes its logo—"por mi raza hablará mi espíritu" (my spirit shall speak for my "race")—to Vasconcelos.

<sup>32</sup>The Lemurs, mythological beings between Romans and Etruscans, were the ghosts of the dead. Interesting also is that lemurs are a subclass of primate mammals from Madagascar in Africa and from Malaysia. Ted Vincent relates that the black slaves from Asia came from Malaysia, New Guinea, and the southern Philippine Islands, including the island of Negros so named because the Negritos lived there (Vincent 2).

<sup>33</sup>Keep in mind that from the onset of the colonial period Afro-Mexicans had a concealed or disguised social life due to the fact that for the most part they were offspring of illegitimate sexual relations.

<sup>34</sup>This last name appeared spelled this way.

<sup>35</sup>*Ethnologue Online* reports 295 languages in Mexico, one of which is Spanish.

<sup>36</sup>PRI stands for *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Revolutionary Institutional Party). This party has been in power continuously since the end of the armed phase of the Revolution of 1910-1920.

<sup>37</sup>For a discussion on the "muralist art" as propaganda, see Melgoza's interview with Rufino Tamayo in *El crepúsculo de los últimos gigantes*. México, D. F.: SEP: Plaza y Valdés, 1989.

<sup>38</sup>Richard Jackson pointed out to me that during this period is "the advent of 'Black is Beautiful.'" It may be added as well that during those days some Afro-American athletes

during the 1968 Olympics in Mexico displayed "Black Power" by raising high their right hand fists covered with black gloves.

<sup>39</sup>For a greater insight in the workings of government propaganda see Chomsky's *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*. New York: Seven Stories, 1997 (1<sup>st</sup> ed, 1991).

<sup>40</sup>See note 15.

<sup>41</sup>Alan Riding in *Distant Neighbors*, points out that "...half the models used on television are European or American (Caucasians), including many seductive blue-eyed blondes. In a country where less than 5 percent of the population is of pure Caucasian blood, the message is that things go better for white fair-haired 'foreigners'" (Riding 313). Also, on September 15, 1998 *Reforma*, a Mexican daily, published an ad from "Herdez," a food Company, that says, "On September live the happiness of tradition and paint with our colors your heart." The ad is a rectangle, the majority occupied by a tri-color heart (green, white and red, the colors of the Mexican flag) with a photograph of a happy well fed white baby covering the center of said heart (Viva).

<sup>42</sup>For one of the latest and most comprehensive studies on the subject see Edward J. Mullen's *Afro-Cuban Literature: Critical Junctures*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998.

<sup>43</sup>For a detailed account see Eduardo Galeano's *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*. México, D. F.: Siglo XXI, 1980 (53d ed.); Hugh Thomas' *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom*. New York: Da Capo, 1998 (1971 1<sup>st</sup> ed.); and Ronald Seagal's *The Black Diaspora*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995.

<sup>44</sup>It should be mentioned that the classification of "Hispanic," that groups Asians, blacks, Amerindians, and whites from south of the Río Bravo as a single "race" echoes the *criollo* deliberate indifference and insensibility to ethnic diversity, and it is an imposition that denies



the multiculturalism of the people arbitrarily grouped under said classification and only adds to the confusion.

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## Special Feature

### Entrevista con Pedro Shimose

por Debbie Lee

The Asian literary diaspora is one of the least studied aspects of Latin American culture. In this insightful interview with Pedro Shimose, Debbie Lee addresses a number of relevant issues and receives some sensitive and revealing answers regarding the culture of a once "silent minority" in the Americas.

Pedro Shimose (Riberalta, Bolivia, 1940) is a poet whose literary career has spanned almost forty years. His first work, *Triludio en exilio*, was published in 1960, and he has recently made plans to publish another collection of poems in the year 2000. Other collections include *Poemas para un pueblo* (1968), *Reflexiones maquiavélicas* (1980) and *Riberalta* (1996). Although mostly known for his poetry, Shimose has contributed a *Historia de la literatura latinoamericana* as well as a *Diccionario de autores iberoamericanos*. Moreover, his talent as a prose writer is witnessed in a collection of short stories entitled *El coco se llama Drilo*. Shimose has also won prestigious awards such as the Casa de las Américas prize for literature for his poetic work, entitled *Quiero escribir pero me sale espuma* (1972), which was published while he was in exile in Spain. In January of 2000 he was awarded the Premio Nacional de Cultura in Bolivia for his extensive body of publications. Shimose is included in various anthologies and his works have been translated into English, German, French, Italian, and Russian.

The following interview is the continuation of a discussion that began in Madrid where Shimose currently resides,

in December of 1999. My research concerning writers of the Asian diaspora in Latin America afforded me the opportunity to discuss with Shimose the implications of the issues of race, ethnicity, and nationalism with respect to writers in Bolivia.

#### ¿Cómo llegaron tus padres a Bolivia?

Mi padre y mi abuelo llegaron a Bolivia a través del Perú. Finalizado el contrato de trabajo con la Peruvian Railway (empresa peruanoestadounidense), emigraron a Bolivia, camino del Brasil. Su meta era echar raíces en Manaos, pero les gustó Riberalta (donde nació) y allí se quedaron los 20 emigrantes japoneses (en el año 1908).

Mi madre es mestiza, hija de japonés (José Kawamura) y de una criolla de Santa Cruz (Bolivia). Se llamaba Antonia Rodríguez.

#### ¿Qué le pasó a tu familia durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial?

Le pasó lo que a todos los japoneses residentes en América. Fueron perseguidos, acosados, denigrados, insultados y si tenían alguna propiedad, se las quitaron acusándoles de ser espías del Eje. Lo mismo le pasó a los alemanes e hijos de alemanes. Mi padre estuvo unos días, meses, en la cárcel del pueblo. Una cárcel pequeña a donde yo le llevaba la comida. Yo tenía unos ocho años, creo.

#### ¿Qué significaba ser japonés en Bolivia?

En la guerra y en la posguerra (1939-1965) ser japonés o alemán (o descendiente

de ellos) era la ignominia. Nos insultaban y, en cierta forma, nos segregaban. No en términos absolutos, sino en términos relativos.

Ahora, ser japonés es diferente. Sobre todo, a partir de la presencia del Japón como potencia industrial y económica, a partir de los años 60.

**¿Cuál es el trabajo de un autor en su sociedad?**

Hacer su trabajo lo mejor posible. Intentar ser el mejor.

**¿Crees en el concepto del "arte por el arte"?**

Personalmente, no. No estoy de acuerdo, no obstante, con los comisarios políticos que tratan de imponer una estética, un modo de escribir determinado, al escritor y al artista. El Gobierno debería respetar y garantizar la libertad de pensamiento y de expresión (publicación de la obra).

**¿Tiene el autor un deber social?**

En los países pobres y atrasados, con un alto índice de miseria y de analfabetismo y marginación social, el escritor tiene el deber de luchar contra estos factores de atraso e injusticia, exigiendo más dinero para la educación y las expresiones culturales. Esto no significa estatismo ni plantea una defensa del Estado paternalista.

¿Por qué un escritor debe luchar por estos objetivos políticos? Porque si no mejora la educación ni se erradica el analfabetismo, ¿quién nos leerá? Es una cuestión elemental de supervivencia del escritor. Por lo general, en las metrópolis del capitalismo no suelen comprender esta defensa del papel del Estado y las organizaciones fiscales (Municipio, por ejemplo). Sin embargo, hasta hoy, el Estado ha sido incapaz de comprender su función en las cuestiones pertinentes a la educación y al difusión cultural. Quizás por que están en manos de personas que no

les interesa solucionar el atraso y la ignorancia de la gente. En Bolivia, por ejemplo, es sintomático que, desde 1985 y apoyados por una política neoliberal, la importación de libros esté gravada con un impuesto aduanero similar al que rige para la importación de artículos suntuarios como whisky, coches, etc.

**¿Cuál es tu definición de Nacionalismo?**

El nacionalismo, para mí, no tiene nada que ver con el fascismo o el nazismo. El nacionalismo vendría a ser una respuesta práctica a una situación objetiva de atraso e ignorancia. Los bolivianos desconocen sus valores culturales, ignoran su propia historia nacional, sus tradiciones y sus leyes e instituciones políticas y culturales. Esto se ha visto agravado por la explosión demográfica. En estos momentos, el 70% de la población boliviana tiene menos de 18 años. El fracaso de la escuela y el estallido de la institución familiar tradicional determinan que en estos momentos, sea muy débil la voluntad política de integración de 8 millones de seres humanos en un destino político común prefigurado inevitablemente por unos límites geográficos y unas instituciones en crisis y unas leyes que muy pocos cumplen de malas ganas.

**¿Qué significa pertenecer a una Nación (para un boliviano)?**

Para la mayoría, muy poca cosa. Muchos hablan, inclusive, con desprecio y amargura del país. Para mí, en cambio, significaría ser más y mejor como individuo, en una realidad determinada por un pacto social, por una voluntad política reflejada en una ley fundamental llamada Constitución del Estado. Creo que la mayoría de los bolivianos no lo tiene claro y, a veces, pienso que les importa muy poco. Si nos deslizamos por esa pendiente,

corremos el riesgo de “africanizarnos” o sea, convertirnos en un espacio geográfico donde se desarrollaría una guerra civil entre clanes que luchan por la supervivencia física, sin ningún destino histórico. Una vuelta a la Edad Media europea que, en el caso boliviano, sería catastrófico, porque, entre otras cosas, nunca tuvimos Edad Media europea. Tuvimos—¡y tenemos!—caciques y tuvimos clanes que nosotros llamamos “ayllus”, en idioma aimara, pero carecemos de aquellos ideales de civilización que mejor definen la Edad Media europea. Nuestra situación de atraso nos convertiría en actores de un proceso de degradación humana y disolución política. Sin un sometimiento a la ley no puede hablarse de política.

**¿Qué te ofrece la poesía (el verso) que no encuentres en la prosa?**

Son dos formas distintas de expresión literaria. La poesía canta y sintetiza experiencias, emociones, percepciones y creencias religiosas, míticas o políticas. Está más cerca de la magia, de la religión y del mito.

La prosa (la narración) describe, narra situaciones personales, individuales, sociales, colectivas, históricas. Sus ideales y sus luchas delimitados en un escenario (geográfico, una ciudad, un barrio, una clase social) y una época.

**¿Por qué escribir poesía?**

¿Por qué escribo en verso? El verso es medida, cadencia, ritmo, música, es la esencia verbal de un sentimiento. En una línea se puede decir—cuando el poeta es bueno—lo que en prosa se explica en diez folios; muchas veces sin conseguirlo del todo. Por ejemplo, ¿cómo se podría explicar en una línea lo que Francisco de Quevedo dice en once sílabas? El verso es éste: “Mi corazón es reino del espanto.”

**¿Hay algo inherente, en la forma**

**del verso, que te permita expresar mejor tus sentimientos e ideas?**

En rigor, la poesía lírica no expresa ideas. La poesía épica (la poesía social y política tiende a ser poesía épica) transmite ideas, sí, pero de una forma especial. Las ideas van unidas a sentimientos y, además, a ritmos, musicalidad, cadencia, colorido. Estas “ideas” expresadas en el verso son distintas a las ideas filosóficas. Una “idea” poética se dirige al corazón. Un pensamiento filosófico (o una reflexión política) se dirige a la cabeza, a la razón. Un pensamiento poético se da en los versos de César Vallejo, por ejemplo. Un pensamiento filosófico se da en George/Jorge Santayana o Federico Nietzsche.

Por estas circunstancias, la poesía política tiende a ser temporal; es decir, pasa rápidamente de moda, aunque resulte importante como testimonio de época. La poesía lírica, en cambio, suele ser más permanente porque las cosas del corazón—el amor, por ejemplo—no pasan nunca de moda. El deseo, la tristeza, la alegría, el miedo, tienen más vigencia que la Revolución Cubana o la Guerra Civil Española, por ejemplo.

**¿Cuál fue el impulso que te empujó a ser escritor?**

No lo sé a ciencia cierta. Quizás fue un deseo de inmortalidad o un deseo de poseer sexualmente a una mujer hermosa o un sentimiento de pavor ante el misterio de la muerte o una inmensa alegría ante el espectáculo de la Naturaleza sea cósmica (una noche estrellada) o sea minúscula (una gota de agua en una hoja).

También hay una razón práctica. Los pobres, los países pobres, saben de alguna manera, que lo único suyo son la palabra y los sentimientos de las cosas: el horror a la violencia, el miedo a seguir viviendo, el

llanto de los enfermos y los esclavos, la felicidad del amor, el desahogo de un apareamiento... Los pobres no poseen, son poseídos. Lo único suyo son la palabra y los sentimientos de las cosas que, a veces, no pueden definir desde la ciencia y la lógica matemática. El pobre sólo tiene cuatro patrimonios: su dios, su patria (aunque realmente no sea suya), su miedo y su palabra.

Sólo tengo la palabra y ella no es mía, pertenece a todos. Quizás por eso escribo.

**¿Hiciste un comentario sobre "El Coco se llama Drilo"?**

Sí, está en la contraportada de la segunda edición del libro. (Te envió fotocopia por si no tienes el libro)

**¿Lo escribiste por capricho?**

No. Surgió de forma espontánea, cuento por cuento. Jamás pensé escribir un libro. Me contaban historias y yo tomaba apuntes y notas. Eso es todo. También conocí gente, personajes cuyas vidas me impresionaron mucho. Creo que mis personajes expresan muchas frustraciones y much violencia.

**¿Por qué experimentaste con la prosa?**

Porque la narración te permite indagar en la realidad de una forma que es imposible conseguir en verso.

**Me hablaste de la Riberalta de tu niñez. La describiste como un lugar cosmopolita, en el sentido de reunir a personas de distintas nacionalidades, inmigrantes llegados de todas partes del mundo. ¿Todos eran tratados en un plano de igualdad?**

La igualdad sólo existe en función del dinero. Si tienes dinero tienes otra educación. Uno es igual al que tiene dinero si uno tiene dinero. Esto marca la diferencia en las relaciones humanas y

sociales. Puedes ser un patán, pero si tienes dinero eres un "señor", tienes dignidad. Más si cabe, cuando el ser propietario va unido a una educación esmerada y a unas virtudes morales. Mientras los japoneses tuvieron poder económico a través de una cooperativa agrícola, fueron respetados y queridos. Quizás por eso unos políticos resentidos y perversos les robaron y quemaron sus sembradíos hasta rebajarlos a niveles de pobreza, a la nada. El pretexto fue la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Después yo vi hacer lo mismo con otros pretextos, siempre políticos. En esta situación y en este ambiente de violencia moral y política yo nací, crecí y me eduqué.

**¿Cómo era la situación fuera del pueblo, en esa misma época?**

No lo sé, porque yo me fui a vivir a La Paz a los diecisiete años. Antes no había salido de mi pueblo.

**¿Había discriminación racial en contra de grupos específicos?**

Según mi padre, no la hubo. Yo no había nacido, por lo que no puedo hablar de lo que no sé.

**Me hablaste de la cooperativa agrícola de los inmigrantes japoneses y el despojo que sufrieron de parte de los políticos locales. ¿Puedes continuar hablándome de este tema?**

No. Yo lo interpreto como un drama humano que, con escenarios y personajes distintos, se repite en todo el mundo y en todas las épocas. El ser humano es capaz de los mayores heroísmos y también, por desgracia, de las mayores villanías. El militarismo japonés también hizo atrocidades en Asia. La historia no es un cuento de buenos y malos. Ahora sé que, en cuanto, un grupo de hombres ataca a una minoría, sean homosexuales,

comunistas, negros, judíos, mujeres o gitanos, toda la humanidad está en peligro. **¿Qué hace que una persona se sienta parte del cuerpo nacional?**

Hay varias razones. Una de ellas es el rechazo de otras nacionalidades a tu manera de ser, de hablar, de vestir, de concebir el tiempo y el espacio. Y la ofensa. Cuando me dicen que "los bolivianos son indios analfabetos", yo me siento indio y analfabeto, sin serlo.

Cuando los demás se interrogan si mi país existe: ¿Bolivia existe? Yo me siento ninguneado y creo que debo defenderme contra el olvido y demostrar, escribiendo, que por lo menos la literatura boliviana existe. De otro modo, ¿qué estoy haciendo yo en el mundo?

La prueba de que vivo en un país complicado es que tú me hagas estas preguntas. Tú no se las harías a un español, a un mexicano, a un chileno o a un japonés. Das por sentado que esas nacionalidades existen. Lo triste es que los bolivianos sí existimos cuando se habla de indios, de analfabetismo, de corrupción, de golpes militares.

Un escritor boliviano debe defenderse (pierdo mucho tiempo en explicarse y defenderse de los estereotipos negativos que nos humillan y degradan) de la indignidad y de la imagen degradada que difunden los "media". Una de las estrategias del colonialismo es hacernos creer, a los pueblos periféricos, que somos lo peor del mundo y que no tenemos derecho a existir. Es cierto que los mayores culpables son nuestras oligarquías nativas. En esta atmósfera enrarecida de acoso moral, un escritor boliviano debe luchar por no ser condenado a la ignominia, al desprecio internacional y, por consiguiente, a la muerte literaria.

**¿Siempre te has sentido**

**boliviano? O sea, ¿no has tenido la sensación de ser extranjero, un inmigrante japonés?**

Siempre me sentí boliviano. Fui educado como boliviano y nadie me negó el derecho a ser boliviano. Donde viví esta experiencia fue en Europa, donde la mayoría de la gente no conoce a países de la periferia como Bolivia.

Nunca tuve la sensación de ser extranjero. Otra cosa es que me segregaran e insultaran durante los años inmediatos de la posguerra. A partir de 1965, la actitud racista de los criollos (promovida por la propaganda bélica norteamericana contra alemanes y japoneses) cambió notablemente, debido al éxito mundial de la tecnología y del comercio japoneses.

**¿Crees en la literatura comprometida?**

Creo en la literatura testimonial. La literatura comprometida me pareció y me sigue pareciendo una coacción ideológica inadmisibles. La militancia política no debería hacernos creer que somos poseedores de la verdad única.

**¿Hasta qué punto reconoces tu ascendencia japonesa?**

No puedo negar mi ascendencia japonesa, pero yo NO SOY japonés. Soy un boliviano mestizo que habla y escribe en español. Mis pensamientos y mis sentimientos son bolivianos. Mi lenguaje, por lo tanto, es también boliviano.

**¿Te sientes un ser culturalmente híbrido?**

Un ser humano no es una planta o una bestia sometida a experimentaciones genéticas. Un ser humano es, eminentemente, un producto social, cultural, lingüístico. Ser mestizo no es ser híbrido.

**¿Conservas algunas tradiciones de tu padre?**



Tradiciones, no. Algunas reglas morales básicas, sí. Muy elementales, cierto, pero muy útiles para sobrevivir en este mundo desquiciado.

**¿Tu padre te hizo compartir su experiencia de vida en el Japón, sus costumbres?**

Hasta 1945 conservamos algunos hábitos en familia. Después, no. A partir de la bomba atómica en Hiroshima, hubo un corte radical en el ámbito familiar. De todos modos, mis padres me enseñaron a “percibir la belleza del mundo a través de la contemplación de la naturaleza, el paisaje y las pequeñas cosas de este mundo: una flor, un atardecer en frente de la confluencia de dos grandes ríos que desembocan en frente de Riberalta, la música de lluvia en los aleros de las casas...” Fue una enseñanza estética vinculada a una moral, un modo de percibir y sentir las cosas, entre ellas el país, el amor, la muerte, la dignidad humana. La vida, en suma.

Supongo que elegir un país, querer ser parte de un país no es lo mismo que nacer en un país que desprecias y no sientes tuyo. Creo que eso le pasa a muchos seres que, habiendo nacido en Bolivia, les importa un comino el país, porque no quieren ser bolivianos. La pregunta es ¿si el ser humano no tiene un país, si pierde su identidad social, es una bestia? Porque dios no la será nunca.

*Madrid, mayo de 2000*

*University of Missouri-Columbia*

## *Interview with Blas Jiménez*

*by Sheridan Wigginton*

Sheridan Wigginton conducted the following interview with Blas Jiménez on April 10, 2000 at his home in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. This conversation offered insight into the first of three recently developed and innovative study abroad programs for both students and teachers. The program detailed in this interview is scheduled to begin during summer 2000. Each of the three programs, alternately based in the Dominican Republic, Peru and Nicaragua, is designed to teach Spanish language, culture and literature through a core curriculum based upon the experiences of the Afro-Hispanic population of the host country. The program detailed in this interview is the first program scheduled to begin in the summer of 2000.

**Sheridan Wigginton:** Could you talk a little bit about what the three programs are, toward whom they are targeted and the general content?

**Blas Jiménez:** We're targeting the first program toward general faculty. When we say general faculty, we mean high school teachers and university and college professors. It will be a general course in which we are going to spend ten days starting with an introduction to the history of Afro-Latin America. We're going to be talking about the history of Latin America from the African perspective in Latin America. Also we will have an emphasis on Afro-Hispanic literature starting with the Moorish presence in Spain and ending with Afro-Latin American writers today, like Nancy Morejón; just an overview. The main part of the program is the present situation of the Afro-Latin American and trying to fill the gap

between the history, the literature and community building in the Afro-Latin American system today. The major emphasis will be the analysis of the Organization of Africans in the Americas paper on the present situation of the Afro-Latin. That paper is going to be published in two weeks in Washington. At the end we would like that to be integrated into the curriculum in the United States because a lot of people don't know how the system of the Afro-Latin is in most of the country. We don't even know that there are Afro-Latin countries. Part of our focus is that some of that information would be integrated into the classroom setting in the U.S. and that would have an impact in the future.

**SW:** Do you have any expectations about how the faculty that come to the program should implement some of that information? Do you have any specific ideas that you want them to take back?

**BJ:** If they just come and see the information that would be good enough because it's going to be an eye-opener. When they come, they're going to say "Oh. I didn't know this. What's going on?" From then on, it'll be more of an individual thing. Now, I can see from the information that we're going to present, a lot of different ways or approaches that can be used for teaching any subject in the classroom from social sciences to literature. What we're saying is that you can teach Spanish literature now looking at the African in the Spanish literature and I guess that to an Afro-American student it would be a lot more interesting to learn literature or learn Spanish if you have that approach than if you just go into a dry

classroom setting and start saying "This is Spanish." So I guess if teachers see that and can integrate what we're going to be reviewing in those ten days into a classroom experience, it's going to be a lot more fun to teach any subject that has to do with the Latin American perspective, in general. What I would like to see happen afterward, is that any teacher or instructor that comes and goes through that ten-day experience will have had fun and can bring that fun back into their classroom settings. That's what I would like to see.

**SW:** Could you describe what "selling points" you would offer to K-12 faculty about this program? What gap is this program going to fill? You mentioned that it would serve as a point of interest for African-American students, to give them a point of departure for learning Spanish. But for the students who aren't African-American, what sorts of things can their teachers can bring back to them as a benefit?

**BJ:** This program is going to be more people oriented, meaning it's going to be more oriented toward the community of the host country. If you go to the program here in the Dominican Republic you will learn what a Dominican is; you will get more involved into what Dominicans are. And that's what any teacher can bring back to their classroom experience. Once you get into a city or country you begin to enjoy that and you learn and then you bring that back to the classroom. It's like bringing a video but the video is you. I think that's a lot when you can do that. If you can enjoy that experience, the classroom is going to grow.

**SW:** Do you see a way that the program could also be a benefit for the educational system of the host countries?

**BJ:** We are involving professors from the host countries and professors from the United States in the program. This is not a program that's going to be run by one group of people in one country. It's going to be run by professors from the U.S. and professors from the host countries. And that will give us the synergism that we need to have the program run in a way so that it ends up being beneficial to both professors here and professors there. Now we cannot say that this program is geared toward people in the host country. It's geared mainly toward people in the U.S., Canada and Europe. We designed it that way. Why? We designed it that way because we feel that if we can get the teachers in these so-called developed countries today to look at the host country communities, it would be a bigger benefit to those communities rather than by just creating more awareness among the local people. That's why we're doing it that way. We believe that if we can create awareness between the English, French and the Spanish about the situation of the people in Vallajuna, it will do two things. It will make them aware that when they eat bread, what eating that bread means for the people in La Maguana. But also it might make them aware that they can contribute a little bit to the people of La Maguana by bringing a professor from La Maguana to learn about using a computer, or something of that nature. We believe that that's what we want to do at this stage. I know that at the end we will do a lot more with teachers from the host countries in our classes but we need to start like this for two reasons. One, we need the people that can pay. Two, if we can get an American to think that "Wow, there are brothers there in Panamá that have been going through this struggle."

That's bringing humanity to a bunch of people who don't have it today and that's more effective than going to the people that don't have the humanity and making them realize that they do have humanity.

**SW:** How did the idea for this program come about?

**BJ:** The main thing is that I've been working for the Organization for Africans in the Americas for around eight years. They've been studying the community and talking about it. It's an uphill battle. You go to the Latin American Development Bank and you go to the World Bank and you fight with AID, but those are just fights. You keep on fighting and what are you going to get? Another fight. You fight today; you win a war and tomorrow, another war. You keep on fighting. So I sat down with them and I said, "Listen. I think we should have an educational program where we can bring information to people, get people the information and let them work with it, have workshops. You're free; it's a democracy. I don't have to beat you with this information. I will show it to you, share it with you, review it with you, and discuss it and if you say "That's a bunch of bologna", then it's a bunch of bologna. But if you say "Hey, we can work with it", then we can work with it. That would be more helpful than keeping up the battle. I'm not saying we shouldn't keep fighting; we're going to keep on fighting, but at the same time this is another route in which we can share and maybe even grow. That's the way it started. We said we could do it and do it in a way that people would have fun. We're not saying this is just a classroom setting, we're saying we'll do it in a way that the faculty will see Santo Domingo as it is, see "la gente", the people. The people are not the government, not the system, it's

just the people. Once you experience that, you get back to the bond of humanity. And we need that in this communication age, we need to go back to that. It's a valid need that we will be covering in the program.

*University of Missouri-Columbia*

## Cuentos por Cubena

### La amiga

Era un día de aguaceros torrenciales y calor sofocante. Y, poco después de la ceremonia de graduación en el colegio Instituto Nacional, popularmente llamado Nido de Aguilas, un joven recién graduado en bachillerato se despidió con abrazos y besos de sus parientes y amigos en el aeropuerto.

El viaje del joven recién graduado con puesto de honor fue un obsequio de su abuelo, quien había sufrido un ataque al corazón una década antes de la ceremonia de graduación, pero antes de morir, para celebrar la educación de sus nietos, el abuelo bondadoso había legado una cuantiosa suma de dinero que logró ahorrar trabajando durante más de cuatro décadas como jefe pintor de brocha gorda en las empresas de una acaudalada familia de ascendencia sefardí. Y, en el testamento se declaró que, antes de iniciar los estudios universitarios, los nietos al recibir un bachillerato con puesto de honor disfrutarían de un viaje al Caribe y África, donde los antepasados ancestrales dejaron huellas como cimarrones, reyes y faraones.

Luego, tras el viaje, el joven completó los estudios con un rotundo éxito en una universidad prestigiosa en los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica, donde se doctoró en la Facultad de Medicina.

El joven médico, en poco tiempo, llegó a ser un notable virólogo, especializado en enfermedades tropicales. Y, en los laboratorios de un hospital, médicos norteamericanos y europeos consultaban, a menudo, con el perito virólogo.

Al joven médico le llamó la atención una enfermedad en África que no conocía, y pidió licencia para estudiar el virus de la fiebre de Lassa.

En África, el joven médico viajó a Jos, Bassa y Bauchi, en Nigeria, donde el virólogo examinó a la gente hausa, fulani y margi, porque en estos grupos nigerianos la fiebre de Lassa causaba los mayores estragos. Luego, al concluir el estudio en África, el joven virólogo se trasladó a Los Angeles, California, donde solicitaron la consulta del médico sobre el brote de una epidemia que era endémica a Sud América.

En California, el virólogo conoció a Gracimarí, una profesora a quien le encantaba llevar la contraria siempre y, por si esto fuera poco, le fascinaba meterse en los asuntos ajenos.

Extrañamente, de alguna manera, se incubó un idilio amoroso entre, según los testigos, la pareja más dispareja.

El primer viaje que hicieron los enamorados fue a la gran metrópoli norteamericana de los rascacielos: Nueva York. Allí frecuentaron la Ópera Metropolitana y, sobre todo, disfrutaron de las presentaciones de *Aída* y *Carmen*, las óperas favoritas del médico virólogo.

Transcurrieron cinco semanas, al regresar a California, Gracimarí invitó a su amigo a la casa de sus padres. Durante esa primera y última visita, la madre de Gracimarí, con desdén, miró de hito en hito al joven médico. Ella, como empleada del Servicio de Inmigración, tenía mucha antipatía por los extranjeros, a pesar de ser ella misma hija de inmigrantes indocumentados. Y, a pesar de tener solamente diploma de la escuela secundaria, no obstante, puso en tela de juicio el conocimiento médico del virólogo.

En Europa, durante el segundo viaje de

los enamorados, admiraron los tesoros en el Museo del Prado, Palacio del Louvre, Palacio del Vaticano... Un martes al atardecer, el virólogo recibió un telegrama suplicándole que se presentara lo más pronto posible a París para diagnosticar la enfermedad de un diplomático francés. El embajador había estado recientemente en Camerún, África. Luego, los galenos que estaban despistados en cuanto a la enfermedad del embajador, a quien le habían dado medicamentos que no surtieron efecto alguno, por el diagnóstico del virólogo se verificó que el paciente padecía de la contagiosa fiebre de Lassa.

Allá en París, durante los ratos de ocio, el joven médico invitaba a su novia para recorrer, a pie, desde la Plaza de la Concordia a lo largo de la Avenida de Los Campos Elíseos, hasta el Arco de Triunfo. Y, un día martes, desde el observatorio de la Torre Eiffel, ambos admiraron, largo rato, el espectacular panorama parisiense antes de visitar el Palais de Chaillot. Luego, tomaron el metro en Trocadero hasta el Jardin des Tuileries, para pasear por la Rue de Rivoli hasta llegar al célebre Café de la Paix. Esa noche cenaron en Maxim's y amanecieron en Moulin Rouge después de haber estado en Folies Bergère y Le Lido. En otra ocasión, cruzaron el Pont Neuf para visitar la Catedral Notre-Dame de París, la Sorbonne, Montmartre y Versailles.

Paulatinamente, el virólogo se percató del cambio en su novia, quien enmudeció en cuanto al recorrido por París para comentar, con frecuencia, sobre una amiga rubia; y, día tras día, estaba más y más deprimida. Además, empinaba el codo hasta embriagarse al extremo. En sus sueños balbuceaba... También, al virólogo le llamó la atención las conversaciones telefónicas en voz baja, las indisposiciones

fingidas y las citas sospechosas.

En una cantina, una madre celebra porque su hija ya no es novia del médico virólogo, y la hija, borracha como la madre, también celebra con su amiga rubia en una cama.

## *El bombero*

*por Cubena*

Sam Wallace, un bombero de la Zona del Canal, popularmente llamado "Bombazo", era un socio poderoso de los enmascarados de Kalifornia, Kalabama y Killinois.

Bombazo era un hombre alto, flaco y de barba blanca descuidada. Por su modo de hablar y, sobre todo, por sus opiniones no cabía la menor duda, según el refrán campesino, que tenía cerebro de pájaro en cuerpo de buey.

Bombazo era un trotaestados. Frecuentemente, había sido huésped de honor en Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, California..., por lo tanto, sus maletas siempre estaban a mano. Por su pericia, los contratos para sus servicios eran numerosos y era necesario que él viajara de norte a sur y de este a oeste para cumplir con sus obligaciones, las cuales cumplía cuidadosamente con el mayor empeño; pero, curiosamente, poderoso caballero es don odio, porque Bombazo ejecutaba todos sus contratos gratuitamente.

Bombazo defendía fanáticamente la misión de sus socios enmascarados, y, con biblia en mano, afirmaba, a gritos, en todas partes que era deber sagrado y patriótico tener a raya a todos los judíos, católicos, latinos, asiáticos y, sobre todo, a los de ascendencia Africana.

Como a Bombazo le gustaba empujar el codo, frecuentaba las cantinas para juntarse con los enmascarados, para hablar sobre su tema favorito: el asunto de las niñas en la iglesia. Bombazo, colmado de orgullo, pormenorizaba, a voz en cuello, su mejor hazaña; y, a cada rato, interrumpía el hilo de la narración para lamentarse de que, a diario, estaba al acecho de otra oportunidad como lo de la iglesia. Y, estaba tan

obsesionado con sus empeños que, cuando no se repitió lo de la iglesia, su ánimo se vino a tierra.

A Bombazo no le agradó el hecho que durante la época del Dr. Martin Luther King, los norteamericanos de ascendencia Africana en los Estados Unidos, se quejaron que su vida era peor que la de un gato en congreso de perros, porque les llamó la atención que ellos, con rifle en mano, habían viajado lejos de la Estatua de la Libertad, para defender la democracia y la justicia; y, lo irónico era que soldados norteamericanos de ascendencia Africana habían muerto patrióticamente defendiendo la libertad de otros pueblos alrededor del mundo cuando ellos mismos no la tenían en su propio país.

El incidente de la iglesia, el mayor orgullo de Sam Wallace, ocurrió durante un verano saturado de odio y calor, en Alabama, donde el gobernador había ordenado que las bayonetas truncaran los anhelos de libertad e igualdad que reclamaban los seguidores de Martin Luther King. Y, aquel domingo, los hijos de los que acompañaban a Martín Luther King, para protestar injusticias, fueron congregados en el sótano de una iglesia para rezar y, también, para protegerlos de los feroces perros de la policía. Pero, la precaución fue en vano porque una bomba de dinamita colocada por Bombazo causó un doloroso estrago. Luego, después del pánico y el incendio, entre los escombros encontraron cuatro cabecitas de niñas.

Luego, en la cantina Snowman, cerca del cementerio, Bombazo, el huésped de honor, mientras era agasajado con algarabía y vítores durante el entierro de las cuatro niñas, los parientes y amigos

de luto, dirigidos por Martin Luther King, rezaban y cantaban: "*We shall overcome some day...*"

Sam Wallace odiaba apasionadamente a todas las personas de ascendencia Africana, por las penurias de la familia Wallace que antes de la Guerra Civil, la aristocrática familia sureña vivía opulentamente, a costillas de sus esclavos negros. Y, por la abolición de la esclavitud, la familia Wallace se vio obligada, por primera vez en su vida, a sudar la gota gorda para ganar el pan de cada día. Además, el rencor de Bombazo se acentuó porque le parecía una insolencia que un negro fuera tan atrevido hasta llegar al punta de exigir justicia. Por eso, Sam Wallace juró, quemando una cruz como señal de lealtad, poner dinamita entre las piernas de todo hombre negro. Y, a cada mujer negra...

Transcurrieron muchos años, y durante el Bicentenario de los Estados Unidos, otro contrato le dio a Bombazo la oportunidad para viajar a Los Angeles, California, donde un grupo de soldados norteamericanos de ascendencia Africana se había reunido para celebrar las hazañas de sus abuelos y padres militares, quienes valientemente habían participado en las batallas sangrientas en Bunker Hill, Gettysburg, Alemania, Corea, Viet Nam...

En el quinto piso del mismo hotel donde se hospedaban los soldados de ascendencia Africana, Sam Wallace, encerrado en un cuarto preparaba una bomba de dinamita. Pero, en vísperas de la celebración, Bombazo se emborrachó hasta los huesos y, como consecuencia las manos le temblaban, y un alambre rojo de la bomba de dinamita descuidadamente colocado causó una explosión prematura.

Luego, el primer bombero que llegó a la escena del desastre arriesgó su vida para salvar a Sam Wallace de las paredes que

estaban a punto de derrumbarse.

En un hospital, Sam Wallace, quien había quedado ciego por la explosión de la bomba, una noche, le comunicó a las enfermeras que deseaba besar las manos del bombero que arriesgó su vida para salvarlo.

El bombero héroe era el papá de las cuatro niñas que murieron aquel domingo en la iglesia dinamitada.



## *Martes de carnaval*

*por Cubena*

Ese martes de carnaval, un grito pavoroso inundó El Chorrillo. En ese barrio de pobres, no era raro que la sangre manchara los callejones asquerosos; sangre que se derramaba, a menudo, por las peleas de maleantes canyaceros, borrachos y prostitutas.

La sangre tibia que esa madrugada teñía los gelatinosos gargajos tuberculosos en los callejones, era de una niña, quien había sido abandonada en un callejón del vecindario chorrillense; y, cuando la madre descubrió que el cadáver había sido fruto de sus propias entrañas, puso el grito en el cielo. Su cabeza, en ese instante, estuvo a punto de estallar de locura. En seguida, la mujer de los gritos se acercó e intentó con caricias maternas llevar a cabo el milagro de Lázaro, sin darse cuenta de lo inútil de su empeño. Los llantos amargos de la mujer se naufragaron en el alboroto del cortejo del Rey Momo que desfilaba carnavalescamente por las calles en El Chorrillo.

Aquel día de Carnaval, la viuda había mandado a su hija mayor para trabajar en su lugar, porque en el chiribitil que servía de hogar, sus chiquilines estaban muy enfermos y las pobres criaturas lloraban a moco tendido sin cesar.

La viuda había trabajado una temporada en El Cangrejo. Pero, perdió ese empleo porque la familia de la barriada lujosa estaba más interesada en emplear a una chola, sin compromisos, para que fuera criada de 24 horas, 7 días, 52 semanas... Luego, en Ancón, Zona del Canal, le fue fácil a la viuda de El Chorrillo colocarse como criada por su experiencia; su madre fue criada, su abuela también, su bisabuela... Además, en la Zona del Canal,

prefieren a las negras de ascendencia antillana porque son bilingües, industriosas, honestas. También, las norteamericanas tienen una obsesión extraña por tener negras como niñeras.

Ese día de Carnaval, cuando la niña llegó al chalet blanco, la patrona gringa no estaba en casa, porque ella se citaba con otras norteamericanas, cada día, a las nueve en punto de la mañana, en el Clubhouse, para, según las mujeres zoneítas, combatir el aburrimiento tropical en la Zona del Canal. Y, como las zoneítas acostumbraban a llevar siempre por delante su santa voluntad, pasaban horas tras horas, hasta el momento de la cena, comparando bochinches, jugando canasta y tomando whisky. En la cocina del chalet blanco, la niña preparó cinco platos de hamburguesas, papas fritas y cinco vasos de cerveza para los hombres que desde temprano tragaban aguardiente en grandes cantidades, en el patio de la casa, cerca de la piscina, donde, el patrón, aprovechando la ausencia de su esposa, había invitado a sus más íntimos amigos ese día de Carnaval.

El patrón era presidente del Club Social Los Enmascarados de Kalifornia, Kalabama y Killinois, y sus compadres eran el gobernador de la Zona del Canal, el comandante de la Policía Zoneíta, el capitán de la Penitenciaría de Gamboa y, el magistrado de la corte de Balboa.

Allá en El Chorrillo, la muchedumbre se divertía alegremente. Tal como lo había prometido el Gobierno Revolucionario, el carnaval ese año era el mejor del país. Y, aunque había mucha pobreza, la noticia que andaba de boca en boca era la llegada al aeropuerto de la reina de la rumba, el rey

del merengue, el príncipe de la samba, la princesa de la cumbia, los fabulosos del guaguancó, el Lord del calypso...

Las calles estaban inundadas de confeti y serpentinas. Los prejuicios de toda índole se suspendieron por ese día: negros, indios, cholos, mestizos y blancos se codeaban como si fueran hermanos; abrazados, cantaban y bailaban las bellas melodías de la rumba, merengue, samba, cumbia, guaguancó y calypso. A las comparsas hasta muchos zoneítas se agregaron al alegre revulú, pero, ellos creían que el calypso era samba y pisoteaban, a cada rato, a los bailarines. Además, desafinaban las melodías carnalescas con su chocante: *"Excuse me... I am sorry, excuse me... I am sorry, excuse me..."*

En Ancón, la niña había lavado toda la ropa, había limpiado todos los cuartos de la casa, había preparado el desayuno, el almuerzo y la cena... Luego, el patrón y sus compadres desnudaron a la niña mientras ladraban obscenidades, de sus hocicos emanaba un niágara de baba. Los aterradores gritos de la niñita se confundieron con los aullidos de una perra en celo arrinconada cerca de la piscina, donde cinco perros se turnaban rabiosamente encima de la perra. Y, en el chalet blanco, la niña desnuda...

La alegría inundaba las calles ese martes de Carnaval.

## Desnudo nació...

por Cubena

En la Corte de Cristóbal, Zona del Canal de Panamá, cuando el indio escuchó la condena, la cual atropelló estrepitosamente sus tímpanos, declaró con resignación fatalista, para el cuello de su camisa: "Desnudo nació, desnudo me hallo, ni pierdo ni gano".

Durante el efímero proceso judicial, la única frase que de rato en rato murmuraba el acusado era: "Puej po un caballo namá".

El abogado de la defensa, en su elocuente exposición, trató de persuadir al jurado de que no se hacía justicia si se condenaba a la víctima y no al culpable. El abogado consideraba al acusado víctima de una sociedad injusta. Desde el inicio del juicio, se había repetido para su interior: "Ya es hora de que cambie la imperiosa postura aquí. Cuando un panameño roba un balboa lo llevan preso y a un gringo zoneíta que roba un millón, lo llaman Don".

La justicia zoneíta condenó al acusado a trabajos forzados a perpetuidad. Las autoridades de la Zona del Canal se apoderaron del cuerpo y alma del pobre indio, a perpetuidad, como ya lo habían hecho con la soberanía nacional.

El juez, de acento norteamericano sureño, ordenó en inglés que se llevaran, lo más pronto posible, al indio a la Penitenciaría de Gamboa, en la Zona del Canal. En ese mismo infierno, Lester León Greaves, un negro, había sido sentenciado, también, a perpetuidad, acusado injustamente de haber violado a una gringa zoneíta.

Tras el anuncio de la condena, del recinto judicial sacaron a un negro con la cabeza ensangrentada, porque el negro había interrumpido al juez, gritando, a

renglón seguido del fallo condenatorio: "¡Qué vida del bacalao, tras da salao encajonao!"

Los indios que habían llegado a la ciudad, en el litoral atlántico del Istmo, después de haber viajado a pie, descalzos, un sinnúmero de días, para presenciar como testigos mudos el juicio, tras del fallo, desfilaron sumisamente de la sala tribunal en fila, en silencio, derrotados, desterrados... Se alejaron sin levantar la vista, tal como lo han hecho desde ese día en que la *Santa María*, la *Pinta* y la *Niña* accidentalmente llegaron a la isla Guanahaní.

En la puerta de la corte, al salir los indios, un párroco pipón les echaba la bendición en latín descuidado, con tono monótono, después de que le besaran la mano y la sotana. El presbítero, a manera de consolación les anunciaba a los indios: "Hijos míos, no se preocupen y acepten todas las pruebas y los sacrificios en este Valle de Lágrimas, porque en el cielo tendrán..."

Luego, en la sala de urgencia de un hospital, el negro, con la cabeza vendada, estaba furioso por la actitud irrespetuosa del magistrado norteamericano. Al negro no le agradó que el juez se dirigiera tan desdeñosamente al indio. El jurista, cada vez que aludía al acusado, decía: "Ese indio". Hizo caso omiso hasta del nombre cristiano del indio, y, además, no le importó si el acusado fuera kuna, chocoe o guaymí.

El indio había llegado en pañales a la ciudad, oriundo de una aldea tan desamparada que ni el cartógrafo municipal advertía su existencia.

A los 5 años de edad, el indio se percató

de que la misma familia cristiana había comprado media docena de sus hermanos, con anterioridad, por menos de cinco balboas cada uno. Pero, a él, lo cambiaron por un rocinante que un cortejo de gallinazos y otras aves de rapiña perseguían, minuto tras minuto, revoloteando agitadamente en el aire tropical, al anticipar el inminente banquete.

Poco a poco, el rencor del indio se fue acentuando, por su condición y, también, porque los amos, una cristiana y aristocrática familia, consideraba al muchacho bruto e inútil porque no era capaz de rendir en la finca al igual que cinco bueyes.

Un día, el muchacho se fugó de la finca, y como se quedó sin oficio y sin beneficio, se vio obligado a dormir donde lo sorprendiera la noche y, por si esto fuera poco, además, comer los desperdicios que sacaran los perros de los asquerosos tinacos en los nauseabundos zaguanes.

El indio logró conseguir, al fin y al cabo, un empleo de aseador en el depósito de cadáveres en la Zona del Canal. Allí, su rencor ancestral se manifestó... una madrugada, lo sorprendieron desnudo, violando los cadáveres de vidriosa mirada azul.

## La fiesta

por Cubena

El novelista dedicó toda la mañana puliendo las últimas páginas de su primera novela, y no cabía en sí de gozo porque al fin iba a participar, con su primera creación literaria, en el prestigioso Concurso Literario Ricardo Miró en su paíscuna. Y, luego, por la tarde, el autor de la novela que pone de relieve la participación de los millares de obreros de ascendencia Africana en la construcción del Canal de Panamá, leyó por tercera vez, ese año, la inmortal obra que tiene como inicio: "En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme, no ha mucho tiempo que vivía un hidalgo..." pero, poco después de leer el capítulo en el cual se narra el incidente con los molinos de viento, el teléfono sonó.

--Hola.

--Es Gracimarí.

--¿Qué tal?

--Bien.

--Dichosos los oídos que...

--Te invito a una fiesta.

--¿Fiesta?

--Aquí en mi casa.

--Pero...

--No hay pero que valga. Llegaron varios amigos y...

--Bueno, estoy un poco agotado pero... iré.

--¡Maravilloso!

La luna ya se reflejaba en el horizonte marino cuando el novelista llegó a la casa donde había sido invitado. Pero, extrañamente, fue recibido con indiferencia y hasta desdén.

Los amigos de Gracimarí lucían ropa amarilla y, además, los hombres tenían boinas amarillas y las mujeres tenían pañuelos amarillos sobre sus pelucas amarillas. Y, de rato en rato, se saludaban

dibujando cinco círculos en la frente con el dedo índice de la mano izquierda y, a la vez, vociferaban: "¡Apolo, Apolo, chimbombá chim-bom-bá Apolo, Apolo, Apolo ra, ra, ra!" Y, como parte del rito, comparaban alegremente las horas que habían acumulado bajo el sol en la playa. Al terminar la comparación, la cual, por la cantidad de horas bajo el sol, se escogió al rey y la reina de la fiesta.

En la fiesta los que no bailaban al ritmo de la samba, conversaban, o mejor dicho, se lamentaban de que cada atardecer la oscuridad hacía acto de presencia. Y, por los otros temas que salieron a colación, el novelista se percató de que, el que menos sabe es el que más presume, porque los amigos de Gracimarí insistían, a voz en cuello, que Dante y Goethe eran pianistas y, que Rubinstein y Rachmaninoff eran novelistas, y, por si esto fuera poco, negaban rotundamente que Rodin era escultor francés. Además, para excluir al novelista de la conversación, hablaban en francés, holandés, alemán, italiano y portugués, haciendo caso omiso de lo inútil de su empeño, porque el novelista dominaba esas lenguas y otras más.

A medida que la oscuridad de la noche eclipsaba el sol, en la fiesta se celebraron más ritos en honor a Apolo, durante los cuales el novelista se sintió incómodo por las miradas hostiles y odiosas que se pegaron a su piel. Luego, todos los amigos de Gracimarí se desnudaron. Se untaron unos a los otros con unguento amarillento y, a coro, rogaron por el nacimiento de un nuevo sol.

Carlos Guillermo Wilson  
San Diego State University

## Poemas

por Francisco Guatimi

### CUATRO ABUELOS

Mi apellido: Guatimi  
Juan Francisco: mi nombre,  
hago, un culto de ser hombre  
de ideas y nobles fines.

Me crié allá en Montevideo  
en rancho de piezas bajas  
y oyó mi llanto primero  
el barrio de las pajas.

Muy cerca de un arroyito  
que cruzaba una cantera  
se alzaba aquel ranchito  
hecho de lata y madera.

Mi madre, una morena  
hija de negra y mestizo  
mi padre, pardo cobrizo  
tenía los ojos claros.

Cuatro abuelos diferentes  
prepararon el camino,  
uno quizás portugués  
y otro criollo por destino

Tuve una abuela africana  
y un abuelo guaraní  
y de esta buena mezcla  
caboclo yo nací.

Y una mañana cualquiera  
siendo aún un chiquillo  
llegué hasta la calle Ansina  
y conocí el conventillo.

Viví allí juventud  
colmada de nuevas cosas  
entre candombes y amores

fue así naciendo mi prosa.

### EL EBANO

El ebano crecía  
en tierras casi vírgenes.  
¡Oh! continente...  
cuántos olores extraños,  
aguardiente, pólvora,  
sonidos nuevos  
inundaron la selva,  
perturbando así  
la sinfonía natural.  
Mis dioses se vieron sacudidos  
por improntos cánticos,  
mis mujeres desesperaban,  
mis niños lloraban.  
Todo huída, todo esconderse,  
todo gritar, todo se movía  
todo encadenado.  
Nunca se había visto  
tanta sangre,  
tanta bestialidad.  
Luego todo agua, todo movimiento  
que arrancaba mis entrañas ...  
hasta casi vomitarlas.  
Y después... otras tierras  
otras gentes ...  
¿Y mis abuelos ... ?  
¿Y mi hermana ... ?  
¿Y mi madre ... ?  
Y tal vez mejor  
la muerte.

### NEGRITA BAILA

No sabe qué hacer  
con tu mota  
negrita de bamba rosá  
la trenza que tiene es cortita

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## PALARA

---

y queda toda enredá.  
Bailá, bailá  
que yo vía cantá.  
Tu pecho, se mueve  
y se mueve  
tu cara una boca  
solo es.  
Tu cadera va y viene  
va y viene,  
y tu cuerpo  
se siente vibrar  
bailá bailá  
que yo vía cantá.

### BREVEDAD

Cuando muera ...  
No perdais el tiempo,  
en llorame.  
Haced el favor  
de quemar mi cuerpo,  
a la brevedad.

Conviertan mis restos  
en cenizas,  
Y dejad que el viento  
se las lleve,  
o que el mar las diluya,  
a la brevedad.

No malgasten su tiempo,  
sus lágrimas en mi.  
Para vosotros  
la vida continua,  
y debe ser con alegría,  
no con tristezas.

La vida es una sucesión  
de momentos buenos, malos,  
regulares, trascendentes,  
o sin importancia.  
Vive intensamente los buenos,  
sobrelleva los malos.

Estos pasarán ... Rápidamente,  
como la muerte, es un instante  
imperceptible, quizás...  
Para morir, sólo se necesita  
estar vivo, y luego...  
Permanecer.

En el viento, en los árboles,  
en las melodías cósmicas,  
en los silencios.  
En el reino tiempo,  
en los colores diurnos  
o en los azules nocturnos.

Esparcid mis cenizas  
al son de los tambores.  
Danzen cual hojas al viento  
dibujen una sonrisa  
y recuerden los momentos buenos  
que antes pasamos juntos.

Ese no será momento para llorar,  
sino para reflexionar.  
Para entender del tiempo  
tiempo que fue, que no fue.  
Aprovechad, no lo olvidéis:  
tienes solo una oportunidad.

Francisco Guatimi is an Uruguayan writer and  
plastic artist.

## *Memoria y Resistencia*

*por Cristina R. Cabral  
translated by Antonio D. Tillis*

A las de siempre,  
las pioneras  
las infatigables hijas de la Noche,  
Mujeres Negras  
que ennoblecen la historia.  
Y para aquellos hombres  
que también lo hacen. Axé.

Hombre Negro  
si tan solo buscas  
una mujer que caliente  
tu comida y tu cama,  
sigue ocultando tus bellos ojos  
tras la venda blanca.  
La de la lucha y los sueños  
es quien te habla.  
Ese es mi reino.

Soy resistencia y memoria.  
Construí el camino del amo  
así como el de la libertad.  
Morí en la Casa Grande  
igual que en la Senzala.  
Dejé el ingenio y descalza  
me hice cimarrona.  
Sola fui comunidad, casa y gobierno  
porque escasas veces estuviste allí;  
Hombre Negro sin memoria,  
codo a codo  
espalda contra espalda,  
sigues sin estar allí.

Negro,  
nuestro ausente de siempre,  
generación tras generación,  
yo te parí,  
como a tu padre  
y a tus hermanos.  
Yo curvé la espalda  
sujetándote durante la cosecha;

sangro, lucho, resisto  
y desconoces mi voz.  
ausente en tus memorias  
y hallada culpable  
vivo  
prisionera del tiempo  
y del estereotipo.  
Fueron mis senos  
quienes te alimentaron,  
y al hijo del amo también  
Fuí sangre mezclada en el barro  
con látigo, humillaciones  
y el estupro después.  
Desde allí desplegué  
al viento mis alas;  
madre,  
    negra,  
        cimarrona,  
Iemanjá,  
    Oxum,  
        e Iansá a la vez.

A veces la leyenda me recuerda  
pero nunca la historia,  
aunque tú la escribas.  
Hombre Negro  
qué le hicieron a tu memoria  
que desconoces mi sereno andar  
bravío por la tierra

Hombre que buscas en mí  
el retrato de una estrella de Hollywood  
o de tu rubia compañera de oficina,  
olvídalo;  
yo soy la reina guerrera  
que te hizo libre bajo las estrellas.  
La que de niño te enseñó  
a amar la tierra  
y a usar el fusil.  
Yo,



memoria perdida  
 que atraviesa tus ventanas,  
 yo,  
 piel azabache y manos raídas.  
 Yo,  
 Negra;  
 Yo,  
 Mestiza  
 corazón tibio y desnudos pies.  
 Yo  
 traje raído y pelo salvaje,  
 yo con mis labios gruesos  
 te proclamé rey.  
 Yo,  
 compañera de lucha y de sueños  
 a quien tu ausencia y la vida  
 le enseñaron  
 le exigieron  
 mucho más que a calentar  
 tu pan  
 y tu almohada.

Le enseñaron a cantarle  
 a nuestros Dioses,  
 a preparar los niños del mañana  
 para que sus vidas de hombres  
 y mujeres liberados  
 testifiquen  
                   fielmente  
 la total nobleza  
 de nuestras batallas.

Yo:

Madre,  
     Negra,  
         Cimarrona;

Iemanjá ,  
     Oxum,  
     e Iansá a la vez.-

*Memory and Resistance*

To those eternal,  
 Pioneers  
 Untiring daughters of the night...  
 Black Women  
 Who ennoble history  
 And to those Black Men who also enrich  
 it,  
 ¡Axé! Power to the people!

Black man,  
 If solely you search for a woman to warm  
 your food and your bed  
 Continue hiding your beautiful eyes

Behind that white bandage.  
 The Bandage of your struggle and your  
 dreams  
 It is She who speaks to you.  
 Such is my domain.

I am resistance and memory.  
 I constructed the master's road  
 Instead of the one towards freedom.  
 I died in the Big House  
 Equally in the slave quarters.  
 I fled the cane fields and barefooted  
 I became a runaway slave.

Alone... I left behind community, home,  
 hegemony  
 Because you were scarcely there:

Black Man without memory...  
 Elbow to elbow  
 Back to back  
 You continue to be absent.

Black Man...  
 Always absent from us  
 Generation to generation.  
 I bore you...

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PALARA

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Your father...  
Your brothers.  
I bent my back  
Supporting you in the cane fields.  
I bled...  
I struggled...  
I resisted.  
Yet, you do not recognize my voice.

Absent from your memories  
And found guilty  
I exist...  
Prisoner of time and stereotypes.  
My breasts nourished you  
And the master's son as well.  
My mixed-blood spilled to the ground  
With lashes...  
Humiliation...  
And ultimately...  
Rape.  
From there, I spread my wings to the  
wind;

Mother  
    Black Woman  
    Runaway slave  
*Iemanjá*  
    *Oxum,*  
    And *Iansá*  
All wrapped-up in one.

At times legends remember me  
But never history  
Even though you write it.

Black Man  
What did they do to your memory  
that you do not remember my serene stroll  
untamed  
upon the Earth?

Black Man  
Who searches within me  
For the portrait of a Hollywood starlet

Or for your blond office mate...

Forget her!

I am your warrior Queen  
Who freed you underneath the stars!  
The one who taught you from birth  
To love the Earth  
And how to survive.

Me...  
Forgotten memory  
That passes through your mind's window.

Me...  
Jet-black skin and tattered hands.

Me...  
Black Woman.

Me...  
Half-breed  
Warm-hearted and barefooted.

Me...  
Worn-out dress and wild hair.

Me,  
With my greased lips  
I proclaim you king.  
Me,  
Partner in the struggle and in your dreams  
Whom your absence and the adversities of  
life  
Taught  
Demanded of me  
Much more than a mere warmer of your  
bread  
And of your pillow.

They taught her to sing praises to our  
Gods  
To prepare our children in the morning  
So that their lives as liberated men and

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PALARA

---

women  
Strongly testify to the full nobility of our  
battles.

Me?...

Mother

Black Woman

Runaway slave

*Iemanjá,*

*Oxum*

And *Iansá*

All wrapped-up in one.

Cristina Cabral—University of Missouri-  
Columbia.

Antonio D. Tillis — Purdue University-West  
Lafayette, Indiana.

*Between Race and Empire: African-Americans  
and Cubans before the Revolution*

Edited By Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes  
Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998, 298pp.

Reviewed by Mark Q. Sawyer

The scholars Lisa Brock (United States) and Digna Castañeda Fuertes have compiled a vibrant edited volume, entitled *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution* seeks to establish a diasporic link between Afro-Cubans and African-Americans. The collection of essays addresses an essential puzzle for all of those who seek to attempt to examine black identity. That puzzle is, "Is there really a Diaspora or diasporic consciousness and what are its features?" Brock and Fuertes have assembled a volume that avoids cultural essentialism based upon pre-modern cultural forms and attempts to examine state structures as the primary means of determining whether or not Blacks from different countries find themselves in similar situations that should thus naturally produce a shared consciousness or affinity. Instead the essays seek to construct a Black Public Sphere that crosses national boundaries and connects people through organizations, media, sports and the arts in a living dialogue about differences, common problems and shared struggle.

The essays focus on what are now called in popular political culture "People-to-People contacts," or what in political science we are now calling forms of "Civil Society." However, the Civil Society or Public Sphere developed in these essays is not the one traditionally thought of in Social Science. In these essays, the 'universal bourgeois public sphere' as

conceived by Jurgen Habermas that is very comfortable with liberalism and the capitalist development is turned on its head. In contrast we have here something similar to Nancy Fraser's conception of "counterpublics," or "parallel discursive arenas where those excluded from dominant discourses, invent and circulate counterdiscourses, so as to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs." While the existence of a Black counterpublic and its coherence has been debated in numerous works (Michael Dawson, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Robin Kelley to name a few), fewer examinations of black counter-discourse have captured the occasionally transnational nature of black identity and political discourse (Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Michael Hartchard for example). These essays portray two peoples who are responding to the structures of domination and in so doing developing a powerful counterdiscourse that according to the essays crossed the ninety-mile gap between the United States and Cuba. Coeditor Lisa Brock notes this most poignantly when she writes, "Within the dual but overlapping struggles against racism and imperialism, a common space had been created. A body of non-elite pan-African and Pan-American political, social and cultural relations evolved." However, the essays, while tracking these connections, also establish conflict and ambivalence as essential elements in understanding the Black experience. It is

important to think of these ruptures as central to the black experience rather than inconvenient lapses brought on by the hegemony of white supremacy.

In this volume, political organizations, social organizations, religious groups, the press, sports and the arts, represent locations of diasporic contact and provide opportunities for both cooperation and conflict. The most obvious location for the construction of a transnational Black public sphere occurs in the area of the black press. The essays by Carmen Montejo Arrechea, David J. Hellwig, Rosalie Schwartz and Van Gosse capture the diasporic tendencies of the Black press in both the United States and Cuba in the first half of the twentieth century.

The essay by Cuban scholar Carmen Montejo Arrechea, entitled, "Minerva: A Magazine for Women (and Men) of Color," captures the magazine founded in the 1880s and dedicated to the concerns of women of color. The articles and commentaries unearthed by Arrechea, capture the struggle against both racism and sexism. Arrechea rightly invokes the work of Higginbotham that draws the connection between women of color seeking to uplift the race and achieve respectability in response to racism and sexism. The article captures the interesting contradiction of this period for women of color, that their attempt to adopt or conform to bourgeois norms of behavior often involved relatively radical means that promoted the education and power of women to determine their own course. A magazine like *Minerva* that was distributed throughout the Caribbean, New York and Tampa should and must come to be a part of the history of Black feminism in the U.S. in order to better understand the complex responses of women of color to

race, gender, and class oppression, in the era following emancipation. The essay also tracks the concern for race relations in the United States as well as Cuba. This drives home an important point in examining diasporic consciousness, that is say, that blacks have often looked elsewhere in order to understand, define, improve and compare their situation.

The other essays pick up on the theme of the important role that comparison played for both Afro-Cubans and African-Americans. David J. Hellwig in his essay entitled, "The African-American Press and United States Involvement in Cuba, 1902-1912," examines the hope and interest with which African-Americans viewed race in Cuba. The essay concludes that the good intentions of African-Americans and the possibility for racial justice in Cuba were thwarted by racist and imperialist US policies. The essay also demonstrates how the attempt to think diasporically but at the same time stake claim to full citizenship in the US made pawns of African-American troops to the cause of US imperialism. According to the essay by Rosalie Schwartz, "Cuba's Roaring Twenties: Race Consciousness and the Column Ideales de una Raza," this combination of interest, identification and ambivalence was mirrored in Cuba. Schwartz notes the importance of comparison when she writes, "For race-conscious Afro-Cubans, the United States became a template, against which they could measure and assess their own circumstances." However, at the same time Schwartz notes that, "The Cuban of color who promoted racial solidarity and economic independence often found his appeal suppressed in the name of national unity." This complexity is essential to understand the connection between the

African-American press and the triumphant Cuban revolution covered by Van Gosse's essay.

Van Gosse, in his essay entitled, "The Africa American Press Greeted the Cuban Revolution," explores the hope and the enthusiasm with which African Americans greeted the Cuban revolution. Van Gosse also notes that this interest followed a long period of indifference to the situation in Cuba broken only by the support of Black leaders, the abuses of the US backed Batista regime, and Castro's public denunciation of racism in the Cuba as well as the United States. Van Gosse aptly notes how Cuba and Fidel Castro became a rallying point for black hopes of freedom, revolution and justice during the 1960s. As an interesting aside, the refusal of *Jet Magazine* to allow their pro-Castro cover, printed as their initial reaction to the Cuban revolution, to be reprinted in the volume is a commentary on the power of this volume as well as the often sad state of much of the black press in the current Post-Cold War world.

The essay by Mirabal, Dodson and Robaina explain how despite substantial efforts to build cross-national social and political organizations faced enormous difficulty. Nancy Raquel Mirabal, in her essay, "Telling Silences and Making Community: Afro-Cubans and African-Americans in Ybor City and Tampa, 1899-1915," demonstrates the difficult situation of Afro-Cuban social organizations wedged between their Cuban identity and the Jim Crow reality in which they found themselves. This position created a gulf between them and African-Americans that was only crossed in moments of crisis and with substantial ambivalence. This particular essay is important even for thinking about ethnic

relations, residential patterns and identity in South Florida today, where these issues still exist, even in the absence of de jure segregation. Further, the essay, entitled "Encounters in the African Atlantic World: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in Cuba," tracks the failed attempt of the American AME church to establish itself in Cuba because of its insensitivity to local traditions, namely the practice of African based religions. Here one attempt to build a diasporic connection fails because of its lack of attention to yet another aspect of the diaspora, namely African religious traditions. In a similar fashion, Robaina's essay, entitled "Marcus Garvey in Cuba: Urrutia, Cubans and Black Nationalism," examines the important and often ignored ideological, social, and ethnic heterogeneity of Afro-Cuba and its impact on attempts to develop Black Nationalist organizations on the island.

The essays by Ellis, Brock, Garcia and Bayne examine the connections between African-American and Afro-Cuban artists, and athletes. Keith Ellis, in his essay on two giants of black letters, Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes, compares the powerful connections and subtle differences that can be seen in their work. Ellis captures the power of each man's contribution both aesthetically and politically that rightly emphasizes their friendship, mutual respect and the power that their individual perspectives and work brought to their relationship and the world of literature. The essay by Lisa Brock and Bijane Bayne clearly demonstrates how, through baseball, racial boundaries were transformed and established. This essay demonstrates that, while contingent and flexible, racial boundaries in baseball and in society in general, are nonetheless

powerful social and political determinants. The essay entitled, "CuBop! Afro-Cuban Music and Mid-Twentieth-Century American Culture," gives an account with striking historical specificity of how Afro-Cuban music became a part of the jazz and ultimately the American popular music lexicon through friendships and affinities that crossed national borders. Thus, a diasporic sensibility in New York became a proverbial Ellis Island for the importation of Afro-Cuban music into American popular culture.

Finally, the Epilogue by the co-editor Digna Castañeda Fuertes serves as a testimony to the vitality and energy of these essays as a living example of the Diaspora itself. In fact; my only criticism is that the focus on "pre-Revolutionary" Cuba seems almost artificial. In that 'the state' in the essays mentioned above often violently interrupted diasporic connections, the relative lack of dialogue after the revolution becomes an important question. The essays beg the question of, what happened? To the extent that the collection seeks to avoid being state-centered, why use that particular transformation (the revolution) in the Cuban state as an end point? Perhaps the answers lie with the state and represent an important and powerful set of possibilities. While Brock suggests that US war against the Cuban government has served as an obstacle to relations, there is not much discussion about the Cuban regime, except for Fuertes' suggestion that African-Americans misunderstand Afro-Cubans' seeming lack of concern or interest in racial issues. Perhaps this can be explained by the simple fact that the power and charisma of Fidel Castro and the revolutionary regime has produced great gains for Afro-Cubans and

powerfully supported African-American struggles, but, at the same time replaced a more personal contact between African-Americans and Afro-Cubans that in the past, generated a vigorous debate and inspiration for change both in the United States and Cuba. Nevertheless, *Between Race and Empire* represents a first step in opening a new sense of cooperation and discussion that will only sharpen the analytical tools for thinking about the African Diaspora and the role of race in society in the twenty-first century.

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## Aspectos del lenguaje afronegroide en Venezuela.

by William Megenney

Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert & Madrid: Iberoamerica, 1999, Págs. 262, más bibliografía, Apéndice e Índice.

Reviewed by Luis Ortiz López

La reconstrucción de las variedades afrohispanicas habladas en el pasado y con repercusiones sociolingüísticas en el presente representa uno de los capítulos más sobresalientes y retantes de la dialectología hispanoamericana actual. Las aportaciones etno-sociolingüísticas de aquellos negros esclavos transportados a suelo americano y las de sus descendientes afroamericanos—a pesar de la escasa atención que recibieron de parte de los maestros de la dialectología hispánica durante el presente siglo—han constituido una parte significativa de los estudios dedicados al español americano durante los últimos años, mediante los cuales se ha replanteado la penetración lingüística de estos grupos marginales en la génesis y el desarrollo del español hablado en extensas zonas hispanicas. Han sido las modalidades caribeñas, las que, por su trascendencia histórica y demográfica africana, han recibido mayor atención y profundidad (Alvarez Nazario 1974; Megenney 1986, 1990; Lipski 1994; Schwegler 1996a, 1996b; Green 1997; Ortiz López 1998, 1999).

Estos trabajos, elaborados desde una perspectiva criollística (Holm 1988, 1989), y siguiendo teorías recientes sobre el contacto de lenguas, han debatido el exclusivismo hispanico en la formación y evolución de las modalidades americanas, específicamente, han cuestionado la asimilación lingüística de los negros *bozales* o esclavos de nación, quienes hablaban el español con diversos grados de dificultad. En su lugar, han propuesto

resultados lingüísticos diferentes, previos al aprendizaje del español como segunda lengua entre los *bozales* y aún en el habla materna de descendientes de éstos, entre los que se destacan: 1) el aprendizaje incompleto de L2, fosilizada como la variedad propia de esa comunidad, similar a una *interlengua* (Selinker 1972) o a un *sistema aproximativo* (Nemser 1971), como hemos documentado en modalidades hispanicas haitianizadas en la región suroriental de Cuba y en la frontera dominico-haitiana; 2) la formación de lenguas *pidgins*, como resultado de la puesta en práctica de un código simplificado, usado para facilitar la comunicación básica en situaciones de emergencia entre grupos de personas que no comparten una lengua mutuamente conocida; 3) la creación de lenguas *criollas*—también llamadas '*pidgins elaborados o expandidos*'—convertidas en lenguas maternas por los niños, cuyos padres no poseen una lengua común que no sea el *pidgin* reducido, y que sus descendientes transforman en una lengua completa, al expandir su sintaxis, inventar nuevas combinaciones léxicas y darles coherencia a aquellos elementos sueltos y un tanto caóticos del *pidgin* y de esta manera formar una lengua nueva, similar en complejidad a cualquier otra variedad, como son las modalidades criollas que se hablan en el Caribe, y 4) el surgimiento de variedades *semicriollas* (Holm 1989; Holm et.al. 1999) para explicar aquellas lenguas que poseen conjuntamente rasgos criollos y no criollos, pero sin que ello implique que



estas lenguas hayan trascendido a una etapa criolla basilectal.

Es dentro de esta nueva perspectiva lingüística que se sitúa el trabajo de Megenney sobre el español afrovenezolano, específicamente, en torno a la variedad que manejan dos comunidades con una fuerte trayectoria etno-sociolingüística negra: Barlovento y la zona del Lago de Maracaibo. El autor, ya experimentado en estos temas afro-hispánicos, se enfrasca en un proyecto ambicioso, con cuyos objetivos pretende documentar huellas afronegroides presentes en la actuación lingüística de los hablantes de estas zonas, e investigar su génesis y su posible origen *criollo* o *semi-criollo* formado en esa geolingüística venezolana durante el encuentro afrohispanico como resultado de la trata esclavista en Hispanoamérica. En primer lugar, Megenney presenta un trasfondo histórico y demográfico del negro dentro la diatopía que investiga, el cual permite valorar y contextualizar los elementos extralingüísticos que han caracterizado y, a su vez, condicionado, en algún grado, la variedad lingüística de la esa región venezolana. Segundo, identifica cualitativamente diversos fenómenos fonéticos y sintácticos propios de los hablantes de estas dos regiones, con el objetivo de ahondar en sus orígenes, y tercero, estudia diversas facetas del léxico activo de Barlovento y del sur del Lago de Maracaibo, con el fin de distinguir vocablos arcaicos, o sea, "de uso delimitado geográficamente y, en su mayoría, diastráticamente... y que gozaban de un uso mucho más general en el pasado en todos los niveles sociales" (Megenney 1999: 130) de aquéllos de posible origen africano o desconocido. También examina algunos de los cambios semánticos que

han sufrido muchas de las palabras usadas en dicha comunidad de habla.

En el análisis de los hallazgos lingüísticos, el autor explora algunas posibles vías genéticas de ciertos rasgos fonéticos (por ejemplo, la elisión de los fonemas /s/ y /r/ en diversas posiciones lingüísticas, la lateralización de /r/, el cambio de /r/ a /d/ y viceversa, la variación fonética de los fonemas velares /r/ y /n/, las variantes vocálicas, etc.) y sintácticos (entre ellos, la sustitución del paradigma verbal, por ejemplo, cambios de tiempo, modo, persona y número; la alteración de las formas infinitivas, mediante la elisión del fonema /r/ en los verbos; el uso de variantes anormativas en los verbos copulativos *ser* y *estar*; la duplicación de clíticos; el manejo redundante de pronombres de sujeto; la construcción de preguntas con pronombres y verbos no invertidos, el uso del verbo *haber impersonal*, etc.), los cuales se apartan de las formas del español estándar. Estos rasgos, cuya génesis aún hoy es incierta, representan evidencia relevante para el estudio del contacto lingüístico afrohispanico, pues, aunque muchos se han documentado en el español antiguo, y/o en variedades hispánicas peninsulares e hispano-americanas, como bien demuestra Megenney, también es sabido que muchos de ellos caracterizan ciertas hablas criollas de base iberromance, entre las que se encuentran, el *palenquero*, hablado en la zona del Palenque, en San Basilio, Cartegena (Colombia) y el *papiamento*, modalidad usada en Curaçao, Aruba y Bonaire, hecho que limita ofrecer una respuesta categórica sobre sus orígenes. Ante esta problemática se enfrenta, una vez más, Megenney y, más allá de dictar pautas definitivas, presenta hallazgos lingüísticos, algunos obtenidos de primera

mano, otros de fuentes secundarias (hecho que debilita la metodología del estudio), y ofrece diversas vías para interpretarlos —vestigios del español antiguo, formas de aprendizaje imperfecto del español, resultados de criollización o semicriollización— aunque en ocasiones, destaca las tesis criolla o semicriolla, conceptos poco delimitados teóricamente en el estudio, sobre las demás como únicas explicaciones posibles. Como muchos de los rasgos fonéticos y morfosintácticos que caracterizan esta modalidad afrovenezolana coinciden más con etapas intermedias de adquisición y/o aprendizaje que con el castellano normativo, resulta bastante atractivo para el autor, vincular éstos con hablas criollas o semicriollas afrohispanicas, que han pasado por un proceso de descriollización debido al contacto con la lengua dominante, es decir, el español estándar venezolano.

Este estudio de Megenney, así como los trabajos previos del mismo autor y de otros autores sobre este tema, lejos de ofrecer soluciones aisladas a un problema lingüístico diacrónico-sincrónico—como podría ser en este caso específico, la modalidad afrovenezolana —ofrece algunas alternativas posibles para reconstruir las variedades afrohispanicas habladas en diversas regiones del mundo hispanico, con el objetivo de proponer, en un futuro cercano, un modelo aproximativo que dé cuenta del contacto afrohispanico en Latinoamérica durante los casi cinco siglos de convivencia etno-sociolingüística. A pesar de que no estamos en condiciones de lanzar conclusiones definitivas sobre este asunto—por la misma complejidad que posee el tema en cuestión—trabajos como el de Megenney contribuyen a esclarecer el escabroso camino. Aún faltan muchos estudios que documenten diacrónica y

sincrónicamente otras variedades afrohispanicas latinoamericanas, siguiendo metodologías y teorías rigurosas y sistemáticas, con cuyos datos podamos ahondar esta problemática. Ojalá que muy pronto otros investigadores emulen el difícil, pero necesario camino que hace más de una década emprendió Megenney, junto a otros colegas afrohispanistas, para lograr tales objetivos.

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## *Palenque: décimas*

By Luz Argentina Chiriboga

Quito: Editorial Instituto Andino de Artes Populares

1999. 119 pp.

Reviewed by Paulette Ramsay

*Palenque* is Luz Argentina Chiriboga's second collection of poetry in which she focuses on and celebrates a wide range of subjects, but particularly the affirmation of the struggle for liberation by different generations of people of African descent. The title *Palenque* functions as the ideological frame of the work as the author apotheosizes the resilience, achievements and distinctions gained through the general marronage which typifies the lives of descendants of slaves in various parts of the Black diaspora. The word *palenque* refers to a community of maroons or descendants of maroons who resisted their enslavement by fleeing the plantation and seeking refuge in the forests, mountains or swamps to establish secret communities or settlements. The *palenque* was a community in which they were free to practise their Afro-cultural forms and devise ways of avoiding domination and oppression. Today, there are settlements in different countries such as Cuba and Colombia where these communities/settlements are still referred to as *palenques*.<sup>1</sup>

The poems have been composed as *décimas*—also known as *espinelas*—a ten line poem, each line of which is usually composed of eight syllables. The usual rhyme scheme is abba, ac, cdda, although the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén whose *El son entero* and *Elegías* contributed immensely to the popularising of the *décima*, demonstrated that there may be other variations.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Chiriboga's *décima* employs a rhyming couplet at the

beginning using an abba rhyming pattern; and varying numbers of ten line stanzas which follow cddcc/aeeea as the rhyming scheme. The *décima* itself is a part of the rich oral tradition of the Afro-derived people of Esmeraldas and of African diasporic communities in Cuba and other parts of the Caribbean and Latin American regions. The *décima* was sung as a ballad and was an important means of transmitting information carried in the collective memories of Afro-derived peoples in these societies. David Aguirre in his introduction to the collection describes the *décima* as "hija légitima del romance y el candombe, heredera de la palabra castellana tanto como de las leyendas fantásticas del Africa profunda."<sup>3</sup>

Chiriboga's use of the *décima* reveals a high level of sophistication, acute sensitivity to the various issues and subjects which she treats, implying confidence and demonstrating admirable poetic skills. A strong tone of musicality and a sense of celebration are rampant throughout most of the poems and are sharply enhanced by assonance, internal rhyme, and rhyme at the end of verses. Some poems carry a lament which is undergirded by a particular type of vocabulary which appeals to the reader's sensitivity to suffering and the brutalization of human beings.

The work commences with a poem entitled "La *décima*," which serves as a sort of prologue or introduction to the collection. This poem comprises three ten line stanzas which are characterized by a

powerful proclamatory tone. The *décima* is personified as one who applauds the efforts of the poet to revive and rescue the *décima* from extinction. The poem acknowledges and lauds the Afro-Esmeraldan people who practised this aspect of the oral tradition in the past and simultaneously recalls the speaker's own association with the folk form during childhood.

This first *décima* also laments the disappearance of this art form from the day to day activities of the Afro-Esmeraldans due to competition from sources such as television and radio and underlines the importance of reviving the folk-form as a central aspect of defining an Afro-Esmeraldan identity and providing younger generations with a sense of their Afro-centric culture. Throughout the poem, the speaker/poet plays an important representative role—the "I" being recognizable as a legitimate Afro-Ecuadorian who is committed to the rescuing of this aspect of rich Afro-Esmeraldan oral tradition:

Yo pido mucha atención  
Y ruego la comprensión  
A lo que estoy exponiendo  
("La *décima*," p. 9)

The collection is divided into three sections each of which develops a different aspect of the writer's main focus—the heritage of resistance, the celebration of liberation and the vindication of an Afro-derived culture. Part I comprises twelve (12) poems which may be further divided into three groups in keeping with the themes which they treat. The first sub-group includes "La herencia", "La negritud" and "El tambor" in which the poet establishes or affirms the African roots of the Afro-Esmeraldans. In the

second sub-group are the poems "La trata", "La travesía", "La plantación", "La esclava," "La carimba," "El niño del palenque" and "Los perros." In these poems the author reflects on the inhumanity of the slave trade, plantation life and the entire slave system. Additionally, the poems point to the fact that the slaves did not come to the plantations *tabula rasa* for despite the cruelty of the slave trade, it did not erase the memory of the slave's culture. The *décima* "La esclava," makes a significant contribution to this section as it points to Chiriboga's insistence, witnessed before in her novel *Jonatás y Manuela* (1994) on reinserting the Black woman in Latin American history.<sup>4</sup> The triple exploitation of the slave woman—racial, sexual, economic—is highlighted as well as her further victimization by the White woman. The message of this *décima* is forcefully underpinned by the use of irony as the poet draws attention to the indispensable nature of the slave woman's labour—even though she is repeatedly brutalized by everyone who depends on her services.

The third group includes poems which speak to the fact that in the face of the extreme harshness of slavery the black slaves devised various means of resistance to liberate themselves and establish various *palenques*. The poems in this sub-group include "El cimarrón", "El palenque," and "La travesía". The poem, "La travesía" could fit into both the second and third sub-groups as it deals with the theme of resistance as well as draws attention to the abominations of the slave trade.

The *décimas* in Part I shape the work as one in which a particular history is examined and recorded. Moreover, the

slaves' history of resistance is embraced and held up as exemplary and worth recording. The centrality of the drum to African religions and its significance as a symbol of resistance is emphasized while its language is declared as the best. In keeping with the title of the collection, Part I emphasizes *cimarronaje* which is brought to a grand climax by the poem "Palenque," (the ultimate destination of many runaways from slavery) in which the importance of the *palenque* as a symbol of resistance and independence for black slaves is underscored. The poem also calls for the recreation of the spirit of the palenque as the essence of Black unity and independence.

Part II of the collection contains ten (10) poems but unlike the section which precedes, it cannot readily be subdivided along thematic lines. The first six (6) poems celebrate legendary and heroic figures such as Jonatás, a slave, and her mistress Manuela Sáenz who both were previously presented in Chiriboga's novel *Jonatás y Manuela* (1994) in which she fictionalizes the contribution of the female slave to freedom fighting. Nelson Mandela is celebrated in one *décima* bearing his name as title, for his commitment to the eradication of apartheid. His struggle is presented as a universal one, rather than just one for the liberation of Black South Africans. In another poem, Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz is hailed as the pioneer of feminism in the Caribbean and Latin America. The poem celebrating Don Quijote at first seems out of consonance with the overall thrust of the work but generally speaking, strengthens the focus on the value of bravery and wisdom which are related to the broader themes of physical marronage and pride in one's heritage. The other poems in Part II each

deal with a different subject. For instance, "A mi madre," recalls the generosity or concern for humanity displayed by the speaker's mother. The mother's struggles to bring happiness to the poor is equated with the struggles of a guerrilla fighter for the liberation of his/her people. Another poem "La palabra," underlines the importance of words and the fact that words fulfill a multiplicity of functions with a wide range of effects.

Part III commences with an introductory poem "América" which is a celebration of the Caribbean and Latin American regions in general and of Ecuador in particular, as areas which have engendered and facilitated bravery among slaves and descendants of slaves. Part III is divided by the author into two sections with an epigraph from Cavafis and Ché Guevarra introducing the first and second sections respectively. The first four (4) *décimas* of Part III are devoted to extolling the beauty and achievements of Esmeraldas. The poem "Canto a Esmeraldas," the longest *décima* of the collection, exuberates with enthusiasm about and pride in various aspects of Esmeraldas' history, cultural and political life. Esmeraldas is hailed as the seat where rebellion was born in Ecuador. The speaker acknowledges the region as her birthplace and emphasizes a commitment to the place. Esmeraldans are also praised for the fact that despite their strong sense of regionalism they willingly embrace any of their other compatriots who are not from the region.

"La Barraca," draws attention to the black consciousness of the people of a particular zone or barrio in Ecuador who affirm their black heritage and are steeped in African religious practices. "Al Optimismo," encourages positive thinking on the part of young Ecuadorians as the

means of helping their country to forge ahead. Moreover, the poem appeals to different members of society such as—the teacher, bureaucrat and politician to perform their duties well so as to ensure the progress of their country. “La autoestima,” constitutes a lesson in the value of self-motivation and appreciation as well as gratitude for the things that life offers as a means of avoiding failure and dishonour.

The quotation from Che which emphasizes individual participation appropriately follows “La autoestima” and precedes the first poem of the second section of Part III—“La solidaridad”—which centres on solidarity and the willingness to serve one’s country. The *décima* “Los niños,” extolls the persona’s appreciation of children and their beauty and emphasizes the importance of dedication to serious studying and practice for perfecting/mastering one’s vocation, skills or talent. “A la blanquitud,” provides an offer of solidarity and fraternity to latinos/whites and invites them to pattern the brotherly love shown by Blacks toward Blacks.

In this collection of poems or *décimas*, Luz Argentina creates her own metaphorical *palenque*—her world of poetic refuge in which she is free to meditate on and express her views about her heritage of resistance and her African-derived oral tradition.

The writer skillfully follows a logical progression from one part of the collection to the next as she begins with an exploration of the history of slavery and plantation life in Part I. Part II begins with a portrayal of the life of the slave woman and moves on to define the colonial period in “Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz” and then portrays more

contemporary contexts in “Nelson Mandela” and “A mi madre”. Part III focuses on the present Esmeraldas, points toward the future, suggests ways of forging national and universal unity and underlines the importance of solidarity for the achievement of liberation and the advancement of her people.

The poems are easily read because the language is simple and the musicality, rhyme and rhythm of the *décimas* are very engaging and create a vibrance and liveliness which will make readers enjoy them all in one sitting. Undoubtedly Chiriboga makes the *décima*—an important part of Esmeraldan oral tradition—truly artistic and elevates it to formal printed poetry. This new collection of poetry makes an important contribution to Afro-Hispanic literature as Chiriboga successfully brings her African-derived heritage to centre stage and infuses her verses with the spirit of Esmeraldas.

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Mona, Jamaica*

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Hennessy, Alistair. “Introduction,” *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, (1993) 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ellis, Keith. *Cuba’s Nicolás Guillén: Poetry and Ideology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, (1983) 230.

<sup>3</sup>Andrade Aguirre, David. “Introduction,” *Palenque*. Luz Argentina Chiriboga. Ecuador: EAIAP, (1999) 5 - 6.

<sup>4</sup>DeCosta-Willis, Miriam. “Review of *Jonatás y Manuela* by Luz Argentina Chiriboga” (1994) *Afro-Hispanic Review* 15. 2 (1996) 56.

**Editor’s note:** In 1956, Nelson Estupiñán Bass published the first edition

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of *Duelo de gigantes*, "décimas" for the most part, describing the intense word battle (contrapunteo) between Timarán and Cuabu. Chiriboga is following a clearly established Ecuadorian and Spanish American literary tradition.



*Singular Like a Bird: The Art of Nancy Morejón.*  
Miriam DeCosta-Willis, Editor.  
Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1999. 363 pp.

Reviewed by Rosemary Geisdorfer Feal

At a recent conference held in the United States, I heard comments to the effect that Nancy Morejón has been superseded by a generation of Cuban poets who use a more emotive register and who can openly despair at the everyday life under the current political regime. Morejón, I was told to my surprise, is formulaic and belongs to the past. Miriam DeCosta-Willis's edited collection completely disproves this distorted view of Nancy Morejón and instead demonstrates why she should be considered one of Cuba's highest practitioners of the poetic arts. *Singular Like a Bird* fills a much-needed void in the literary criticism devoted to Morejón. It serves both as a repository of some classic scholarship previously published in journals such as the *Afro-Hispanic Review*, and it also introduces new critical approaches to the poetry. DeCosta-Willis has assembled a wonderful gallery of voices from the U.S., Canada, the Caribbean, and West Africa, some of whom will be very familiar to Afro-Hispanists. A particularly appealing feature of this book is the beautiful artwork (in the style of Miro and Garcia Lorca) by Nancy Morejón that graces the cover and is reproduced inside with eight color drawings. DeCosta-Willis has compiled the definitive classified bibliography on Nancy Morejón including critical works in translation, interviews, journal and newspaper articles, and so forth.

In her Preface, "Keeping the Song Alive," Miriam DeCosta-Willis recounts how she first came across the poetry of

Morejón by means of an unmarked brown envelope, one of many sent to her from across the world by Cuban writers and intellectuals. The "Introduction" presents the reader with a clear and intriguing sketch of Morejón's importance as a poet. DeCosta-Willis has the gift of a creative, imaginative writing style that is as poetic as the work of which she writes: "Her poetry soars like a solitary bird in flight, lifting its wings over the still patios and ancient barrios of her city, over the cerulean waters and green mountains of her country until, free and fierce, it embraces a column of white light" (1). DeCosta-Willis traces two main currents in Morejón's poetry: a line of committed work, forged in revolutionary ideals, and a lyrical thread that she calls the aesthetics of restraint. Morejón's literary disappearance during a decade starting in 1968 allows DeCosta-Willis to affirm the speculation about the most probable cause: the poet was silenced because of her alleged affiliation with a racial agenda. DeCosta-Willis offers a nuanced overview of the entire poetic production of Morejón and concludes the introduction with a deft preview of the chapters to come. My brief consideration of these chapters, in the order in which they appear, cannot do justice to the full, rich, and complex vision that they form collectively.

The interview conducted by Gabriel Abudu asks precisely formulated questions of Nancy Morejón the answers to which any critic would want to know (unfortunately, no date for the interview is given). Morejón reiterates the importance

of the Cuban Revolution on her identity and her work; she discusses her aesthetic considerations of the Black woman; and she once again pays tribute to her mentor and friend Nicolas Guillén without whom, she claims, her own poetry would not exist. William Luis's substantial chapter on race and Revolution provides a thorough historical and ideological grounding for Morejón's political voice. Luis's article from the *Afro-Hispanic Review* (1996), not included in this volume, strikes me as an even more complete overview of Morejón's poetic production, and it would have made an equally fine contribution to this project. Gerardo Fullea León writes of the influence that Morejón has had on his own writing, and provides a warm (if impressionistic) testimony to the genius of his friend. The concept of "cultural ascendancy" gives focus to Caroline McKenzie's chapter on language, culture and consciousness. She underscores Afro-Cuban mythology, synthesis, and *mestizaje* in her discussion, informed critically by thinkers as diverse as bell hooks and Merleau-Ponty. The presence of Richard Jackson in a collection such as this is all but requisite. His remarks on Morejón and the "New Woman" in Cuba, framed within a general history of a generation of Afro-Hispanic writers born in the 1940s, may strike specialists as overly introductory, whereas those who lack familiarity with the larger context of Afro-Hispanic writing will appreciate Jackson's panorama. Trinidad Pérez Valdés concentrates exclusively on *Cuaderno de Granada* (1984), which contains nine poems that react to the North American invasion of the Caribbean island. The ethics of international solidarity shape the design of *Cuaderno de Granada* and

constitute its primary motivation, says Pérez Valdés.

Several essays concerning feminist and womanist poetics take up the second part of *Singular Like a Bird*. Lorna V. Williams examines Morejón's rewriting of Black history according to the teleology of revolution and compares her work with the poetry of Guillén. Linda Howe's careful use of the concept of womanism (as developed by Alice Walker), coupled with her deep knowledge of the Cuban context, make her essay notably solid. Family and generational ties give Janet Hampton a starting point for her chapter, in which the theme of empowerment emerges strongly. "Mujer negra," Morejón's signature poem, receives a most elucidating close reading in C. RoseGreen-Williams' essay. Diane Marting succinctly discusses the representation of female sexuality in selected poems from *Amor, ciudad atribuída* in a note-length chapter. "Avenging Resistance" is the topic that Mariela Gutiérrez approaches in her chapter, also settling on notions of empowerment to undergird her analysis. One of the problems with this section (and elsewhere in the volume) is the repetition of citations of two of the most famous womanist poems: "Mujer negra" and "Amo a mi amo." There tends to be overlap in the commentary as well, especially when the authors engage in a close textual explication. Yet since not all readers will get to every chapter, there may be some merit in allowing for a certain degree of autonomy and its accompanying repetition.

The final section of *Singular Like a Bird* explores "an ancestral language," beginning with Dellita Martin-Ogunsola's thorough treatment of Africanity and Revolution. She demonstrates, in one of

the most scholarly chapters of the project, how Morejón's race and gender consciousness is subordinated to political ideology, and how the poet "engages in linguistic *cimarronaje*, biting the conqueror's tongue in order to create new icons and myths" (228). Martin-Ogunsola relates Morejón to Guillén, something that Antonio Olliz-Boyd and Gabriel Abudu also accomplish in their jointly-authored chapter on *Piedra pulida*. They view Morejón's voice as restrained in its post-Revolutionary awareness of race and gender, whereas Guillén's was the voice of fervor, loudly decrying exploitation and prejudice. Shirley Jackson considers *Piedra pulida* one of the Morejón's finest works, particularly in its appellation to the cosmos. Jackson believes that Morejón's poetry must be situated within the African historical continuum and the context of the larger cultural system that originated in the Nile Valley. In "Orishas Circling Her House," Miriam DeCosta-Willis discusses race as a context in Morejón's poetic discourse. She develops her concept of the "poetics of restraint," and she makes important interpretations of the function of African deities in the poems. DeCosta-Willis combines close textual readings with socio-biographic-historic commentary, thereby producing a nuanced and grounded study. "The Poetics of the Quotidian" concern Yvonne Captain-Hidalgo in a (previously published) essay devoted to Morejón's recreation of the "Black Universal": an extension of the meaning of a Black family in its pan-African dimensions. This edited collection closes with "And Still the Song Lingers," an evocative piece by musician and composer Marta Valdés, who writes of her collaboration with Morejón. She shares memories of their artistic intersections,

concluding that "Nancy's poetry and my songs breathed the same air" (317).

*Singular Like a Bird* offers readers the definitive compendium of critical writings on Nancy Morejón. DeCosta-Willis brings her unique creativity to this endeavor, and thus has managed to produce a volume that offers something of interest to both specialists and more general readers. Further, the English translations that accompany all quotations in Spanish make this volume accessible to a very wide public. One of the very few problematic areas in the volume is the inconsistency in documentation. Some chapters use the "Works Cited" method, whereas others employ a notation system. There is a great deal of overlap in the bibliographies, yet it is useful to view at the end of each essay the precise list of sources. In some cases, like Captain-Hidalgo's the paucity of critical sources makes itself apparent. Further, one would have expected all critics to update and/or expand their journal articles (some over a decade old) for the purpose of this enduring book project. DeCosta-Willis's introductory chapter places these diverse critics in dialogue, yet internally we might have expected more engagement among these scholars, who in some instances seem not to have considered sufficiently the existent critical writings on Morejón. There is, nevertheless, an important historical element to *Singular Like a Bird*: by reproducing some essays from an earlier critical period, DeCosta-Willis creates her own version of a "Recopilación de textos sobre Nancy Morejón" to paraphrase the title of the poet's book on Nicolas Guillén. A generation of scholars will be indebted to Miriam DeCosta-Willis and all the critical voices featured in her collection, for their care (in all senses of

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the word), their expertise, their creativity,  
and their collective will to keep the song  
alive.

*State University of New York-Buffalo*

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