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Inscribing Contact: Zurara, the Africans, and the Discourse of Colonialism

by Jerome Branche

And beware
Cried Akyere
Do not trust strangers
In their eyes I see dangers.
Hooks jerk in their smiles.
Masks.
Edward Kamau Brathwaite.

Completed in 1453, Gomes Eannes de Zurara's *Crónica dos feitos de Guiné* has been described as the "first book written by a European on the lands south of Cape Bojador."[1] It provides the "most complete and authentic record of exploration down the West African Coast approximately up to the year 1448,"according to J.W. Blake, and has been of use mainly as a source for historical research.[2] Blake and other historians have cited it to highlight the decades of Portuguese exploration which preceded Columbus's New World find, as well as the intense Portuguese and Castilian rivalry that produced the first colonial war between European powers and characterized this early scramble for Africa.[3] The historic treaty of Alcaçovas, signed on the 4th of September 1479, brought Castilian and Portuguese competition momentarily to an end after four years of fighting. It limited Castile to the Canaries while Portugal's claim to the other islands of the Atlantic archipelago and to the as yet "undiscovered" parts of Africa remained intact.

Portugal's outthrust from 1415 to the turn of the century, and the eventual establishment of its vast seaborne empire are important in the context of Ibero-American studies. The achievement of Portugal's captains, Bartolomeu Diaz, Vasco da Gama, Pedro Alvarez Cabral, and Fernão de Magalhães contest the centrality of Columbus to the broader narrative of exploration and discovery, and to 1492 as the signpost of the modern period.[4] In the same way, Portugal's production of sugar and its establishment of the slave plantation as an institutional complex in Madeira and the other Atlantic islands stand as important historical antecedents to conquest and colonization in the Americas.[5] The relevance of this Ibero-African background to Ibero-American studies, or the value of Zurara's chronicle as a resource for historical research, is not difficult to establish. It may be observed, however, that when historians or cultural critics cite or comment on the *Crónica*, it is rare to find an engagement with Zurara's writerly intentions in the text, or with his rhetorical praxis in what is clearly a discourse of power. This seems to be the case irrespective of the degree to which his commentators endorse or critique the obvious ideological elements that undergird his narrative, or the triumphalist tenor of the macrotext which it, in turn, supports.[6] The apparent gap in Zuraran scholarship is important, especially since his chronicle evidently occupies a place in the broader European master narrative of discovery and colonization.

Zurara's account of Portugal's venture in the Atlantic and down the West African coast is significant also as an early inscription of the modern encounter of European and non-European peoples, and for what this encounter reveals in terms of the Hegelian dialectic of identity and difference. The fact that the "us and them"

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dichotomy that it expresses is articulated within a discourse of domination and conquest is what makes the document historically important as an act of signifying. Postcolonial critic Mary Louise Pratt has called attention to the way in which European travel and exploration writing produced the "'rest of the world'" for European readerships, encoding and legitimating thereby Europe's aspirations "to economic expansion and empire" (5). In similar vein Homi Bhabha has pointed to colonialist stereotyping as a tactical and textual strategy designed to "construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types" and to (re)produce them in terms of an enduring racialized subalternity (41).

The intervention of postcolonial critique as a deconstructive emancipatory response to what Said has referred to as the "knitted together" strength of varying colonizing enterprises (6), is aptly summed up by Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson in their introduction to *De-Scribing Empire: Postcolonialism and Textuality*. They remind us that:

> Imperial relations may have been established initially by guns, guile and disease, but they were maintained in their interpellative phase largely by textuality, both institutionally...and informally. Colonialism (like its counterpart, racism)...is an operation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse it interpellates clonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation. (3)

This essay examines some of the ways in which Zurara's *Crónica* labels the colonized as inferior under various rubrics, and articulates a justification for their subjection, setting thereby a discursive precedent for subsequent colonial writing. It sees this triumphalism of the text as essential to the ideological objectives of the chronicler in his role as panegyricist and national propagandist. Accordingly, the Infante Henrique, to whom it is dedicated, and the men who represent him abroad, become the avatars of Civilization, and official defenders of the Faith. The subjected Others are represented as barbarous, less than human, and somehow deserving of their subordination in the new imperial order. The paper also explores the extent to which the contradictory motifs of the civilizing mission, the expansionist quest for profits, and the fundamentalism of the anti-Islamic crusade lay bare the ambivalence attendant to the textuality of colonialism.

Zurara was appointed royal chronicler in 1448 when he replaced his predecessor Fernão Lopes. He was commissioned by King Affonso V with the writing of the chronicle to honor the King's uncle, the Infante (1395-1460) in order that his deeds "assy especyaaes antre muytos que alguũs principes xpaãos em este mundo fezerom" (3) (so noteworthy among the many actions of Christian princes in this world) might be remembered in perpetuity. The zeal with which Zurara undertook the task of telling the story of the "Discovery and Conquest of Guinea," as Beasley's and Prestage's English translation titles the work, gets its fullest expression in his portrayal of the Infante. The fact that he was personally familiar with the prince and with the other aristocratic protagonists of the events he described added to his enthusiasm as a writer. Dom Henrique is a heroic extract from the medieval novels of chivalry. His heroic status is built upon his exemplary service to God and king. In his eulogistic portraiture Zurara does not

distinguish between the terrestrial and celestial dimensions of the Infante's praiseworthiness. For Zurara he is a visionary, strategist, statesman, and a military exemplar. Since many of his successes are achieved in the context of the confrontation with Islam, or may be so construed, his symbolic importance is also calculated in terms of the crusading ethic of eliminating the Infidel and spreading Christianity. The "honra" (honor) that the Infante accumulates in his life's work is therefore both earthly (national), and celestial.

The dual aspects of D. Henrique's persona are interwoven in the relation of two of his early triumphs. They are the prince's valiant performance in the conquest of Ceuta in 1415, in which the blows he delivered against the Infidel, were "antre todollos outros" (24) (conspicuous beyond those of all other men), and the armada which he successfully sent out against the Canaries some years later "com entençam de lhe fazer mostrar o caminho da Sancta fe" (26) (to show the natives there the way of the holy faith). These events occupy the same narrative space as the relation of the churches he erected around Portugal.[7] Zurara recalls the hagiographic as he stresses the prince's wisdom and humility, his hard-working nature, his moral strength in abstaining from drink and sex, his generosity to guests and the members of his court, and his thirst for knowledge (24-33). In pinpointing the prince's more mundane objectives of finding new sources of trade, bringing new peoples into the Christian fold, and undermining Islamic geopolitical power, Zurara combines the two dimensions of the prince's actions into a single profile.

Zurara's celebration of D. Henrique's service to God and king—he refers to him at one point as "pouco menos que devinal" (8) (little less than divine)—calls attention to the very nature of the panegyric. A less idealized version of the Infante's *curriculum vitae*, however, might draw attention to the degree to which the chronicler builds his song of praise around distinct features of selection and omission.[8] Such an account might point out where the prince's motivations were more material than spiritual, and consider the fact of his deliberate if patient entrepreneurship and his political dexterity. These are shown by his persistence in sending out expeditions of exploration until they returned a profit, and in his subsequent acquisition of the monopoly over the licenses to trade in the newly discovered areas through his influence at court and at the papal curia. Despite his relative disadvantage in the royal hierarchy (he was King João's third son), D. Henrique also managed to appropriate the royal fifth, traditionally the king's purview, of the proceeds from the new ventures overseas. With his political titles (Duke of Viseu, Lord of Covilhão), and the revenues he derived from them, as well as his monopolies over tuna-fishing in the Algarve and over soap production in the Realm, the Infante over time became "the third richest magnate in the kingdom" according to Ivana Elbl's estimates.[9] When one considers, in addition, that a dispensation from consanguinity had been granted in relation to wedding plans in which the Infante had been involved, both his celibacy and his disinterest in material gain, underscored by Zurara, are placed in doubt.[10]

Zurara's rhetorical selectivity and elision are equally apparent in relation to the cognitive space accorded the Other in the

narrative, whether these are the Idzāghen tribesmen of the Moroccan coast that the Portuguese encounter, the sub-Saharan Africans (black Moors), or the *guanche* natives of the Canaries. In his chapter summarizing the Infante's works, the chronicler is notably brief in describing how the Canary Islands were brought to "o caminho da sancta fe" (26) (the way of the holy faith). His juxtaposition of the "grande armada" (26) (great armada) employed in the task, however, and the claim for proselytism that follows it (ie, showing them "the way of the holy faith"), is what betrays here the central paradox of his text as colonialist apologia. Although the settlement and the productivity of the previously uninhabited Madeiras are mentioned almost in the same breath, the triumphalist passage omits to mention the means by which the large supplies of "pam e açuquer, e mel, e cer, e madeira, e outras muytas cousas" (28) (wheat, sugar, wax, honey and wood, and many other things), were produced. D. Henrique's expedition in 1425 against the Grand Canary continued a process that by 1450 had exported two-thirds of the native Canarians as slaves.[11] The productivity and "grandes proveitos" (28) (great profit) of the Madeiras at Zurara's time of writing had been made possible primarily through *guanche* slave labor. To the degree that his syntax asserts the agency of the emerging metropolitan forces in the production of colonial wealth, and denies the natives historical recognition as the producers of this wealth, Zurara's account can be seen as a sort of figurative erasure of the group. Their rhetorical suppression in the text parallels the real process of extinction of the native Canarians over the course of the fifteenth century.[12] Later when he discusses the way of life of the Canarians in greater detail, he would invoke their barbarism and bestiality to justify their conquest and enslavement, as he again does in the case of the sub-Saharan Africans.[13]

A shifty rhetorical platform is the inevitable product of the irreconcilable ideological objectives of the expansionist text. The song of praise to the expansionist hero and the account of his triumphs impose a compromise with the empirical, as pointed out above. When Zurara identifies and represents the colonized his discourse is similarly restricted by the requirements of triumphalism. While slave raiding (*razzias*) had been a Mediterranean tradition for centuries and has in all likelihood characterized inter-cultural conflict universally, in Zurara's post-medieval expansionist text the phenomenon of the manhunt is sandwiched between the discourse of evangelism and the clear and concrete desire for material gain. The conundrum that comes out of representing captives both as colonial booty and as souls for Christendom provokes elaborate ideological justifications as well as semantic instability in identifying them.

In 1434, D. Henrique's squire Gil Eannes rounded the dreaded promontory at Cape Bojador, situated at 26 degrees north on the Saharan coast, after over a decade of patient and persistent effort and investment. It was the most important moment of the enterprise of exploration before the discovery of the gold trade at El Mina four decades later. The feat put to rest myths that had formerly haunted Venetian, Genoese, and Portuguese sailors, not only as to the impassibility of the promontory, but as to what lay beyond it.[14] The maritime milestone apart, the event also marked a qualitative and

quantitative change in the exploratory enterprise. Beyond lay the sub-Saharan populations and the captives for the future trans-Atlantic trade.

What is remarkable about the narration of this stage of events is the growing speculation and excitement as the expectations of booty are realized. The voyages between 1434 and when the cape is circumnavigated, and 1444 when the first major shipment of captives is brought to Lagos for sale are marked by findings of increasing value. The findings range from mere herbs, plucked as evidence of landfall at the new site in 1434, to seals, and finally humans (34). It is the collapsing of the different categories of items, vegetable, animal, and human, into the class of "booty," by the narrator, however, that is noteworthy in the description of events. So is the bloodlust of the adventurers. Zurara's relation of Gil Eannes's and Goncalvez Baldaya's return to Rio d'Ouro after they spot "rastro dhomees e de camellos" (56) (footmarks of men and camels) at Bojador carries the unmistakable mark of the predatory even though that particular hunt was eventually unsuccessful. His juxtaposition of the two kinds of "game" that they acquire two years later is equally revealing:

> E porque vyo...grande multidom de lobos marinhos...fez matar aquelles que pode, de cujas pelles fez carregar seu navyo, ca ou por serem ligeiros de matar, ou por o engenho daquelles seer auto pera tal feito, fezerom em aquelles lobos muy grande matança. Empero com todo esto Affonso Gonçalvez nom era contente, por nom filhava alguũ daquelles Mouros, e seguyo porem mais avante cinquoenta legoas, por veer se poderya fazer presa em alguũ homem, ou sequer molher ou moco, pello qual satisfizesse aa voontade de seu senhor. (61)
>
> (And because he saw...a great multitude of sea-wolves...he caused his men to kill as many as they could, and with their skins he loaded his ship—for either because they were so easy to kill, or because the bent of our men was towards such an action, they made among those wolves a very great slaughter.
>
> But with all this Affonso Gonçalvez was not satisfied, because he had not taken one of those Moors, so going on beyond this for a space of fifty leagues to see if he could make captive some man, woman, or child, by which to satisfy the will of his Lord...)

People and animals coalesce semantically again as Zurara reports on an expedition in 1443 that reached the island of Arguim. On that occasion discovering the island and seizing the natives, and discovering a neighboring one and capturing numerous royal herons, form part of a seamless narrative in which islands, birds, and human captives are all registered as booty. Success in "fazer presa" or "making booty" as the narrator's primary topic allows him to foreground the actions and experiences of the Portuguese parties. Subsequently the remaining chapters of the narrative become an almost monotonous chronicle of the geography of conquest, that is to say of place names, the list of Portuguese adventurers involved, and a detailing of the number of Moors "que tomarom" (that they took). As "objects" in this narrative of mercantile speculation and predatory success, the humanity of the captives is again submerged.

While it is important to point out the suppression of the humanity of the natives

in Zurara's protocolonialist account, it is also important to recognize that this depiction of them as less than human is only an attempt at objectification, one that is ideologically necessary to narrative triumphalism and rooted in the will to power. In the analogous case of the discourse of slavery and racism in the United States, Cassuto argues that "humans just can't see other people as nonpersons for long" (17), and suggests that such human objectification in fact "never fully succeeds" (16). He locates the objectification principle in the "desire for superiority," since our anthropomorphic instincts predispose us to recognize our common humanity (19). It turns out that the text's restoration of the humanity of the captives, in spite of the chronicler himself, perhaps, is never far away, as he narrates how the Moorish natives at the island of Naar flee in panic before the Portuguese onslaught:

> Ally poderiees veer *madres* desemparar *filhos*, e *maridos molheres*, trabalhando cadahuũ de fogir quanto mais podya. E huũs se afogavam sob as auguas, outros pensavam de guarecer sob suas cabanas, outros scondyam os filhos de baixo dos limos, por cuidarem de os scapar, onde os despois achavom. (104, emphasis added)
> (Then you might see *mothers* forsaking their *children*, and *husbands* their *wives*, each striving to escape as best he could. Some drowned themselves in the water; others thought to escape by hiding under their huts; others stowed their children among the seaweed, where our men found them afterwards, hoping they would thus escape notice.)

The reconstruction of the human family in this passage betrays the recognition of the essential humanity of the Moors. A careful tally of the surviving ones is made immediately, however, and we are told that some are "stored" (as merchandise) in small boats to await the arrival of the larger caravels for eventual transport to Portugal. What the passage also highlights is the narrator's semantic instability in naming them firstly one thing and then another. In the denial and subsequent acknowledgement of their personhood, the Moors as captives are suspended somewhere between the animate and the inanimate.

It turns out that location in the narrative is a key factor in the ontological appreciation of the prisoners. If in describing them in the islands and on the African coast they are seen primarily as material spoils of conquest with eagerly anticipated market value, and thus objectified, on the mainland they are rehumanized. When the first group is put up for public auction at Lagos, the contradiction of a campaign to Christianize that is also a campaign to conquer and enslave is exposed. The ethical and moral problem that emerges further throws off kilter the chronicler's rhetorical premise of praising the prince who brought so many pagans into the way of salvation. In spite of a tradition in commercial law that made slaves marketable as (*cousas*) things, and in spite of his prior placement of them in the class of plants and animals, as Zurara relates the episode of the auction, the human subjectivity of the prisoners imposes itself. Their loud lamentations are too striking to be ignored. So too is the graphic image of children struggling with their captors to resist separation from their parents, or that of mothers who cling to their offspring for as long as possible,

valiantly disregarding the blows they receive from their captors. That this brutality violates a wider moral consensus, and that the townsfolk who had come to witness the novelty empathize with the tragedy of the captives *as fellow humans* to the extent of disrupting the proceedings, emphasizes the ultimate failure of the (narrative and legal) attempts at objectification. In the end the commoners have to be restrained for the mass sale to be successfully completed. The chronicler, spokesperson for the business interests of the aristocracy, finds it an opportune moment to commiserate with the captives as he also claims that he wept "piadosamente o seu padecimento" (124) (in pity for their sufferings).

This, however, is one of the few moments that the narrative recognizes their victimization. Although some historians highlight the chronicler's response to their plight,[15] it is pertinent to note that Zurara's sympathy is short lived. His role as apologist reasserts itself as he extracts the Infante from any moral responsibility and advances justification after the fact for the capture and enslavement of the foreigners. He clarifies for posterity that the pleasure the Infante expresses at the success of his captains is based purely on the "salvaçom daquellas almas que ante eram perdidas" (127-127) (salvation of those souls that before were lost). The human agency of mercantile speculation is therefore replaced in the narrative by the workings of fate, and the goddess Fortune is assigned a role in the present predicament of the prisoners and in their future deliverance (125).

Faced by the morally unbecoming image of the prince astride his powerful steed claiming his "royal fifth" of the wailing men, women, and children, and redistributing them in lordly fashion among his followers, Zurara resorts to stressing the compensatory value of Eurochristian culture for the captives. It is a device that is often used, in obvious dismissal of the prisoners' own heritage and cultural specificity. It emphasizes the spiritual as well as the material superiority of Christendom. The chronicler's claims regarding the compensatory value of Christian culture for these foreigners range from assertions of their benign treatment as slaves and their happy integration into Portuguese society, to their joyful acceptance of Christian sacraments and their dismissal of the false prophet Mohammed (129)(14). On one occasion in a remarkable display of cognitive dissonance he laments that some Moors choose to flee upon witnessing the decimation of their companions, rather than surrender to the Christian slave hunters and thereby guarantee eternal salvation for their souls:

> E finalmente forom ally presos per toda gente lvij: alguũs forom mortos, e outros fogirom. Oo e se assy fora que em aquestes que fogyam ouvera huũ pequeno de conhecimento das cousas mais altas! Por certo eu creeo, que aquella meesma trigança que levam fogindo, trouveram por se viir pera onde salvassem suas almas, e repairassem suas vidas. (296)
> (And finally of all the people there were taken, fifty-seven; some others were killed and again some others escaped. Oh, if only among those who fled there had been some little understanding of higher things. Of a surety I believe, that the same haste which they showed in flying, they would then have made in coming to where they might have saved their souls and restored their things in this life.)

Zurara's compensatory arguments are premised on Aristotelian notions of the natural inferiority of some people, that is, their natural enslavability, and on the thinking of medieval theologians that further justified the subjection of non-believers. According to thirteenth-century thinker Egidio Colonna, unacceptable norms of dress, housing, and diet, as well as the lack of laws and a stable government placed some peoples closer to the beasts than to civilized humanity. Bestiality meant enslavability. Zurara's colonialist justification is both derivative and prescriptive as he not only details the foreigners' paganness, but their apparent lack of reason and industry, their nakedness, lack of houses, and the fact that they seemed to only know how to live "em hũa occiosidade bestial" (129) (in a bestial sloth). The gross cultural chauvinism apparent in assuming that the surviving captives would be better off living among us "em senhoryo alheo" (296) (under an alien rule), or that on account their ignorance of Christianity and their bestiality their own culture represented "muyto mayor cativerio" (296) (much greater captivity), would later become ideological cornerstones of colonialism and the Atlantic slave trade.[16] For Thomas Aquinas, thirteenth-century Aristotelian scholar to whom he often alludes, to the extent that unbelievers might, however indirectly, stand in the way of the diffusion of Catholicism, war might justly be waged against them. Additionally, deterring the possible proliferation of any non-Christian doctrine, or reducing the lands or goods of the adherents to alien religions was seen as justification for Christian offensives.

Zurara's ideological framework also incorporarted the Augustinian doctrine that enslavability is premised on divine punishment for sin. Whereas the Idzāgen tribesmen of the Moroccan littoral were the approved enemy because they were Muslim, and the offshore islanders might be preyed upon because they were seen as primitives, it is the original sin of Noah's son Ham staring upon his father's nakedness that is invoked to justify the enslavement of the Black Africans in this process. A millenium before Christ the ancient Hebrews had used Noah's mythical curse upon the descendants of Ham's son Canaan to celebrate their military conquest in the Land of Canaan and to justify the enslavement of its inhabitants. This power myth originating in a racially homogenous context would come to apply to Syrian, Slav, and Black African captives over time. It would also be assumed by Islamic slave ideology.[17]

The Hamitic myth makes its appearance earlier in the text to explain the presence of some enslaved Blacks among Moorish prisoners, because, Zurara asserts, "[d]a maldiçom, que despois do deluvyo lançou Noe sobre seu filho Caym...que a sua geeraçom fosse sogeita a todallas outras geeraçooes do mundo" (88) (of the curse which, after the Deluge, Noah laid upon his son Cain [sic]...that his race should be subject to all the other races of the world). It buttresses an also prevalent racial prejudice that he expresses at Lagos, that associated Whiteness with beauty and the divine and Blackness with their polar opposites, ugliness and devilry.

> Os quaaes, postos juntamente naquelle campo, era hũa maravilhosa cousa de veer, ca antre elles avya alguũs de razoada brancura, fremosos e apostos; outros menos brancos, que queryam semelhar pardos; outros tam negros come tiopios, tam desafeiçoados, assy

> nas caras como nos corpos, que casy parecia, aos homees que os esguardavam, que vyam as imagees do imisperyo mais baixo. (125)
> (And these, placed all together in that field, were a marvelous sight; for amongst them were some white enough, fair to look upon, and well proportioned; others were less white like mulattoes; others again were as black as Ethiops, and so ugly, both in features and in body, as almost to appear (to those who saw them) the images of a lower hemisphere.)[18]

The Manichean projection by which Blacks are assigned a negative aesthetic value and associated with evil or a "lower hemisphere" had been articulated by theologians like Origen and Jerome as far back as the fourth century.[19] It persisted in the popular imagination in contemporary Spanish and Portuguese lyric poetry. In its coherent articulation of past and present ideologies of racial and cultural superiority, Zurara's chronicle of discovery and conquest, written at the beginning of the expansionist age, becomes an important foundational document for colonialism and trans-Atlantic slavery.

In his panegyric to the Infante, Zurara stresses the geopolitical value of the 1415 conquest of Ceuta, and the strategic importance of finding an Atlantic sea route to an undefined point in southern "Guinée" that would allow the Portuguese to attack the Infidel from the rear. Ceuta was not only the launching point for D. Henrique's fame as the "Navigator," it was also pivotal to his prestige in terms of statesmanship. Located at the northern-most tip of a centuries-old trans-Saharan trade route, it was an important commercial entrepôt. The prisoners from the Ceuta campaign confirmed the old supposition that the source of the gold trade controlled by the Muslims lay south of the Sahara, as had been represented by the 1375 Catalan Atlas which showed the emperor of Mali with a golden orb in his hand. The ensuing gold trade that D. Henrique's voyages made possible, allowed the mint in Lisbon to strike gold coinage in 1457; an important event since Portugal had not had its own gold currency since 1383. Significantly the coin was called the *cruzado*.

Zurara's chronicle brings together the interrrelated topics of Portuguese maritime expansion, the Crusade, and the civilizing mission. He quotes at length the bull by which Eugenius IV in 1442 granted the Infante the monopoly over exploration and trade in the as yet unmapped areas from which Antão Gonzalves and Nuno Tristão had brought the first captives the year before.[20] The citation highlights the ideological oneness and the close structural relationship between the curia and the Portuguese royal house. In the case of the Ceuta campaign of 1415, a similar letter from the pope had authorized the venture in terms of a crusade and provided plenary indulgences to the soldiers involved. Such bulls would become the legitimizing instrument for future colonial (dis)posession most notably at the end of the century when the trans-Atlantic voyages of Columbus initiated the period of Spanish imperial ascendancy.[21]

The bulls were premised on the evangelical principle of the world as a potential *civitas dei*, with the pope, as God's earthly representative, empowered to apportion material and spiritual prerogatives to designated Champions of the Faith. The Christian world order, as Pagden observes, knew "no natural

frontiers" (31), as "propagating of Christian religion to such people as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God," or the more candid objectives, "to plant Christian religion, to traffic, to conquer" (36), became almost a formula by the end of the sixteenth century. Pagden's quotation from the writings of Richard Hakluyt, British geographer and colonialist, indicates a unanimity of intent and content in colonial discourse, both within and without the papal orbit, that had been expressed by Spain and France, the other major colonial powers, in the intervening century and a half.[22] In the fifteenth century, according to Barreto, God handpicked the Infante for this mission (322). Portugal was charged with the responsibility "of transforming the world into an immense City of God."[23]

A.J.R. Russell-Wood shares this idea of Christ becoming a nationalized deity, or "warrior god" for post-medieval Portugal, one who would provide strength and protection to the nation in exchange for their commitment to defend and extend Christendom (27). The bull Romanus Pontifex, issued by Nicholas V on January 8, 1455, came after the challenge by Castilian interlopers in 1452-53 for access to the Atlantic trade. It confirmed the pope's previous letter Dum Diversas of 1452, congratulating D.Henrique for his "most pious and noble work," and endorsed his monopoly of discovery and trade (23). Because of its specificity, it has been termed "the charter of Portuguese imperialism" (Boxer 21). As it turns out, the bull offers a remarkable intertextual and ideological counterpoint to Zurara's narrative. The stylized fictionalization of the *Crónica* projects the Infante as an epic hero. He is also a privileged and faithful instrument of God in the eternal cause of good against evil. But in the bull the Infante is not the hierarchical superior that he is for the chronicler, he is the highly approved "son" of Nicholas V, the ecclesiastical "father."

Pierre Bourdieu's notion of legal discourse as a creative speech which "brings into existence that which it utters," and which consequently supports "the dream of absolute power" (42), seems an apposite frame of reference for the sledgehammer legality of this document. Based on the notion of papal infallibility, and of the pope's apostolic authority as God's representative and spokesperson on earth, the "Romanus Pontifex" admits no question as to the righteousness of its premise or the status or identity of the Other. The Saracens (Moslems), Guineamen (Blacks), "enemies of the faith," gentiles, or pagans that it refers to all share the common denominator of being subject to Christian domination and conversion; apparently by the most direct and effective means available, violence. Neither does the harm to their physical selves, nor their material belongings, imply a moral or ethical deterrent to the belligerence of this document. D. Henrique's and king Alfonso's mandate is unambiguous. It is an unambiguity indicated in the semantics of repetition and emphasis. The Infante is authorized to:

> [I]nvade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the

> kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit...23

Considering that in Zurara's account surviving Moorish captives were regarded by Portugal's agents as divine "renumeraçom" (105) (reward) for the "trabalho que tiinham tomado por seu serviço" (105) (toil they had undergone in [H]is service), and that their military attacks were accompanied by loud invocations of "Santiago" and "São Jorge," the idea of Portugal's conversion of Christ into a warrior god hardly seems to be an exaggeration. The interpretation of Christian cosmology by the sixteenth-century African convert King Afonso 1 of Kongo appears to confirm the idea that this was the most evident value of the Christ-figure to post-medieval Christians. Afonso's military victory over his half-brother, a non-Christian, and his consequent accession to the throne, were entirely attributed by the new king to the divine intervention of the new god, by way of the miraculous appearance of Santiago (St. James Major) leading an army of armed horsemen. Upon seeing this vision, the forces of Mpanzu a Kitumu, the half-brother and putative usurper, fled.[24]

To the extent that Zurara's *Crónica* confirms the papal premise of the non-Christian world being a *terra nullius* or no-man's-land available for conversion and domination,[25] it assumes a foundational role in a broader discourse of power yet to be expressed through popular fiction, cartography, colonial administration, and at various levels of the vernacular. In its aggrandizement of the protagonists of colonialism, and its reduction of the Other to the status of *tabula rasa*, it bridges the gap between force and apologia in the colonial enterprise. Equally important are the omissions, accretions, and ambiguities that characterize its triumphalist rhetoric, especially to the extent that these promote racial supremacy or misrepresent colonialism in terms of benefaction and the civilizing mission. The sometimes-unsubtle sophistry that produced such myths as that of the happy slave, benign exploitation, and an equally happy integration of the latter into colonial society produced a discourse based on the silence of the subordinated. Even in attempting to conceal the relations of domination they describe, however, these myths highlight them.

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Notes

[1]Edgar Prestage, Editors' Preface to *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea* l. Translations of the quotations from the *Crónica* will be taken from this edition.

[2]*Europeans in West Africa 1450-1560* 3-4.

[3]See P.E.Hair, "Columbus from Guinea to America" 116, for example.

[4]Diaz rounded Africa's southernmost tip, the Cape of Good Hope, in 1488, da Gama reached Calicut in 1498, Cabral landed on the Brazilian coast in 1500, and Magalhães went around the globe between 1519-1521.

[5]At the time of Zurara's writing, there was already organized production of wheat, sugar, wax, honey and wood. See Chapter V. By 1498 Madeira was exporting sugar to England, Flanders, France, Brittany, Rome, Genoa, and Constantinople. See Greenfield and Verlinden.

[6]See, for example, A.C.De C.M Saunders, *Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal 1441-1555*, Hugh Thomas's *The Slave Trade*,

AJ.R. Russell-Wood's "Iberian Expansion and the Issue of Black Slavery: Changing Portuguese Attitudes, 1440-1770," Luis Felipe Barreto's "Gomes Eanes de Zurara e o problema da 'Crónica da Guiné," and C.R.Boxer's *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire: 1415-1825*.

[7]Zurara, Chapter 5.

[8]Hayden White alerts us to the writerly strategies of characterization, motific repetition, suppression and exaggeration of events, etc. and the way they contribute to the creation of meaning in the historical text. See "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," and "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact."

[9]See "A Man of his Time (and Peers): A New Look at Henry the Navigator" 78.

[10]"Luxurya nem avareza nunca em seu peito ouverom repouso...que toda sua vida passou em limpa castidade." 18 (Neither lust nor avarice found a home within his breast...all his life was passed in purest chastity." See also Ivana Elbl, "A Man of his Time (and Peers)."

[11]A.J.R. Russell-Wood puts this number at 50,000. See "Before Columbus: Portugal's African Prelude to the Middle Passage and Contribution to Discourse on Race and Slavery" 140.

[12]See Greenfield "Madeira and the Beginnings of New World Sugar Cane Cultivation and Plantation Slavery: A Study in Institution Building" 51.

[13]See chapters 79-82. The settlement of the Madeiras is related in chapter 83.

[14]In relating the event Zurara claimed credit for Portugal's maritime leadership suggesting that its seamen had gone "where none had gone before" (Chapter 7) presaging thereby a motif that would be a constant in the national epic, *Os Lusíadas* (1572), by Luís de Camões.

[15]See, for example, Saunders 35. Thomas uses Zurara's rhetorical question "What heart could be so hard (as not to be pierced by piteous feeling to see that company?) as title and epigraph to his first chapter 22.

[16]Political and cultural superiority is also taken for granted in the Spanish *Requirimiento*, an imperialist document that called for political and cultural surrender from natives in America. The accompanying demonization of Aztec gods by 16th century Spanish priest Bernardino de Sahagún offers a striking example of this. See *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*. Pagden and Pieterse study the supremacist premise in French and British colonial and travel writing.

[17]See Mckee Evans "From the Land of Canaan to the Land of Guinea: The Strange Odyssey of the "Sons of Ham."

[18]Thomas comments on the racial diversity of the group by reminding us that the previous seven centuries had been a period of Islamic hegemony during which White Christians, victims of similar raids, had been enslaved in the North African Muslim Empire and could be easily absorbed into local African populations.

[19]See St. Clare Drake, *Black Folk Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology 58-59*.

[20]Zurara, Chapter 15.

[21]See Valentin Mudimbe, "Romanus Pontifex (1454) and the Expansion of Europe."

[22]The documents are respectively Hakluyt's *A Discourse on Western Plan*ting (1584), *and Pamphlet for the Virginia Enterprise* (1585). See Pagden's *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France c. 1500-c. 1800* 35.

[23]"Portugal tem como dever a transformação global do Mundo numa imensa cidade de Deus..." 335.

[24]See Thornton's "Perspectives on African Christianity" 173.

[25]See Valentin Mudimbe, "Romanus Pontifex (1454) and the Expansion of Europe."

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Transformative Belief: Re-Creating the World Through Story and Ritual in Simone Schwarz-Bart's *The Bridge of Beyond* and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*

by Geta LeSeur

"Just like that chicken coop, everything got four sides. All of it is the truth." (Mama Day)
"A little black dog appeared with eyes just like Ma Cia's." (Telumee)

Simone Schwarz-Bart's 1972 novel *The Bridge of Beyond* and Gloria Naylor's 1988 novel *Mama Day* are "about" many things. They represent insular matriarchal societies that are bound together by the powers of a grandmother/conjure woman, who derives her power from intimate contact with nature and personal knowledge of family and cultural history. Though they focus on different generations of the grandmother-apprentice relationship, both rest solidly on the foundation of the grandmother/ancestor/goddess figure. Ma Cia (paired with Telumee's biological grandmother, Toussine) in *The Bridge of Beyond* and Mama Day (paired with Abigail, her sister and Cocoa's grandmother) in *Mama Day* serve as repositories of knowledge, objects of veneration and fear, and mentor/guides to the next generation of wise women, the granddaughters who will uphold their own and extended families through contact with their pasts stored/storied and transmitted to them by their "grandmothers."

The Bridge of Beyond is Telumee's own first-person recollection of growing up into the fullness of the grandmother role with Ma Cia and Toussine remembered as her mentors, protectors, and guides. *Mama Day*'s narrative focuses on Miranda (Mama) Day's relationship to Cocoa and Cocoa's husband George, and to her family and island's history more through her experiences, especially as her consciousness merges with the communal voice of Willow Springs. These matriarchs are wise women who define and sustain their family and community (though neither has biological children, both are honored with "mother" titles). They possess detailed knowledge of family history that intertwines with, supports, and is supported by, the communities they sustain. They exhibit acute powers of observation and deduction about the human heart and its relationships, purvey remedies from their rich store of herbal knowledge derived from long and intimate association with their chosen landscapes, and may even call upon supernatural powers to protect their family or community members from crises of disbelief or from the intrusion of dangerous outside forces. Revered as ancestor/goddess or witch (depending on the beholder's point of view), Ma Cia and Mama Day perpetuate the knowledge of folk arts including midwifery, healing, second sight, shapeshifting, control of nature, communication with spirits of the dead, even of power over life and death. They are spiritual leaders who represent the moral center of their communities as well as the culture bearers who remember and transmit history/story to receptive apprentices/initiates.

In other words, Ma Cia and Mama Day are extremely powerful women, creators and sustainers of very particular ways of life on their island homes. They have "real" power and possibly occult power as well, defined within their cultures' belief systems of *obeah* or *conjure*. Within their texts, they first appear to be the matriarchs of fading family lineages: Telumee (in *Bridge of Beyond*) has no children and her foster daughter Sonore disappears before

she can be properly instructed, while George's death barely saves Cocoa's life and only in her second marriage does she bear children to continue the Day women's line. But in Schwarz-Bart's and Naylor's hands these mother/priestess/goddess figures' lives and worldview transcend the boundaries imposed by place, time, and text.

Schwarz-Bart and Naylor ask more of their readers than that they willingly suspend their disbelief only for the duration of reading a novel about quaint old women and insular superstitions. Both Diaspora authors ask their readers to become engaged in the storytelling process that the characters perform and authors mediate to them as active story-listeners. They ask ultimately that readers/listeners move outside the limits of the novels' texts to join in creating the stories and to become storytellers themselves. They ask their readers to become witnesses—observers, but even more, proclaimers (in an almost Biblical sense) who are willing to testify about the lives and imaginative/imaginable universe that their novels offer to expand the great story of the "real world." There is an African belief that as long as someone calls a dead person's name that person continues to live. Similarly, characters "live" in the telling, hearing, and re-telling of their stories, whether in oral performance or in written texts attended by engaged imaginations. Telumee recalls her mother's mother's names even as Mama Day seeks out Sapphira Wade's forgotten name and prophesies that Cocoa will find it one day (notably, outside the boundaries of *Mama Day*'s text). Simone Schwarz-Bart and Gloria Naylor have created texts that ask their readers to continue calling out the names of their characters and communities and calling forth their lives into the "real world."

At a reasonably literal level, both Ma Cia and Mama Day demonstrate their powers as healers, using keen observation and medicinal herbs to cure illness. When Telumee falls sick after Elie abandons her, Ma Cia sends herbs whose sweet smell surrounds Telumee's home and helps restore her to both physical and emotional health. Mama Day diagnoses a child's croup and offers not only medicine but also sage advice to the young mother on how to keep her child healthy. In a more extended passage, Mama Day diagnoses Bernice's ills that are both physical and emotional from trying too hard to become pregnant. She administers choke cherry syrup to ease Bernice's pain but knows that the fertility chemicals she has ingested require treatment by a "scientific" doctor from "beyond the bridge." Dr. Smithfield recognizes Mama Day's abilities, as the communal island voice observes,

> For years Miranda and Brian Smithfield have had what you'd call a working relationship...he had a measure of respect for the way things was done here.... Although it hurt his pride at times, he'd admit inside it was usually no different than what he had to say himself—just plainer words and a slower cure than them concentrated drugs.... Being an outsider he couldn't be expected to believe the other things Miranda could do. But being a good doctor, he knew another one when he saw her. (*Mama Day* 84)

The mainland physician can treat Bernice's body, but Mama Day can treat her spirit, given Bernice's belief and cooperation in the process.

In *Mama Day*, Naylor presents a range of "doctors," from Dr. Smithfield, a licensed medical practitioner, to Mama Day, wise in herbs, human nature, and spiritual powers. She also presents Ruby, Mama Day's powerfully malevolent rootworker antagonist who is capable of seducing and poisoning minds and bodies. Doc Buzzard's imitation hoodoo of moonshine, neckbones, and haints is not in the same class of power, but he still possesses island wisdom and tries to counsel George from his experience. Naylor demonstrates that all these doctors are "effective," given appropriate circumstances and participants willing to believe in them. In some sense, the power they wield is no more a function of their own power than of the recipients' belief—an important concept to remember about the relationship between storytellers and audiences as well.

That Ruby knows poisonous plants and how to apply them to Cocoa's scalp is not hard to believe, nor is it unreasonable that Mama Day would know antidotes to physical poisons from plants on her island. But clearly Cocoa's illness is also spiritual and must be countered by spiritual powers wielded by a community of believers. It is like Telumee's malaise that can be cured only by a combination of healing herbs from Ma Cia, familial attention from Toussine, and restorative visits from community members who re-attach her broken life thread to the threads of community in *Bridge of Beyond*. Abigail's incessant singing of hymns and laying on of hands sooth and protect Cocoa until Mama Day and George can perform the ritual that saves her life and soul.

For both Ma Cia and Mama Day the most important healing is emotional or spiritual in nature. They provide remedies for disconnected souls and validation for lives that are denigrated and fragmented by the dominant culture represented by worlds across the bridge from their protected island havens. Roland Walter, in his article "The Dialectics Between Writing and Reading," argues that

> by means of structural and stylistic devices, Naylor determines the act of reading, leading the reader from the surface of the text to its deeper layer: the African-American magico-realist world-view and the implicit issues of cultural roots, history and identity. The text's "political unconscious" resides not only in Naylor's use of the text to implicitly acknowledge and write against the fading of this worldview but also in her delineation of the damaging consequences of such a loss: a fragmented identity that ultimately leads to the individual's death. (Walter 59)

George, with *his* world's way of defining reality and determining truth, invades Mama Day's island. Together they can defeat Ruby's evil power and save Cocoa, but his entire way of thinking and being must be transformed/enriched/expanded if he is to survive the experience.

The very nature of imagined and real (and their distinction, if it exists) comes into question on the literary islands of Guadeloupe and Willow Springs created by Schwarz-Bart and Naylor. That Ma Cia and Mama Day indeed have powers that defy rational explanation is simply a given for characters in the texts as well as for the authors. There is some debate over whether they are witches or goddesses, practitioners of black or white magic, but no doubt about the reality of their powers to shape their worlds and the lives of the

people who inhabit them. (In this sense the grandmother in both novels serve as surrogates for the creative authors/ storytellers even as the grandmothers are characterized as storytellers who convey their wisdom through tales and sayings.) The ultimate transformation can be the readers'/listeners'—if only they hear and act upon the persuasive cadences of the master storytellers' art.

For example, Uncle Abel shares rumshop rumors of Ma Cia turning into a great bird and attacking him. His male cronies agree that she is a fearsome witch. But when Toussine takes her to visit Ma Cia, Telumee sees that the legendary witch is only "an ordinary-looking little old woman" (*Bridge* 35). Like belief in the power of a hog's head placed in Ruby's yard or in Doc Buzzard's bones and spells, the power of fear and superstition grants power to the practitioner through others' belief. But Ma Cia's gifts are more important for transforming minds than in altering physical bodies. She connects Telumee to legacies of strength and independence with her admonition to be "a fine little Negress, a real drum with two sides. Let life bang and bump, but keep the underside always intact" (*Bridge* 39) as a way of defining herself apart from slave history and white exploitation. When Telumee works at the white Desaragnes' home she remembers Ma Cia's lesson and uses it to fight the denigrating attitudes and sexual advances of the former slave owning family with words of power from her ancestors. When her white mistress tries to intimidate her, Telumee thinks, "I took the words and sat on them with all my sturdy weight—white man's words, that's all" (*Bridge* 61). Though she is physically separated from her home, Telumee can call up and live among the images planted in her spirit by Ma Cia and Toussine: "Then Fond-Zombi was before my eyes and began to float up out of the slough.... it would always be reborn again in my memory—intact" (*Bridge* 59-60). As Mama Day says to Abigail, "The mind is everything" (*Mama Day* 90).

After Dr. Smithfield "cures" Bernice's body, Mama Day goes to work on her spirit to make her receptive to pregnancy. She tells her, "Folks say I can do things most can't do. Whether that's true or not, I can help you *if you are willing* to work with me as hard as you worked on that room [nursery]" (*Mama Day* 87 my emphasis). Mama Day gives Bernice "magic" pumpkin seeds to plant and tend, instructs her to relax and do handwork, even though she admits that is "disguis[ing] a little dose of nothing but mother-wit with a lot of hocus-pocus" (*Mama Day* 97). When Abigail challenges her methods Mama Day asserts, "The mind is a funny thing, Abigail—and a powerful thing at that. Bernice is gonna believe they are what I tell her they are—magic seeds. *And the only magic is that what she believes they are, they're gonna become*" (*Mama Day* 96 my emphasis). Even Abigail, Miranda's sister, the consummate insider, the one described as "like two peas in a pod," offers rational objections to Mama Day's prescription for Bernice. In this case, Gloria Naylor provides her audience with a skeptic with whom to identify and then lets Mama Day answer in terms that even someone from beyond the bridge can understand and accept. In this scene Abigail speaks for the reader/listener, actively involving the reading audience in an exchange that would be expected between an oral performer and porch sitters (to use Trudier Harris's analogy from *The Power of the Porch*).

About Bernice's quest for pregnancy Mama Day concludes, "Nothing would be real until the end. And in the end, Bernice would have to step over the last line by herself" (*Mama Day* 97).

After a season of preparation, Bernice goes with Mama Day to "the other place," an isolated ritual setting, rich in cosmogonic symbology: springtime, an ancestral house in a garden, chickens and eggs, a place where mysterious events can transpire. Mama Day meditates, "Would God forgive her for Bernice? But she wasn't changing the natural order of nothing, she couldn't if she tried. Just using what's there. And couldn't be *nothing wrong in helping Bernice to believe* that there's something more than there is. It's an old house with a big garden...And I'm just an old woman who'll be waiting in a rocking chair" (*Mama Day* 139 my emphasis). Of course the rocking chair resembles a throne of power and is connected through her ancestors to Sapphira Wade the founding mother of Willow Springs, Miranda's direct ancestress, the woman who controlled lightning and spoke with God. And Mama Day is not simply "an old woman," as any attentive reader must agree by this point in the novel. In "Recovering the Conjure Woman," Lindsey Tucker presents an extended interpretation of the "other place" as ritual setting. It is the navel of the Willow Springs universe, its heart and seat of power, the kind of place described by Mircea Eliade in his analysis of creation myths.

What "really" happens with Bernice and the egg at the other place? It does not matter, either in the novel's text or for a reader who is willing to enter into the liminal space of belief in things beyond a rationally explicable material world. It is no more necessary to know or understand the "facts" of the ritual that causes/allows Bernice's pregnancy than it is to explain Ma Cia's disappearance followed by the appearance of a little black dog with Ma Cia's eyes. In both cases, the authors have prepared their characters for belief in transformative experiences and expect readers to believe as well.

In *Bridge of Beyond*, Telumee's first person naïve recollection of her life events encourages readers to trust her personal narrative. For her, Ma Cia and events associated with her powers are not mysterious or malignant as the men at the rumshop would claim, but understandable lessons absorbed from her grandmother and grandmother's friend. Telumee's is the authoritative voice that readers have no reason to dispute in *Bridge of Beyond.* Gloria Naylor offers even more explicit help for a reading audience that she expects to be "outsiders" to a culture like that of Willow Springs and skeptical of powers like Mama Day's. She creates the communal voice of Willow Springs to personally address readers/listeners and invite their participation in creating the story. This island voice expects proper attention from the outset and brings listeners into the "storytelling interpretative community" (Robert Stepto's term, see Harris, *The Power of the Porch*) through language, attitude, and the humorous counter-example of Reema's boy. From the opening pages of the Day family tree, Sapphira's Deed of Sale, and the prologue spoken by the island voice fix readers' relationship to Mama Day, both the character and the text.

Naylor uses language to engage her reader/listener: the speaker uses folksy informal discourse, directly addressed to

the reader: "Everybody knows but nobody talks about the legend of Sapphira Wade. A true conjure woman: satin black, biscuit cream, red as Georgia clay: depending on which of us takes a mind to her" (*Mama Day* 3). Immediately the reader is pulled into the narrative through the inclusive language of "everybody" and "us," made curious about this conjure woman who was rumored to be a mischief maker or witch and whose color depends on point of view. Immediately the voice permits divergent understandings of some "facts" (like Sapphira's color or how she murdered Bascombe Wade) but at the same time it assumes agreement about the important issues (she could "grab a lightning bolt in her hand" and "persuaded [Bascombe Wade] to deed his slaves every inch of Willow Springs" (*Mama Day* 3).

Though Naylor does not write, "Sit down, children, and listen to my story" explicitly, the attitude of the Willow Springs voice is clearly, "You all want to listen and know how to listen; in fact you will listen right, not like Reema's boy." Even though Naylor/storyteller might assume that readers would be, or want to identify with, an educated, mainland type of audience, one trained to think rationally and self-reliantly and to believe only things they can see, the communal voice presents the anecdote about Reema's foolish son with humor and gentle ridicule to produce a calculated response from readers, "I won't be like that." Instead they want to participate in the storytelling community, to ask the right questions, be willing to hear and believe—even if some questions are left unanswered. The Willow Springs voice cajoles, admonishes, flatters, and promises rewards for readers who come to the story with the proper attitude:

> [Reema's boy] coulda listened to them the way you are listening to us right now.... Really listen this time: the only voice is your own. But you done just heard about the legend of Sapphira Wade....You done heard it the way we know it, sitting on our porches and shelling June peas... Pity, though, Reema's boy couldn't listen, like you,... or he woulda left here with quite a story. (*Mama Day* 10)

In fact, the time shift implies that the readers have already heard the stories and now the "only voice is your own," that is listeners have become re-tellers of Sapphira's legend, and most importantly, of its continuing life spreading through the world that the readers inhabit.

Reema's boy's fault is that he has been educated out of a way of knowing that is commonplace on the island of Willow Springs. He has forgotten his place and lost touch with the meaning behind the words. He looks for a literal meaning of the charged phrase "18 & 23" as the coordinates on a map and fails to understand their meaning as touchstones of land, liberty, and identity for the inhabitants of Willow Springs. When George searches maps futilely for the exact location of Willow Springs, he echoes Reema's boy's fallacy.

Both Schwarz-Bart's and Naylor's novels rest on dichotomies—island-mainland, black-white, spiritual-material, female-male, storyteller-story listeners—and consider the bridges that connect and divide the disparate realms of belief and experience. If their aim is for readers to imaginatively bridge the gap, connect two ways of being in the world, how can they accomplish this feat? In *Bridge of Beyond*, Schwarz-Bart opts for insularity,

projecting the safety of a tightly knit maroon-like community. The larger world is marginalized. Telumee goes across the bridge briefly to work for the Desaragnes, but retreats to Fond-Zombi; Amboise emigrates to France but returns to embrace to air, soil, and forests of Guadeloupe; and the intruder Angel Medard must die to save Telumee and protect the community. Schwarz-Bart memorializes a woman she knew and sets her experiences in a nostalgic past. The tone is elegiac, almost wistful, and the encroaching modern world at the novel's conclusion seems barely held at bay by the waning strength of an old woman standing alone in her garden. It is almost as if her time and world have passed. Only if the reader can be recruited to perpetuate the stories of the legendary Lougandor women will they continue to live.

Naylor's narrative celebrates more complex possibilities: inhabitants of Willow Springs cross the bridge for work and commerce but return to rituals like Candle Walk that inform and sustain their lives, and Mama Day and Dr. Smithfield have formed a respectful healing partnership. In Willow Springs some things stay the same, but others adapt and Mama Day underscores the need for change:

> Candle Walk was a way of getting help without feeling obliged... only had to be any bit of something, as long as it came from the earth and the work of your own hands....Things took a little different turn with the young folks having more money and working beyond the bridge....But Miranda, who is known to be far more wise than wicked, says there's nothing to worry about. In her young days Candle Walk was different still....And Miranda says that her daddy and his daddy said Candle Walk was different still....And even the youngsters who've begun complaining about having no Christmas instead of this "old 18 & 23 night" don't upset Miranda. It'll take generations, she says, for Willow Springs to stop doing it at all. And more generations again to stop talking about the time "when there used to be some kinda 18 & 23 going-on near December twenty-second." By then, she figures, it won't be the world as we know it no way—and so no need for the memory. (*Mama Day* 110-111)

Living ritual accommodates change and, like any good folklorist (not like Reema's boy), Mama Day knows it and helps her community retain the important connections while allowing the forms to evolve. Belief in the shared community values is paramount. It's rather like Bernice and the "magic" pumpkin seeds and chicken's egg; the important thing is not the form of the ritual but its meaning. Naylor celebrates the unique worldview of Willow Springs at the same time she suggests the possibility for adapting it to the world as defined by the mainland (or even, potentially, of shifting the mainlanders' belief system toward Mama Day's).

The question becomes, if Bernice, why not George? Cocoa's husband is a good man, hard worker, good provider. He has learned from Mrs. Jackson how to rely upon himself and to manipulate the world in accordance with his vision. He is an engineer who fixes things that he can see and touch. But he is baffled and frustrated by the alien species, woman, and by the female-centered island world of Willow Springs. When he finally visits Willow Springs he is respectful and eager to learn about his environment, if a little too

intent on pinning down its workings and fixing it on a map. He joins Doc Buzzard's poker game and analyzes how to win. But he misses the point. The islanders expect Doc Buzzard to cheat and expect to lose; it's their shared ritual at the still. George violates the rules of their game and becomes drunk on moonshine when he tries to fit back into a society he cannot truly understand. But the damage is done. He fails his test at the still, the men's "other place." He figures out the game and alters the dynamics of belief and power. But Doc Buzzard's is imitation power when compared to Ruby's rootwork and Mama Day's ancestral power unleashed to protect Cocoa, the end of the Day line. George fails the test in the chicken coop too, because he cannot relinquish his rational mainlander's ways.

Most critics focus on George or on George and his relationship with Cocoa. It is a reasonable choice because he represents "people like us," modern, rational human beings who trust what they can see and touch and who reject superstition, someone readers and critics "can identify with." And that is exactly the point, we are too much like George to fit into Willow Springs's sensibility—that's the trap the island voice warns readers about in the prologue with the anecdote of Reema's boy. If Reema's boy is the comedy, George's story is the tragedy on Willow Springs's stage. It is to George's credit that he is not totally without a poetic or artistic side; he enjoys Shakespeare and recognizes the beauty of the handmade quilt Cocoa's relatives make for them. But he wants to hang the quilt on the wall as a piece of art while Cocoa knows that it is meant to cover the bed with pieces of the Day family past, to bless the place where they come together and the Day lineage could be extended through their children.

George is afflicted with what Susan Meisenheider calls "white men's scripts" and a weak heart, both of which limit his ability to see past his upbringing to embrace the communal nature of Willow Springs society and believe (letting go of his need to rationally understand) how to save Cocoa from Ruby's poison. As Meisenheider points out, George has adopted a movie script for his relationship with Cocoa. He sees himself as a romantic hero who will save *his* woman and return her to her place at his side. This script does not work in the Willow Springs founded by Sapphira Wade. After the big storm, George surveys the wreckage and muses, "A week in Willow Springs was enough to understand that words spoken here operated on a different plane through a whole morass of history and circumstances that I was not privy to" (*Mama Day* 256). And the challenge to his rational, self-reliant preconceptions is only beginning. His wife is sick beyond remedy from scientific medicine or herbal lore, betrayed by the poison rubbed into her scalp under the guise of Ruby's friendship and childhood comforts of hairbraiding. Cocoa suffers from a disease that he cannot even see (only the women see her distorted skin and feel the worms). As usual Mama Day knows what she needs, and discusses it with her sister Abigail: "'I believe there's a power greater than hate.' 'Yes, and that's what we gotta depend on—that and George.' 'That boy's from beyond the bridge, Miranda....We ain't even got his kind of words to tell him what's going on.' '*Some things can be known without words*'" (*Mama Day* 267 my emphasis). At Mama Day's request, Doc Buzzard tries to explain what needs to be done, but

typically George rejects solutions that he cannot understand: "What do you do when someone starts telling you something that you just cannot believe? Walk away ...challenge him...laugh if it wasn't so pathetic: the grizzled old man with his hat of rooster feathers and his necklace of bones" (*Mama Day* 287).

Just before George takes the walk to meet Mama Day at the other place, Doc Buzzard tries once more to school him for his quest but George asserts: "'I've got work to do. And if you're worried about us, you can stop. We're going to be fine *because I believe in myself*" (*Mama Day* 292 my emphasis). Doc Buzzard, joining his voice to all those who love and want to save Cocoa, admonishes George:

> "That's where folks start, boy—not where they finish up. Yes, I said boy. 'Cause a man would have grown enough to know that really believing in himself means that he ain't gotta be afraid to admit there's some things he just can't do alone. Ain't nobody asking you to believe in what Ruby done to Cocoa —but can you, at least, believe that you ain't the only one who'd give their life to help her?" (*Mama Day* 292)

George almost escapes his outsider, male, rational, self-reliant script when he undertakes his quest to the chicken coop at the "other place." In *Gloria Naylor: In Search of Sanctuary*, Virginia Fowler characterizes his difficulty: "George cannot entertain the possibility of a reality different from or larger than the empirical world to which he anchors himself" (Fowler 108).

Later Fowler says, "George reveals himself as unable or unwilling to read the reality of Willow Springs correctly" (111). His heart is too weak (both literally and metaphorically) for he cannot escape his need to understand Mama Day's instructions and the urge to save his wife with his own hands, alone. He disregards Doc Buzzard's and Mama Day's instructions to admit that he cannot do this thing alone, that he must join his hands with others and demonstrate his love for Cocoa in a way that other men who loved Day women could not, by letting go. He needs to control her destiny and kills himself by taking his own path, rather than returning from the chicken coop with what Mama Day had asked him to bring back: his empty hands and willing spirit. He fails to believe enough in unseen powers supported through communal faith, and like Bascombe Wade and John-Paul Day before him, George dies of a broken heart. His reality is too literal, too rational. Both Doc Buzzard and Mama Day know that just because he cannot see or touch something doesn't mean it is not real.

Mama Day admits her need for George's help and reinforces Cocoa's dire need: "I can do more things with these hands than most folks dream of—no less believe—but this time they ain't no good alone ...she's (Cocoa) suffering from something more than the flesh, I can't do a thing without you" (*Mama Day* 294). But George hears the words without understanding or believing, "Well, you're talking in a lot of metaphors" (*Mama Day* 292), and rejects her explanations as "this mumbo-jumbo" (*Mama Day* 293), placing her instructions in the same category as Doc Buzzard's bones and spells. He does not listen properly or respect her oft-demonstrated abilities. Naylor gives readers a choice: to side with George the skeptic (there's no such thing as worms

under Cocoa's skin and riddles about chicken coops certainly cannot cure her) or to embrace the liminal possibilities of the "other place" that helped Bernice conceive a baby. It is fundamentally a matter of belief, belief that leads to right action, but it requires a capitulation of control and rationality that George labels "weakness" (*Mama Day* 296). George almost achieves an epiphany as he thinks, "Bring me straight back whatever you find there. But there was nothing to bring her. Bring me straight back whatever you find. Could it be that she wanted nothing but my hands?" (*Mama Day* 300). George fails the hero's test; he cannot bring himself to follow the wise woman's instructions fully: "There was nothing that old woman could do with a pair of empty hands.... All of this wasted effort when these were *my* hands, and there was no way I was going to let you go" (*Mama Day* 301).

If George is a classical tragic hero, his flaw is his hubris, his belief in himself and his ability to save Cocoa alone, his way. George's misplaced emphasis on self-reliance leads directly to his death. Gary Storhoff offers an orthodox Jungian interpretation of the chicken coop scene as George's failure to embrace his *anima* contrasted to Mama Day's full integration of her *animus* when she looks into the well and sees her hands like John-Paul's. It is not necessary to force an orthodox Jungian reading, though it does suggest one very particular approach to understanding why George fails to save himself and to cure Cocoa.

Another useful consideration would be to recognize how George repeats the history of male-female distrust and master-slave power imbalance. Like Bascombe Wade and John-Paul he tries to hold on too tightly, to possess *his* Day woman, and loses in the end. He's just "another one who broke his heart 'cause he couldn't let her go" (*Mama Day* 308). But his sacrificial death saves Cocoa. Perhaps his death finally atones for the "sins of the fathers" before him and betokens reconciliation and the building of a bridge that no physical storm can destroy. Paula Eckard lauds George for helping Mama Day construct a metaphorical "bridge" between place, memory, and life for Cocoa to walk

> over....He ends up sacrificing his own life, but in doing so George ironically becomes fully assimilated into the community. Although he had no personal history of his own, through death George contributes to the collective history of Willow Springs and becomes part of its lore and memory. (132)

He lives on, his voice joining the other whispers among the oaks of Willow Springs. A careful reader should notice that most of the action in *Mama Day* is past—back in the year of the great hurricane, 1985 or so—while the time present, announced by the communal voice, is August 1999 (*Mama Day* 10). When Cocoa visits Willow Springs and talks to George in the text he has "really" been dead for several years, she is living in South Carolina, remarried, and has two children. In time present George's voice joins the voices of the ancestors, voices that those who are properly initiated and listen rightly can hear. Readers "hear" him speak; we have heard his voice throughout *Mama Day* even though the only voice speaking is "our own."

As several commentators have pointed out, Gloria Naylor invites her readers to become creators of the text, tellers of the

tale, recreating characters and events that presuppose and substantiate a worldview. Under her tutelage (and through the voices from Willow Springs) we have become different from Reema's boy and more than what George was. From the beginning, Naylor lets her readers "create the story" by choosing among versions of how Sapphira murdered Bascombe Wade—suffocates him, stabs with a dagger, or poisons him—and by resisting a rational explanation for how she disappeared—flew back to Africa but still resides in Willow Springs. Through the text of *Mama Day* she allows us to imagine Bernice's transformation into mother, Cocoa's hideous malaise, and George's struggles in the chicken coop—not what happened, but what it means. Remember again the prologue's cautionary tale of Reema's boy who didn't know what questions to ask, whom to ask, or how to listen. We are reminded to ask the proper questions. We should not ask how Bernice becomes pregnant, but how the mind/heart can create a body receptive to impregnation? Nor should we ask how the empty hands of a hero can save a woman, but rather how his hands can be joined to others' hands to save the woman, hero, *and* community? Of the concluding image of a woman with gray-streaked hair "sitting on the rise over the Sound," one with a "face that's been given the meaning of peace" (*Mama Day* 312) we should not be intent on choosing among the possibilities—Sapphira, Ophelia, Miranda, Cocoa—but embrace the paradox that she is each of them and all of them, living at peace on her island home.

Simone Schwarz-Bart and Gloria Naylor do not expect their readers to understand rationally the powers displayed by Ma Cia and Mama Day, but they do want us to learn to believe that they might exist and to ponder what could happen if the world were re-created in the image of Fond-Zombi or Willow Springs. In "Metaphor and Maternity in *Mama Day*," Amy Levin concludes:

> In *Mama Day* Naylor asks us to hear in our own voice (*Mama Day* 10) the mystical knowledge of that "other place" where rationalistic laws of the mainland "don't apply" (*Mama Day* 5). Reading the secrets of *Mama Day* we, too, are initiated into her wisdom, so that ultimately the text reaches out to us, replicating the relationship between Mama Day and Cocoa in the bond between author and reader. (87)

When preparing for Candle Walk, Mama Day speaks to George's spirit, "One day she'll [Cocoa] hear you, like you're hearing me. And there'll be another time —that I won't be here for—when she'll learn about the beginning of the Days" (*Mama Day* 308). Mama Day can go toward her place in the family plot assured that "the rest will lay in the hands of Baby Girl [Cocoa]—*once she learns how to listen*" (*Mama Day* 307 my emphasis). Through Mama Day's training of Cocoa, Gloria Naylor instructs her readers: listen and believe.

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Women's Diasporic Dialogues: Redefining Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Identity in Rojas' *El columpio de Rey Spencer* and Chiriboga's *Jonatás y Manuela*

By Lesley Feracho

In cultures ranging from precolombine Latin American to African to European, the development, preservation and continuation of important socio-cultural, familial and historical beliefs is achieved through memory and stories. Through these forms of gathering and transmitting information particular societies acquire an understanding of both the individual and the collective. While written expression is one manifestation of this development, I would like to emphasize in this study the significance of the oral tradition to definitions of the individual and collective. As Trinh Minh-ha observes in *Woman, Native, Other*: "Storytelling, the oldest form of building historical consciousness in community, constitutes a rich oral legacy, whose values have regained all importance recently, especially in the context of writings by women of color."(148)

In diasporic Black women's writing in particular, if we are to fully grasp the experiences of their respective communities the dissemination of information must be joined with a recognition of the significance of migrations across borders in bringing them together. As Carole Boyce Davies notes, the renegotiation of Black women's experiences takes place on individual, collective and various temporal levels, constituting what she designates as "migratory subjects" suggesting: "...that Black women's writing cannot be located and framed in terms of one specific place, but exists in myriad places and times, constantly eluding the terms of the discussion."(36)

The convergence of multiple places and times emphasizes that the interaction of the present and past must be recognized in order to understand Black women's self-expression and future development. Nowhere is multiplicity and mobility more evident on both a regional and diasporic level than in the Caribbean, where, according to Davies "...identities then are products of numerous processes of migration" (13). According to Benítez-Rojo it is this multiplicity that gives the region its fluid nature:

> ...el Caribe no es un archipiélago común, sino un meta-archipiélago...y como tal tiene la virtud de carecer de límites y de centro...El Caribe es el reino natural e impredecible de las corrientes marinas, de las ondas, de los pliegues y repliegues, de la fluidez y las sinuosidades....(iv, xiv)

Because of the convergence of peoples and histories in at times violent clashes, Benítez-Rojo's definition of the Caribbean as a site of imprecision is especially significant when we look at the effects of migration on the region. While the region has been indelibly marked and shaped by slavery, the cultures of these communities of "migratory subjects" have also been maintained and redefined by the extensive border crossings occurring since the 15th-16th centuries.

The oral tradition can in fact be a critical key to comprehending how migrations shape one of the greater modern representations of community: the nation. The link of orality and New World literatures by writers of African descent is an especially significant connection in understanding the diasporic ties created across nations by slavery and perpetuated with continued migrations of the twentieth

century. As J. Bekunuru Kubayanda observes:

> ...as new critical modes and codes are developed alongside the Eurocentric parameters of literary historiography, one can no longer make a competent reading of certain Latin American and Caribbean texts without a reference to the African oral-traditional legacies of discourse about the world. (5)

Kubayanda goes on to note that "...many "African" variables underpin the creative writing of the New World from Barbados and Brazil to Cuba and Colombia...." (5). In this statement he recognizes that African based literary analyses of cultural elements like oral traditions provide an important counterpoint to European based modes of critical analysis by emphasizing social and literary connections that form the foundation of Diaspora. This has been evident for example, in works by women of the African diaspora throughout the Americas, including the Spanish speaking Caribbean and of Latin America. The importance of storytelling to forming alliances can be found in the works of African-American authors like Toni Morrison. Her novel *Beloved*, speaks in particular to the function of a concept she calls "re-memory" as a means of reconstructing community. As Boyce Davies notes:

> ...Toni Morrison in *Beloved* makes re-memory central to the experience of that novel...Morrison is clearly talking here about crossing the boundaries of space, time, history, place, language, corporeality and restricted consciousness in order to make reconnections and mark or name gaps and absences....The process of re-membering is therefore one of boundary crossing. (17)

In this study I will focus on the novel *El columpio de Rey Spencer* by Cuban novelist Marta Rojas and the historical novel *Jonatás y Manuela* by the Ecuadorian writer Luz Argentina Chiriboga to demonstrate how women of African descent use African oral traditional rhetoric, and a process similar to (yet more far-reaching than) Morrison's re-memory to achieve the redefinition of national identity, and the reevaluation of Caribbean identity. As a final result, the "boundary crossing" that storytelling and "re-memory" in these two novels facilitate becomes the affirmation of a more encompassing collectivity that goes beyond the diasporic. While I will emphasize Marta Rojas' text as a clear demonstration of the oral based reconceptualization of a specific Cuban and Caribbean history, I will end with Argentina Chiriboga's text as an example of Black women writers' general use of orality to rewrite the larger context of transnational identities.

Ruth Finnegan defines oral tradition as a literature born of performance formulated for specific occasions (2), yet she notes that the stories have historically had multiple purposes (Finnegan 377). Because of social and gendered organizations of the home and work, women often times were given the responsibility of taking care of and educating their children as well as participating in non-professional public ceremonies and gatherings as poets or storytellers (Finnegan 98, 375). In *African Oral Literature* Isidore Okpewho notes that oral literature has also been instrumental in capturing the experiences of each community member's rites of passage through the five stages of life. The functions of these literatures range from

explaining aspects of nature and the universe to protecting communal self-definition (110-119). It is this last application that is of special importance in both Rojas' and Chiriboga's texts. As Okpewho states:

> A much wider service provided by oral literature is to give the society-whether isolated groups within it or the citizenry as a whole-a collective sense of who they are and to help them define or comprehend the world at large in terms both familiar and positive to them. To protect these common interests, they often tend to develop and circulate pieces of oral information (whether in songs or in stories) that will help them feel a certain sense of security in the face of other contending groups within the society... (110)

The oral tradition thus becomes a tool through which the specific community engages both their past history and present surroundings in a protective, interactive redefinition of themselves. Consequently, in the face of uncertain and at times marginalizing social and political institutions the larger national space is also protected and redefined.

Rojas' latest work *El columpio de Rey Spencer* is different from her other texts in that it highlights the use of oral tradition as an instrument of the socially marginalized. She was born in 1931 in Santiago de Cuba after the literary movements of Modernism and Negrismo had spread throughout the region and devoted her early life to journalism. In the decades of the 1960's and 1970's Rojas achieved her greatest literary production with texts of fiction and non-fiction whose topics reflected the themes of resistance and rebellion in Cuba, the Americas in general and Asia (Busby 411). Her first book *La generación del centenario en el Juicio de Moncada.* (1964) was a historical testimony depicting Fidel Castro's trial for his 1953 attack on the Moncada barracks. Later works like *Scenas de Viet Nam* (1959) and *Viet Nam del Sur* (1966) were based on her experiences as a war correspondent. In the 1970's Rojas wrote *Tania, la guerrillera inolvidable* (1971) and *El que debe vivir* (which won the Casa de las Américas prize in 1978) which continued to draw from her journalistic pieces and explored the emotions and ideals of resistance and survival on both individual and group levels throughout the world. (Busby 411-412). In *El columpio* Rojas expands her vision by looking at a specific period of Cuban history in the early twentieth century when issues of migration revealed that although the divisions between definitions of Cubanness and otherness were seemingly rigidly drawn, they were in fact quite permeable.

In this novel two of the protagonists, Juliana and Andrés, recall their relationship and family history. André's black Jamaican mother, Clara Spencer, migrated to Cuba in the 1920's with many other Jamaicans looking for work in plantations and related areas, encouraged by U.S. sugar companies seeking cheap labor. Juliana and Andrés' love story is placed alongside the forbidden affair of Clara Spencer and Arturo Cassamajour, a mulatto doctor of Haitian descent. Primarily through Andrés' recollections and his mother's diary, the reader is given a glimpse into a period of Cuban history not often discussed: the time of the mistreatment of Jamaican and other Antillean migrants by Cuban society.

In his text *Solutions to the Black*

Problem, Pedro Serviat notes that as the numbers of Black migrant workers in particular increased, members of the Cuban bourgeoisie began to mount strong opposition to this immigration for fear of the legendary "black danger" which originated during the colonial period and resurfaced during the Haitian revolution. As a result, Cubans worried by the changing face of their island nation began to call for the increased settling by Spaniards, Canary Islanders, Puerto Ricans, Italian, and Irish in order to "whiten" the island. This was accompanied by increased propaganda that portrayed Haitians and Jamaicans as inferior, which in turn subjected them to legal and illegal discrimination, repatriation and physical violence. (80-82)

Through Clara Spencer's diary and stories she was able to affirm her life's worth and individually insert herself into a society that had relegated her to the marginalized position as a devalued Other: "Clara Spencer llevaba su diario personal desde hacía muchos años y aunque no escribía en él todos los días, sus resúmenes recogían los relatos sobre su vida, su entorno y estados de ánimo. El diario tenía valor narrativo y de introspección personal" (117). Nonetheless, it is not the written record of her life that is of greatest significance for Clara Spencer. It was equally important to verbally share her life history, as in the moments when "...sus hijos le preguntaban algo de interés ocurrido cuando eran pequeños y Clara Spencer buscaba su diario y les leía lo que había escrito al respecto..." (117-118) As Finnegan observes, this connection of the written and the spoken, and the inability to easily separate the two, demonstrate that "...the presence of writing can coexist with an emphasis on the significance of performance as one of the main means of the effective transmission of a literary work..."(18) For Clara, the narration of the events of her life to family and friends provides a mirror that links her to the future descendants of Antillean migrants. However, it also changes the personal into the political by projecting the social realities that they too could face: "Andrés no era ajeno a esa práctica de su madre, quien, además, nunca les había ocultado a sus hijos los problemas propios que podían afectarlos a ellos, consideraba su vida como un espejo donde se proyectan las imágenes de la realidad..." (117-118).

For Trinh Minh-ha the projection of any speaker's reality does not necessarily correspond to the representation of an absolute truth: "...what is more important is to (re-) tell the story as she thinks it should be told; in other words, to maintain the difference that allows (her) truth to live on." (150) Clara Spencer especially exemplifies this prioritizing of the story over fact in the later years of her life when she alone is left to take care of her lover Arturo Cassamajour in his sick bed and read to him the sporadic letters sent from Mexico by his son Robert. When the narrator reveals that "...Clara misma escribía algunas de las cartas...En esas misivas imaginativas le contaba Robert a su padre los hechos más interesantes ...porque Clara siempre había sido la más fabuladora de los griot." (170) The extensiveness of the link that Clara's oral tradition has established is emphasized, connecting her with the Fulani wandering poet that originated the term "griot" and its more contemporary references to poets or musicians of French-speaking areas of West Africa.

Nonetheless, it is Clara's use of oral

tradition to keep alive for successive generations the daily contributions of the Jamaican and in general Antillean community that reflects what Mary Chamberlain defines as the "generational history" of memory: "Memory, too, has...a generational history. Nevertheless, it is a vital part of the process of socialisation, for the structures, themes and shifting meanings of memory are inherited, passed down through the generations" (104). It is through this combination of memory, socialisation and generational history that nation is redefined, opening up spaces where meanings were silenced. The valorization of these generational and communal ties is, for Kubayanda, what links this work to the African context: "The African principle of ancestrality, i.e., the recognition of the whole network of values pertaining to one's past, is one area in which the New World verbal acts become indices of renewed faith in the self and in communal renaissance." (5)

For Clara Spencer, this function of memory and orality as communal recovery gives a voice to those who were silenced under definitions of Cubanness that did not include them, despite their obvious presence and contributions:

> Alguna vez su madre le había manifestado que quería que sus nietos conocieran sus recuerdos porque no tenía de qué avergonzarse, y la vida de los humildes antillanos de color no solían aparecer escritas en los libros, aunque eran partícipes de la fundación de las naciones. (135)

Clara's written and oral memories are therefore a counterpoint to the official Cuban history, creating her own parallel national discourse that recognizes the impact of migration in the development of the Cuban nation. As part of this generational history her son Andrés continues his mother's legacy: "Andrés tenía el mismo criterio en cuanto a trasladar oralmente las historias" (Rojas 135). He tells her story, not through the modern computerized systems of cataloging that his wife Juliana uses, but through the merging once more of the written and oral tradition, recognizing that "...las leyes primitivas de la transmisión oral continuarían siendo válidas, porque la memoria que se proyecta de unos a otros por generaciones sucesivas sí es una memoria imborrable."(135) This union of the oral and written exemplifies what Kubayanda refers to as integration:

> Integration is a structural-aesthetic term which refers to an interlocking ritual system whereby the narrator or poetic voice conceptually and psychically incorporates his or her being not only into the Word but also into the elements and spirits... (7)

According to scholars and Africanists like Daphne Harrison, Paule Marshall and Isidore Okpewho the aesthetic and spiritual models of integration found in African folk ritual models serve as a source for African and Black Diaspora creativity even when these contemporary artistic forms are represented through a European language (Kubayanda 7). In this context Andrés Spencer's recognition of the timeless importance of generational ties illustrates a subversion of commonly held representations of memory as moving from past to present. In this case, memory also entails a reverse movement as Andrés Spencer integrates his life into the lives of

his mother and ancestors.

However, Rojas' use of the Spencers to subvert Cuban collective identity across physical boundaries extends beyond the scope of the family genealogy. Her protagonists' multilingual crossing of borders from the English-speaking Caribbean to the Spanish-speaking "Pearl of the Antilles" and the oral transmission of their histories is ultimately meant to represent the whole region and human experience in general, as evidenced by the text's opening quote by Carpentier: "El mundo del Caribe y más allá, el sudamericano, son mundos complejos, caóticos, extraordinarios, que comportan todas las posibles etapas de la vida del paisaje humano." (11) This oral tradition functions not only to affirm the multiplicity of Caribbean identity but also to protect it from forces that would distort and subjugate it. Rojas explores this dual function in a moment of intertextuality when Andres' father Arturo recounts to him an especially interesting passage from a text by Señora (Nancy) Morejón:

> En ese mismo ensayo la señora Morejón afirmaba que a una expresión caribeña debe corresponder un altísimo grado de mestizaje que no excluye los mitos, en términos generales, que la tradición oral tan cara a la cultura de los pueblos del Tercer Mundo, de hecho propone y dispone de toda una riqueza de signos, leyendas, fábulas y folklore que ayudan no sólo a concretar una imagen legítima de nosotros mismos, sino que tiende a ser puente de salvación ante el empuje asimilador y enajenante de las culturas metropolitanas en el mundo americano ... (145)

Morejón's words reiterate the importance of folklore and particularly its oral component to issues of legitimization and protection of collective identity from assimilationist forces that characterized Clara Spencer's life work. However, the generational links that I highlighted earlier are expanded to unite the experiences of Jamaican migrants like Clara Spencer not only to Cuban nationality but to the Third World as a whole, creating a sense of unity that is not solely diasporic but based on shared histories of oppression, resilience self-determination and heterogeneity.

Ultimately, both Juliana and Andrés Rey Spencer continue through their own work the legacy Clara Spencer had established decades before. Juliana's dependence on technology as the protector of individual and communal histories is replaced by her understanding of the importance of storytelling in this process. She thus is changed to a storyteller of sorts by continuing and encouraging her students to create their own oral tradition: "...les recomendaba a los alumnos que no renunciaran al don maravilloso de la palabra, al derecho de escuchar y ser escuchados por alguien" (175). However, Rojas reaffirms the generational link through Andrés Rey Spencer's textual connection with his mother: "Hasta ahora he creado subterfugios...para distanciarme de esta historia tanto de los demás como mía.... Al releer el texto, a Andrés le pareció que su voz era igual a la de su madre, y se ufanó" (174-175). Although Andrés Rey Spencer's written text is what the reader holds, it is his mother's symbolic and literal voice that communicates the stories to him. For this reason Rey Spencer's act of giving the rewritten history back is extended not only to the Cuban nation and the Antillean region but first to his mother, the source

of his story:

> Aunque me preguntaron aquí si iba a dedicarle la novela a la Conmemoración del V Centenario, por tratarse de un tema antillano, dije que no, impuse mi decisión de dedicarle la obra—la que más quiero de todas—a mi difunta madre, porque su voz inconfundible me dictó el libro. (177)

While these histories passed between mother and son chronicle the expansion of geographical boundaries they also subvert the expectation of maintaining gendered boundaries of transmission. Without Andrés Rey Spencer's remembering and retelling, not only would his mother's story be lost, but also the story of the Cuba and Caribbean not found in official history books, built on migrations and cultural encounters of diverse communities.

I would like to now briefly look at how the Afro-Ecuadorian writer Luz Argentina Chiriboga uses the oral tradition to renegotiate concepts of the national and regional identities of Ecuador and Latin America. Chiriboga is an Ecuadorian poet and novelist who deals expressly with Afro-Latin American women's emotional, racial, national and sexual self-definition in poetic collections like *La contraportada del deseo* (1992) and her first novel *Bajo la piel de los tambores* (1991). In *Jonatás y Manuela*, (1994), Chiriboga presents the reader with a historical novel that focuses on the relationship between Manuela Saenz, called *la libertadora del libertador*, because of her relationship with Simón Bolívar, and Jonatás, a liberta who accompanied Manuela from childhood, first as her servant and then as a friend and independence fighter. Unlike many historical novels, Chiriboga's representation of the early period of Ecuadorian and African diasporic culture focuses on the marginalized voices of the women, placing her in the Afro-Latin American tradition with writers like the Colombian Manuel Zapata Olivella and specifically in the company of female diasporic writers like Nancy Morejón (particularly for "Mujer negra") and Maryse Condé. As Rosemary Feal states in her article "The Legacy of Ba-Lunda: Black Female Subjectivity in Luz Argentina Chiriboga's *Jonatás y Manuela*:

> ...it produces an Afrocentric counternarrative to the grand historical novels of Latin America that have privileged a white European viewpoint ... *Jonatás y Manuela* provides a gynocentric vision of the African diasporic experience, and it establishes that Jonatás merits attention as a historical and literary figure, as do the generations of her foremothers. Chiriboga invents individual biographies for these characters of African descent, yet their particular stories transmit collective values. (25)

The importance of the oral tradition in relating experience is established early on in the text in the stories of Jonatás' grandmother Ba-Lunda (renamed Rosa) and her mother Nasakó (renamed Juana) in Angola after their capture from the Upper Niger region and later as slaves in Ecuador. One moment that especially illustrates the communal significance of orality occurs during Ba-Lunda's and Nasakó's enslavement on the sugar-cane plantations when slaves, in order not to arouse their masters' suspicions, used the word "Kan" as a means of communication among them:

> Kan era un constante en el trabajo, los ritos y los sueños...Parecía una sutil oración de independencia. Juana, cuando corría con sus amigas por los cañaverales y jugaba a las rondas con ellas, les enseño a musitar la palabra clave. Las esclavas alegraban sus rostros con sonrisas socarronas, al oír a sus hijas pronunciar el mismo término ...Estaba prohibida la comunicación con otras plantaciones, pero, en alas del viento, el Kan se esparcía por todas partes, tal una palabra mágica, una pleamar de rebeldía. (49-51)

In this passage Chiriboga emphasizes two functions of oral communication also found in Rojas' text: the generational transference of knowledge through the spoken word and the strengthening and protection of communal ties. However, "Kan" is more than just a prayer passed down from grandmother to mother to daughter. It is, as Chiriboga notes, a secret testament to all the slaves' resilience, survival and rebellion, which allows them to develop and maintain their sense of identity in the midst of oppression, as did the Jamaican immigrants in Rojas' *El columpio*. Like those immigrants this communal chant keeps alive the spirit of resistance and agency that allows them to actively plan their own destinies.

As a result, the temporal and cultural links created are continously reinforced between the roots of Africa (as represented by the word Kan)—the present circumstances of individual and collective survival—and the future plans of escape and self-determination. This spirit of rebellion embodied in orality is fostered in Nasakó and passed on to Nasakó Zansi (renamed Jonatás), allowing her to create her own cultural and emotional space in the midst of her enslavement. She does this through a "re-memory", constantly recalling the stories of her ancestors and thus fighting the emotional and physical silence imposed on the slaves through slavery:

> Les dijo que su madre se llamaba Juana, pero que su verdadero nombre era Nasakó;...A ella también le cambiaron el nombre, don Simón le dio el de Jonatás, pero en verdad era Nasakó Zansi. Las domésticas se asombraron de la forma atolondrada con que hablaba ...En tanto otras sirvientas revivieron la cacería, Jonatás sintió bullir demonios en su piel... (95)

Jonatás' refusal to be silenced or to forget serves as a catalyst for the other enslaved women to remember. As Gurleen Grewal notes in her analysis of re-memory and recovery in *Beloved* : "... narrative becomes a collective, interactive enterprise. The effect of several individuals dealing with their past has the effect of a collective remembrance and purging." (159) For slaves like Mercedes this meant recognizing the separation from family and loss of hope that her oppression caused: "Se acostumbró a creer que las cosas siempre fueron como las veía ahora, que nunca tuvo padres ni hermanos...la vida la había dejado sin memoria" (95-96). Like a line of dominoes that fall one after another, Jonatás' proud articulation of her family's and her own true identity at first frightens the slaves and then inspires them to uncover what Trinh Minh-ha has described as the power of the story "...both to give a vividly felt insight into the life of other people and to revive or keep alive the forgotten, dead-ended, turned-into-stone parts of ourselves."(123)

Once again storytelling becomes a vehicle for communal resistance and

rebellion, used by women like Jonatás to map out a space where their voices and those of their ancestors are heard, and their presence is felt. This active resistance develops in Jonatás throughout her adolescence and adulthood, finding its ultimate expression in her work with Manuela Saenz as liberator of slaves in Ecuador and Peru and fighters for Peru's independence in 1822: "En el trayecto, liberan esclavos y convencen a curiosos para que marchen con ellas y se enrolen en el ejército independentista" (166). Both actions demonstrate an interconnectedness between orality, the freedom of slaves and national independence from colonization. As Pedro Pérez Sarduy notes in his introduction to the anthology *AfroCuba*, the history of Cuba's struggles for independence demonstrate the relationship between abolition and the end to colonial rule: "The independence struggle could not but incorporate the struggle for abolition..." (8). What Jonatás and Manuela's work emphasizes is the necessity for liberation of all peoples for the nation to be truly independent. The oral tradition, therefore, provides the vehicle through which these relationships and values are transmitted.

Jonatás and Manuela's liberatory activities demonstrate an important connection between Peruvian national identity and Ecuadorian national history. Although both women participated in Peruvian liberation from colonial rule, their activities made them a significant part of the link between the two countries, emphasizing in particular women's role in this historical union. Just as Rojas' text emphasized the oral tradition as a means of redefining Cuban and Caribbean boundaries, Chiriboga uses it to show the development of revolutionary renegotiations of Ecuadorian, Peruvian and ultimately Latin American space. Oral articulations of memory and more extensive applications of "re-memory" thus become the tools for women's empowering redefinition of history and collectivity.

Women's voices not only create spaces where the silenced can rewrite national history but also provide examples of the role of the oral tradition in the continual development and renegotiation of regional and diasporic collectivities. It is this fluid redefinition of concepts and communities that J. Michael Dash observes in *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context*:: "Including the Caribbean in any survey...means dismantling those notions of nation, ground, authenticity, and history...and exploring concepts of cultural diversity, syncretism, and instability that characterize the island cultures of the Caribbean" (5). While Dash emphasizes the Caribbean's embodiment of "...multiplicity and heterogeneity as opposed to exclusivity and opposition..." (6), Argentina Chiriboga's text has demonstrated that the Americas on the whole are representative of these ruptures of gendered, racial, national, and geographical boundaries.

This study has shown how Caribbean and Latin American women of African descent use oral tradition as a continuation of African oral legacies. The result is threefold: it provides a site of stability and empowerment, a vehicle for marginalized communities to actively redefine multiple communal identities, while also laying the foundation for greater transnational connections. Women's use of oral histories then becomes a significant key in complementing the studies of more male-

centered discourses by unlocking other less studied dimensions of the multiple historical, social and political encounters that define the Americas.

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From *Quarto de Despejo* to a Little House: Domesticity as Personal and Political Testimony in the Diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus

by Kimberly A. Nance

Although the Latin American genre of *testimonio* is traditionally traced to Miguel Barnet's groundbreaking *Biografía de un cimarrón* (*Biography of a Runaway Slave*) (1966), this article will make a case that a 1960 Brazilian text, *Quarto de Despejo* (*The Trash Room*), should be considered as at least proto-testimonial in its rhetorical deployment of personal experience narrative toward a political end. *Quarto de Despejo* is a collection of diary entries written by Carolina Maria de Jesus, an Afro-Brazilian women struggling to raise her children in the *favela* (slum). After a chance encounter between the writer and a newspaper reporter, excerpts from the diaries appeared in the Brazilian press, and in 1960 Livraria Francisco Alves published the entries dated from July 1955 and May 1958 to January 1960. The book caused a sensation in Brazil: *Quarto de Despejo* sold ninety thousand copies within the first six months, making it the most successful book in Brazilian publishing history. It was translated into more than a dozen languages; the book is still in print in the United States, Canada, France, Great Britain, Japan, Germany, Cuba, and Russia. Dutton's 1962 English translation, *Child of the Dark*, sold several hundred thousand copies in hardcover alone (Levine 151).

In an attempt to capitalize on the first diary's unprecedented success, a sequel was rushed into print in 1961. In Rio de Janeiro, Editora Paulo de Azevedo published *Casa de Alvenaria (Cinder Block House)*. Dated May 1960-May 1961, this second collection of diary entries covered events from the signing of the book contract through Carolina's public appearances, book signings and installation of her family in the title's cinder-block house. By this time, however, US publishers' interests had turned elsewhere, and the English edition of this second diary appeared only in 1997, when the University of Nebraska Press released Arrington's and Levine's scholarly edition and translation, *I'm Going to Have a Little House.*

The insistent demands of quotidian domesticity pervade all of the entries in Carolina Maria de Jesus' first diary; the problems of obtaining food, caring for children, and keeping house are all amply detailed in *Quarto de Despejo*. The beginning of a representative entry from 1958 reads

> *July 10* I left my bed at five in the morning to get water. I don't like to be with those women because at the spigot they speak of everybody and everything. I feel so bad. If I could only lie down for a while! But I don't have anything for the children to eat. The only thing to do is go out. I left João studying. I only got ten cruzeiros and found some metal. I found a wood drill and a schoolboy asked for it. I sold it to him. He gave me three cruzeiros for a cup of coffee. I went by the street market. I bought a sweet potato and a fish. When I got back to the *favela* it was noon. I heated food for João and cleaned up the shack. Later I sold some tin cans and got 40 cruzeiros. I came back to the *favela* and made supper. Deolinda and her husband were taken away in a police car. Probably they've been arrested.... (82)

Interspersed with the meticulous recordings of events are modest dreams of sufficiency and a suitable place—enough to eat, a clean bed, clothing for the children, a little house—dreams largely if temporarily realized in *Casa de Alvenaria*. This article examines some common threads in the accounts of the domestic in the diaries, in relation to the specifically political function of social justice literature.

In comparison with contemporary testimonial works, the diaries have been criticized as conservative and conventional, and the writer has been categorized somewhat condescendingly as naïve and lacking the political consciousness of those later *testimonialistas*. Levine notes

> The left rejected her from the start because she was considered insufficiently revolutionary, selfish—concerned only about herself and her children—and a believer in the work ethic, which they considered a device to keep the population docile. (173)

A conventional reading of this writer's apparent lack of solidarity with many of her neighbors would (and did) point to her limited political development. Levine appears to accept such judgments, although he attributes her position largely to simple fatigue: "Carolina in her diary did not advocate resistance to the system or revolutionary action because she was too tired after each day of scavenging" (152).

Some have seen the diaries, marked by Carolina's acceptance of a domestic magazine aesthetic and by her sometimes catty comments on the neighbors, as little more than period pieces; but beyond chronicling the writer's personal trials and aspirations, the discourse of a rather conventional domesticity serves more radical political functions by disarming common reader defenses against feeling called to action. I would submit that Carolina Maria de Jesus' insistent aspiration to respectability might instead be viewed as itself a considered political and rhetorical stance, and her attempt to forge a social connection between herself and her likely readers might be considered as more than an individualistic attempt to separate herself from her own class. This writer's insistent domesticity serves to challenge her readers' comforting notions regarding poor people's differential experience, adaptation, and inurement to their poverty. Rather than confronting the reader with the "Other," as her work was framed in the journalistic context, she confronts readers with a set of judgments that are likely to be very similar to their own, thus supporting her continuing rhetorical argument that the people of the *favela* are *not* unfathomably different from the reader.

As has often been the case with Latin American testimonial writing, the paratextual apparatus of marketing *Quarto de Despejo* was much at odds with the diary's content. An early paperback edition offers a woodcut-style depiction of a woman and a boy silhouetted against a *favela*, set in vivid orange against the book's black cover. In yellow type, a quote from *Newsweek* promises the prospective purchaser "A desperate, terrifying outcry from the slums of São Paulo. 'One of the most astonishing documents of the lower depths ever printed.'" The pre-title promotional page described the writer as "A Brazilian woman with only two years of schooling, the mother of three illegitimate children, each

born of a different father. The story of her life in São Paulo explodes as a vivid, incendiary social document;" and went on to offer "vicious fights, knifings" and, last but certainly not least, "the sordid sex life of the *favelados*."

The translator's preface contextualizes the *favela* in terms of Brazilian urban development and speculates ominously what might happen if conditions there went unattended "If there should appear a Brazilian Fidel Castro, and if he should give these hungry illiterates guns...." (St. Clair 9). This was, after all, 1962. St. Clair's descriptions of the diarist and her circumstances, from which the copywriters of the inside cover ad apparently took their cue, lean heavily on images of unbridled sexuality and extramarital pregnancy.

> Carolina Maria de Jesus came to the *favela* of Canindé in 1947. She was unemployed and pregnant. No one wanted her. Her lover had abandoned her and the white family where she worked as a maid refused to let her in the house. (9)
>
> "I used to slip out of the house at night and make love." Six more jobs and six more dismissals ended with the discovery that she was pregnant. "He was a Portuguese sailor, and he got on his ship fast when I told him I was going to have a baby." (10)
>
> Carolina was attractive and liked men and so two years later a Spaniard "who was white and gave me love and money" went back to Europe and her second son José Carlos was born. (10)
>
> Once, in a jealous rage, because Carolina wouldn't attend a drunken party-orgy, a woman filed a complaint against her son João, who was then eleven, claiming he had raped her two-year-old daughter. (11)

In "Can *Another* Subaltern Speak/*Write*?," Else Rebeiro Pires Viera characterizes these prefaces as a "ransacking" of the diarist's work, paralleling Carolina's own daily searches of the city, but the inviting similarity leaves unexamined both the objects of the searches and key differences in the employment of the findings. Carolina appears to put to creative use just about everything she finds among the street's slim pickings. The various editors and producers of paratexts, in contrast, make highly selective and largely unrepresentative choices from the much larger and highly varied inventory of her writing and from biographical interviews, with an obvious preference for the shocking and the salacious. Even allowing for the difference in cultures between the current millennium and the late 50s of the one past, any reader expecting the sort of tale that the preface seems to foretell, chock-full of sex and violence, could only have been disappointed by the day-to-day routines of the diaries that followed.

An easy and uncharitable accounting for the disjuncture between marketing and content could point first to the vicissitudes of the market and to the profit motive that was undoubtedly a factor—exoticism, eroticism, and violence sold then as they do now. More charitably, it might even be argued that such marketing efforts allowed the book to reach a much broader public than it would otherwise have attained, though in this case the social costs of the portrayal should be tallied against the assumed benefits of wider dissemination.

The addition of rather scholarly historical, economic, and sociological background in these paratexts suggests at least some

degree of social motivation in portraying the diarist in the most transgressive terms possible. Such a stance is further apparent at the end of *Little House*, in Levine's "Afterword: Like a Fish Out of Water," when he takes "female Brazilian intellectuals" to task for not recognizing the "courageous feminist act" of "resolv[ing] never to marry because of men's treatment of her and out of fear of losing her independence" (174). Given the practical lot of *mulheres sós* (women on their own) in Brazil and unmarried women in general in the 1950s, such a decision might well have been courageous. The problem here is that, at least judging from the content of the diaries, Carolina's unmarried status was not a categorical resolution that she made, but rather a contingent outcome of her life. A 1961 entry recounts her response to an impromptu proposal: "I told him 'If I were to get married, it would have to be to a good man who was refined and educated'" (*Little House* 111). Later she notes that "Men who asked me to marry them were not worthwhile people" (131) and "I think it's beautiful when a couple commemorates their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary" (162). On her visit to Chile she is deeply wounded when she overhears someone describe her as "unmarried and with three children" (Levine "Afterword" 169). The conversion of a contingent decision not to marry into an unconditional resolve echoes Burgos' treatment of Menchú's choices in *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, where a chapter in which Menchú states that while she has had opportunities and might marry someday, now is not the time, is titled much more definitively by Burgos: "XXXI Women and Political Commitment: Rigoberta renounces marriage and motherhood" (220-226). In both cases the writers overstate the case, overshadowing the contrary statements of the speaker. Social action tales, it seems, impose their own romantic templates on the heroine.

In contrast, Carolina's self-presentation, to the extent that it can be discerned from heavily edited texts, is in general highly conventional, a bias made even more significant given the apparent editorial leanings toward the transgressive. Not only does she extol the virtues of a good marriage, she advocates education, industriousness, self-sufficiency, cleanliness, patience, and good manners. She reiterates these values (later concentrated even further in the aphorisms of *Provérbios)* in the diaries through precept, example, and frequently through counterexample.

> Take María José, better known as Zefa, who lives in shack number nine on "B" Street. She is an alcoholic and when she is pregnant she drinks to excess. The children are born and they die before they reach two months. She hates me because my children thrive and I have a radio. I told her I wouldn't loan it, and as she didn't have any children, she could work and buy one. But it is well known that people who are given to the vice of drink never buy anything. Not even clothes. Drunks don't prosper. (*Child of the Dark* 21-22)

Carolina's dream is conventional: "to be very clean, to wear expensive clothes, and live in a comfortable house" (26).

> I dreamt I lived in a decent house that had a bathroom, kitchen, pantry, and even a maid's room....The tablecloth was white as a lily. I ate a steak, bread and butter, fried potatoes, and a salad. When I reached for another steak I woke

up. (*Child of the Dark* 40)

When the book is published, Carolina goes shopping.

> I can buy some clothes for myself....I am thinking about earrings, necklaces, pretty clothes; I'm going to see a dentist. (*Little House* 11)

> I bought furniture, clothes, and household utensils. I ate as much as I felt like eating. Beef, fish, grapes, olives, cod, and cheese. When I was in the *favela* I would think. Oh, if I could only eat cod! Those things used to be just abstract concepts to me, but now they are concrete reality. I bathe every day in a shower with hot water and I sleep on my spring mattress. (*Little House* 78)

Far from flouting in her writing the values professed by conventional society outside the *favela*, Carolina deploys them rhetorically for two purposes: first, to demonstrate her common ground with her prospective readers; and second, to honor the readers' own likely values in, as it were, the breach. Rather than contesting conventional values, as appears to have been both the ideal and the demand of many of her editors, translators, and critics, she is instead militantly upholding those values. By pointing out where polite society falls short of its own avowed standards, she in effect converts conventions into a call to action. From the beginning, Carolina demonstrates awareness that a fundamental rhetorical task is to convince (or more optimistically to remind) the reader that people who dwell in *favelas* experience pain, hunger, and other sensations in the same way that the reader would in similar circumstances, to bridge the comfortable gap between the reader's world and her own. To this end, she chronicles an exchange between herself and a passerby who marvels at the *favela*-dwellers.

> A man went by, stopped and stared at us. He said loud enough for me to hear.
>
> "Is it possible that these people are of this world?"
>
> I thought this funny and replied:
>
> "We are ugly and badly dressed, but definitely of this world."
>
> I cast an eye over the crowd to see if they looked mortal or as if from another planet. (*Child of the Dark* 124)

Where the writers of the paratexts assume the moral indignation of the readers, Carolina begins one critical step earlier, with the realization that such indignation is not a given when it is possible to see people like her as literally extraterrestrial "aliens." Both her painstaking recount of the minutiae of marginal existence and her correction of terms—insisting that she lives not in a "house" but a "shack"—can be seen as efforts to overcome the tendency either to look away from the *favela* or else to overlook it. She also devotes considerable text to depicting the *favela* itself as an agent that acts on people who come to live there, people whom she portrays as having been better before they arrived, and sometimes redeemable if they can get out. It should be noted that this depiction does not characterize the people of the *favela* as universally innocent victims, but rather asserts the demoralizing effect of their surroundings. Casting herself in a didactic role, she likewise offers both examples and counterexamples of proper behavior on the part of those living outside the *favela*.

Bit by bit, the diary entries chip away at

each of the fictions that allows those outside the *favela*, including people of generally good will like many a potential reader, to feel less than personally obligated: it isn't so bad, they're used to it, they're so warped that nothing can be done for them, besides, there are government agencies and charities that deal with such problems. Responding to the neighbor's charges against her son, Carolina chronicles an encounter with a child-welfare worker.

> I went to talk with a woman who wanted to know what had happened with João. She asked João if he knew what it was to make "Dirty-Dirty." He said he knew. And if he had made "Dirty-Dirty" with that girl. He said he hadn't. The woman stopped writing and read some papers. Then she proceeded with the questioning. She used slang with the boy and the questions were obscene, wanting the boy to describe in detail his sexual pleasures. I thought the interrogation was horrible. (*Child of the Dark* 108)

From Carolina's perspective, the current forms of government intervention in the *favela* are hardly positive. Charitable agencies come in for similar scrutiny and most are found wanting, their offerings scanty and unreliable. The current efforts of both government and private agencies are presented as inadequate at best, so that there is nothing here that will let the individual off the hook. On the contrary, the most positively presented incidents are of the helpful actions of particular individuals.

Individualism, indeed, has been advanced as a negative criticism of the diaries; the writer was accused of thinking only of herself and her children rather than aligning herself in solidarity with the rest of the *favela*, and of accepting individual solutions rather than.....? What, exactly? Levine asserts that "Carolina never understood the symbolism of her ascent from misery. Fame for her was a path to having food to eat every day and a house in which to live. She never saw herself as a role model, or as a crusader" ("Afterword" 174). I would agree that she did not generally present her ascent as an exemplary tale for the benefit of other people in the *favela*, but it is difficult to see what might have been gained, politically or socially, had she presented her own path as a model that other people could follow out of the *favela*. She is only too keenly aware that her very literacy, the product of two years of schooling, sets her apart from many in the *favela*. Moreover, her own hard work and best efforts to publish her writing (for example, by showing it to Brazilian publishers and eventually sending it to *Reader's Digest*) had come to nothing until a chance encounter with the reporter Audálio Dantas, whom she duly if sometimes ambivalently credits. Candidly, Carolina's hypothetical *exemplum* might read: "Learn to write, work very hard, but that really won't get you out of the *favela*, because you still need to get yourself discovered by someone with the connections to get you published." This is hardly practical advice.

I would argue that Carolina did attempt to foster a sense of solidarity, but that she did so without stopping at the boundaries of the *favela*. Rather, she extended her efforts at building solidarity to the larger community of her readers (and later, listeners,) where she encouraged people who would see themselves as part of a fair, hardworking and decent community to

extend their conception of that community to include at least some of the people living in the *favela*, and then to recognize a consequent social obligation to their fellow citizens. At a time when the nation of Brazil was intensely engaged in projecting a portrait of social and economic progress (for instance, in shifting the focus from the older cities to the futuristic Brasilia,) Carolina Maria de Jesus sought to move the *favela* out of the realm of the politically invisible (and even extraterrestrial) and into the body-politic. From this perspective, her deployment of conventional ideals of comportment, progress and citizenship takes on a more radical slant. Compared with the ripping social action tale promised in the prefaces, the diaries' reiterations of the domestic realities of grinding poverty are indeed routine and unglamorous, but those diaries remain a significant and insufficiently recognized contribution to the domestic social justice literature that would become *testimonio*.

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Angelitos negros a Film from the "Golden Epoch"[1] of Mexican Cinema: The Coding of "Visibly" Black Mexicans In and Through a Far-reaching Medium

by Marco Polo Hernández

The coding of blacks in film, as in the wider society, involves a history of images and signs associating black skin color with servile behavior and marginal status. While these depictions may have reflected prior economic oppression of blacks, they also tend to perpetuate it. Through the exact repetition which is film's main virtue, these associations became part of film's typological vocabulary..."Codes" are not singular portrayals of one thing or another, but larger, complex relationships.

James Snead

The family melodrama *Angelitos negros* (1948) (*Little Black Angels*) is a cinematographic message[2] about "visibly" black Mexicans broadcasted in a far-reaching medium.[3] This black and white sound motion picture is a graphic example of the ethnic integration discourse on nation adopted and institutionalized by the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) in Mexico during the cultural phase of the Mexican Revolution (1920-1968).[4] It is part of the populist discourse of that period, found in film,[5] literature, music, dance, painting, and images, which became standard stamps of Mexican national identity. *Angelitos negros* is an illustration of an expressed mode of thinking that produced the myth of a "cosmic race" as the modern nation was forming; a myth used to obliterate the black African contribution to Mexican *mestizaje* while narrating that blacks and their descendents in Mexico had been "diluted," "assimilated" or "integrated."

Angelitos negros is the story of the suffering and the understanding caused when a blond woman mothers a "visibly" black girl. The blond woman doesn't know until the end of the story, and only after she has caused a deadly injury to her mother, that in fact she is the daughter of her black maid. The black maid has kept the secret to spare her daughter from suffering. The blond woman makes everybody's life, particularly the life of her black daughter and black mother, miserable. The otherwise jovial and lively blond woman goes into a deep depression due to the birth of her black daughter. All characters, black, white and mestizo are very understanding. Nobody really "blames" the blond woman, and even her husband who has been accused of being the cause of her "misfortune" in the end absolves her.

In this essay, following a brief historical preamble of Mexican cinema to set the context for my argument, I will analyze the manner in which stereotypes of black people are used to code "visibly" black Mexicans in *Angelitos negros* to propagate and perpetuate the idea that blacks are inferior. I will propose that the message regarding black people in *Angelitos negros* is a reproduction from an earlier Hollywood[6] film adapted for the Spanish speaking public. I will explain how this message moves through languages and cultures promoting images that are more fantastic than real. I will demonstrate that the message in *Angelitos negros* deploys a Euro-centric mass-produced negative view of black people for mass consumption.

I will show that the predominant aesthetic of *Angelitos negros* is what Richard L. Jackson has identified in Afro-Hispanic American literature as the

White Aesthetic.[7] I will incorporate James Snead's approach in *White Screens Black Images: The Dark Side of Hollywood* (1994) to Jackson's perspective. This enables an aesthetic "reading" of the characterization and portrayal of black people in *Angelitos negros* in terms of the codes reproduced and reinforced through the stereotypical images of black people in the film (Snead 136). Snead explains:

> Stereotypes ultimately connect to form larger complexes of symbols and connotations. These codes then begin to form a kind of "private conversation" among themselves without needing to refer back to the real world for their facticity. The pleasure of recognizing codes displaces the necessity for a viewer to verify them. Since many mass-media images today claim to be neither reality nor fantasy (witness the docu-drama), there are no useful criteria by which to inspect or challenge the claims to truth that these visual images and events constantly make. (Snead 141)

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* bring to the forefront of the debate on stereotyping in popular culture some methodological questions "about the underlying premises of character- or stereotype-centered approaches" (198). They warn that, "the exclusive preoccupation with images, whether positive or negative, can lead to a kind of essentialism" (199). Shohat and Stam bring to light the complexity of the question through a series of examples of what they see as a "black experience." They propose that said experience differs according to the various cultural contexts where it occurs. Shohat and Stam conclude that a critique of stereotyping should begin only after a film has been understood within its cultural milieu and not "as the application of an *a priory* schema" (213).

While I agree that a work should be analyzed within its cultural context, any expressed mode of thinking or discourse dealing with the question of blacks in the Diaspora, including *Angelitos negros*, needs to be concurrently understood within a worldwide context to avoid the possibility of regionalizing or reducing a problem that has for centuries and continues to affect people across cultures and languages at a global level (Simms, Monograph).

My approach is particularly relevant here because we are dealing with a narrative form that carries an adverse message conceived in another language and culture first. The message was developed in the United States. So, did Hollywood export messages based on its world-view: on the manner in which it perceived blacks? Was this world-view acceptable and adaptable across languages and cultures for the reproduction and reinforcement of an adverse discourse on blacks at a continental (or world) level?

Although the script of *Angelitos negros* is solely attributed to Joselito Rodríguez, according to Rita Wilson, *Angelitos negros* "is clearly based on the 1933 novel, *Imitation of Life*" by the US writer, Fannie Hurst (1889-1968) (Wilson 3). Said novel was adapted into two Hollywood films by the same name. The first, directed by John Stahal with Claudette Colbert, was shot in 1934. The second, directed by Douglas Sirk, featuring Lana Turner, was filmed in 1959 (Fischer 4). It should also be mentioned that *Angelitos negros* was remade by Joselito Rodríguez in 1969 featuring Manuel

López Ochoa and Martha Rangel with the Afro-American actress Juanita Moore (Wilt). Juanita Moore played the victimized mammy in the 1959 *Imitation of Life*. It could be argued that the stories in *Angelitos negros* and *Imitation of life* are two different stories at the pretext level but the subtexts are comparable as far as the way in which black people are coded. Although the stories are plotted differently, the roles are not quite the same, and the sets are dissimilar, the resemblance is found in comparing the message conveyed as far as what the filmmakers want us to believe and continue believing about black people.

In *Angelitos negros*, non-black people, literally painted black, play two of the central "black" characters. The manner in which "visibly" black Mexicans are narrated exposes the ideology upon which the story is centered and it allows me to place the film within the official discourse about "visibly" black people during the cultural phase of the Mexican Revolution where a whitening tendency dominates the narrative on nation. According to Jackson, while *mestizaje* is an indisputable process that black people—from the African Diaspora in what is called "Hispanic America" as well as Brazil and the non-Iberian countries—have undergone, "the process of racial bleaching denies the... black the recognizable African characteristics of his physical features and thus his black identity" (*The Black* 2). It is important to note also that this film is produced in a country that, according to its own official discourse, has imagined itself as non-white.

Angelitos negros belongs to a period in Mexican cinematography identified by Maximiliano Maza as "*Después de la Guerra*" (after the war). This period is dominated by films known as *Rumberas y Arrabal* (Maza *online*). *Rumberas* makes reference to the *rumba*, an Afro-Cuban rhythm adopted in Mexico that was born in the Cuban city slums that grew considerably at the turn of the century when some 250,000 slaves were freed and poured into the cities in search of employment (Alén 82). The *arrabal* refers mainly to Mexico City slums that grew quickly between 1940 and 1950. As they prepared for World War II, the industrialized nations had switched their production priorities from consumer goods to war goods. One of the immediate results of this change in productivity elsewhere was the industrialization of Mexico. The possibility of work attracted people from the provinces to the city and they usually settled in the slums. *Rumberas* and *arrabal* films deal with life in the poor areas of the city and with the growing urbanization. These pictures are different from the *charro*[8] films that, according to Ricardo Pérez Montfort, dominated the industry from 1920 to 1946 (93). *Charro* films were used to cast an ideal image of the Mexican, an image that appears more white than anything else and thereby negates the African or third root of Mexico and the Afro element of the *charro* image and music.

Maza reports that between 1940 and 1950 the Mexican urban population grew more than ever. In 1946, Miguel Alemán Valdés became the first civilian president since 1932. Mexico's national infra-structure was greatly developed under his presidency. Also, according to Maza, President Alemán decreed *La Ley de la Industria Cinematográfica* (Law of the Film Industry) in an attempt to dissolve a monopoly on film showing headed by the North American William Jenkins, (Maza

online). This strategy placed the film industry under government control and, perhaps unknowingly, established its bureaucratic foundations. Another setback for the dwindling Mexican film industry was the emergence of television in the early 1950s.[9]

With the end of the war, and as Hollywood reentered the market full force, the position held by Mexican cinematography began to lose importance. Film companies in Mexico cut budgets in an effort to preserve productivity at the same level reached during the war. The end result of this approach was the proliferation of films known as "*churros*," "low budget films made in a short time and of poor quality in general" (Maza *online*). Pedro Infante, one of the central characters in *Angelitos Negros* and the indisputable star of the *cine de arrabal*, was the protagonist in *Los tres García* (1946) (*The Three Garcías*), *Nosotros los pobres* (1947) (*We the Poor*), *Ustedes los ricos* (1947) (*You the Rich*), *Dicen que soy mujeriego* (1948) (*They Say that I am a Womanizer*), and *Los tres Huastecos* (1948) (*The Three Huastecos*).

Two additional points should be made. *Angelitos negros* was one of three movies filmed in 1948 where Infante was one of the principal characters. He was an idol being among the most popular male stars of the decade, and was considered a model of success (the provincial boy who comes to the country's capital and makes it big). In 1948, he was at the pinnacle of his acting and singing career. Loved by the masses, he was known as "*el ídolo de las chorreadas*" (something to the effect of vulgar-women's hero). This last point is particularly important if one considers that his image in any movie of the epoch would attract a mass audience susceptible to persuasion by whatever role he represented.

According to David Wilt, in *Historia documental del cine mexicano*, Emilio García Riera says that although *Angelitos negros* played for two weeks in Mexico City it was a big hit, so it can be said that the film had an immediate impact on a good number of people in the city. Wilt also mentioned that to find out how popular *Angelitos negros* really was one would have to consider the number of subsequent runs in "neighborhood and provincial theatres" and I suggest on television as well.

Angelitos negros, a cinematographic *churro*, is important because it may be the most widely known of a group of films from the late 1940s and early 1950s that presented, as their central theme, the Black question; films such as: *Negra consentida* (1948) (*Spoiled Black Woman*), *Lo que la carne hereda* (1948) (*What the Flesh Inherits*), *La negra Angustias* (1949) (Angustias the Black Woman) *Negro es mi color* (1951) (*Black is my Color*) and *Píntame angelitos blancos* (1954) (*Paint White Angels for Me*), among others. The "rediscovery" of "visibly" black Mexicans in the mid forties, dealt a heavy blow to the myth of a purely Amerindian and "Spanish" *mestizaje*. It brought to the forefront the question of diversity in a would be racial paradise. Mexico was forced to revise its own discourse in order to get in step with its World War II Allies.

That some sort of "new" awareness on the Black question was going on in Mexico when Miguel Alemán Valdés was inaugurated president can be readily seen. The same year, 1946, the Mexican anthropologist and ethnologist Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, returning from North-

western University, published *La población negra de México* (*The Black Population in Mexico*). In Aguirre Beltrán's words "In spite of a good reception [his work on Afro-Mexicans] did not stimulate this interesting line of investigation" (Aguirre 11). Aguirre Beltrán continued his work and in 1948 he carried out an ethnographic investigation of the "visibly" black Mexican population in Cuijla, Guerrero (Aguirre 11). Curiously, that same year *Angelitos negros* was filmed and released marking the genesis of a short lived period of discursive acceptance of the existence of "visibly" black Mexicans.

Angelitos negros can be considered as a piece of the propaganda used to deal with the Black question in Mexico after the second World War. According to James Snead, a "film becomes 'propaganda' and no longer merely 'fiction' when its aim is to introduce or reinforce a set of political power relationships between social groups..." (140). *Angelitos negros* reinforces the power relations instituted since colonial times between "visibly" black people and lighter skinned people by positioning the darker people as subservient.

Angelitos negros is of central import to a Black Experience and to a Black Identity in Mexico, and to Mexican experience and identity as a whole since the majority of the population in Mexico are so called "mestizos" and the majority of Mexican mestizos according to official and unofficial history have black African blood to various degrees in them. *Angelitos negros* allows the viewer to perceive the White Aesthetic, that dominates the official narrative of the period, and how "visibly" black Mexicans are still coded in and through this valuable evidence of eugenicist thinking. The ideology behind this perspective, instituted at the onset of the cultural phase of the Revolution (1920) is stamped in José Vasconcelos' book-length-essay *La raza cósmica: misión de la raza iberoamericana* (1925).[10]

In essence, Vasconcelos proposed in *La raza cósmica* that the Mexican population was amalgamating into one by a natural selection process where what he perceives as beauty (whiteness) would eventually dominate "ugliness" (blackness). According to this line of thinking, all cultural and "racial" differences in Mexico would disappear through *mestizaje* and Hispanization. Eventually, Vasconcelos explained, a superior race would be created in Latin America. This race would be beautiful (white-like) and civilized (speaker of a European tongue). Vasconcelos' ideology did not tolerate ethnic diversity.

While it is true that by the turn of the century most of the population in Mexico had undergone *mestizaje*, or miscegenation, Patrick J. Carroll has suggested an alternative way for reading the facts (Carroll 429). That is, it can also be stated that black African blood runs in the veins of most Mexicans, particularly if one takes into consideration that the *mezclas*,[11] [*mulatos, moriscos, albinos, torna atrás, lobos, zambaigos, cambujos, albarazados, barcinos, coyotes, chamisos, coyote mestizos,* and *ahí te estás* (Aguirre 175)], were descendants of black Africans, at least as much as Amerindian and or Europeans, and comprised, a substantial minority, if not the majority, of the population by the end of the 18th century. Therefore, Mexican *mestizaje* should be understood as having a "third root" (Martínez 2), especially when this fact can be appreciated all over Mexico as embedded in its language, its food, its

music, its sense of humor, and in its people's physical characteristics.

In "*Del rancho al arrabal: guías para ayudar a formar un estado nación en el cine mexicano de La Epoca de Oro,*" Juan Carlos Ramérez Pimienta asks, "How...is it possible to think that the PRI-government did not design and implement a cultural policy to help it stay in power?" (Ramérez 211).[12] To speak of the possibility of a Black Experience and of a Black Identity in a country conceived of, as a mestizo nation may have been considered tantamount to an act of dissidence. This is probably why Joselito Rodríguez chose to deal with the subject in accordance with the official discourse. In *Angelitos Negros*, criollos, Euro-mestizos and even Arabs are "white;" there are no Amerindians, except in their role as assimilated Indomestizos; and blacks are exotic, pure musical and passionate beings from a tropical paradigm (victimized servants, innocent children, or resigned friends) who are capable of unquestioning love and friendship for the "white" characters.

Angelitos negros asserts class as the principal divider of people, and in this manner minimizes the "racial" friction that nevertheless exists in the very house where the drama develops. Rodríguez' story proposes that in Mexican society at large there are good, at least acceptable, relations between the "social" groups, and that the relations in the central part of the story, the domestic situation, can and will be resolved by a higher type of understanding obtained by the central character, the very perpetrator of the conflict.

Angelitos negros was supposed to be an "anti-racist" film. However, "real" black people play minor characters as is the case of Chimy Monterrey who plays Fernando, a character capable of supporting open discrimination without a word and is the ever- understanding friend. Snead has identified a similar role as "the loyal sidekick/retainer" (142). The central character, Ana Luisa played by Emilia Guiú, is a well-off and educated black woman who appears white. She doesn't know she is the daughter of the Black housemaid, "Mercé" (Mercedes), played by Rita Montaner, a Cuban actress. Before dying, the "good" *criollo* father (we are told by Mercé, the nanny), agreed to recognize the outwardly blond daughter as his, so long as the black maid renounced motherhood. Whether painful, Mercé considers this to be a small price to pay for her daughter's happiness. The housemaid has kept the secret for the "good" of her daughter and endures outright discriminatory treatment with a sort of veneration for her daughter's whiteness, or "beauty." The daughter marries a Euromestizo[13] looking orphan, José Carlos Ruiz played by Pedro Infante, who has become a famous singer and who refers to himself as "white." Superficially, José Carlos is kind to all "visibly" black people and is apparently free of racial prejudice. He agrees not to reveal Mercé's life secret because this knowledge, according to the priest's advise, may be life threatening for Ana Luisa's already frail emotional state (caused by the birth of her non-white baby). When Ana Luisa (Guiú) and José Carlos (Infante) have Belén, a mulatto daughter, played by Titina Romay, the conflict begins.

José Carlos absolves Ana Luisa readily: from abusing her mulatto mother to death; from abusing her mulatto child by openly and publicly rejecting and denying any relation to her for years; from having

publicly discriminated against José Carlos' "visibly" black friends; and even from having abused José Carlos directly over the years when she charged him with having ruined her life by giving her a "visibly" black child.

A point to which I wish to return, is that beyond appearances José Carlos suffers "the prejudice of having no prejudice."[14] He is capable of "listening" to all sides. The film suggests that he is a good-natured person, oblivious to discrimination. We see him literally blinded by his "deep love" for a blond woman, while he is unaware of the unwavering and understanding love the "visibly" black Mexican woman Isabel has had for him secretly over the years. He acknowledges that "visibly" black Mexicans are as they are because that is "the way God made them." He has a sort of puppy love for Mercé. Although she is his elder, he calls her "my little tar ball," "my little chocolate bar," "my little pile of soot," "my little chunk of tar," "little cinnamon flower," "ugly *negra*," "fine little black one made from the little charcoal that makes diamonds," among other names. At the level of subtext, no matter how "sweet" these names may appear, they position Mercé in opposition to Ana Luisa.

Conversely, he calls Ana Luisa "goldy locks," "blondie," "the most beautiful girl in the city," comparing her with the sun itself. Moreover, his supposed best friend, who according to him is almost his "brother," carries water (while José Carlos hand's are free) to wash him and scrub his back. He is a kind of mediator who accepts things as if prescribed by a divine force. Even his love for Ana Luisa is presented as divine. José Carlos is capable of suffering the unthinkable and of accepting the suffering of "visibly" blacks due to his love for Ana Luisa, a type of love that in the end of the *churro* succeeds.

An interesting historical note should be made at this point. For years, Mexicans, prior to becoming war allies of the United States, were deeply bothered by the "denigrating" way they were portrayed in US films. The Mexican government went as far as to create a censorship organism to ban movies considered defamatory (García 148). It is paradoxical to find that while official Mexico noted the way Mexicans were portrayed by Hollywood, it was incapable of recognizing the manner in which "visibly" black Mexicans were presented to the viewer in *Angelitos negros* by Mexicans whose overwhelming majority, as mentioned above, are supposed to be non-whites, or mestizos descendants of the *mezclas*, according to the cosmic race myth.

James Snead identifies three strategies by which stereotypes on race are forged and reinforced: mythification, marking, and omission. He proposes that film is never one person's story and that "film is always typical, broadcasting certain codes about social status and interrelationships" (143).

In *Angelitos negros* we are confronted with "mythification" when we observe that José Carlos is elevated in the beginning in the introductory scenes of the film. He is clean and elegantly dressed (according to the understanding in Mexico of the late 1940s of what a gentleman was supposed to dress like) in a cashmere suit, white starched shirt, and tie. We see that he has a shiny late model convertible, and we find him confidently buying a newspaper in front of a Mediterranean style house, indicating a well-to-do neighborhood.

The scenes are as well illuminated as a sunny day. José Carlos is overly cheerful thus denoting a person who has no apparent worries beyond enjoying life. He portrays a secure individual who feels good enough to approach another individual without formal introduction, namely the visibly blond Ana Luisa who has come out of the Mediterranean-style mansion to hail a taxi.

Fernando, on the other hand, would not even dream of approaching a white rich woman, knowing that he would have no chance for a positive result, and that to do so would be an open invitation for real trouble. Yet, Isabel, a mulatto singer, who has worked for years along with Fernando and the famous singer José Carlos, has been secretly in love with José Carlos. Her broken heart is shown as something accepted, even by Fernando (a "visibly" black man who is portrayed as her confidant or brother), as some sort of predestined penance. "Visibly" black people are coded as group phenomena, as if tied by blood and destiny and desirous of assimilation into the dominant group. Their aesthetic is the White Aesthetic. All "visibly" black people in the film seem to be destined to suffer due to their color. Snead explains: [t]he coding of blacks in film, as in the wider society, involves a history of images and signs associating black skin color with servile behavior and marginal status" (142).

According to Snead, mythification, the magnification of the film image, "can both elevate and degrade," and he explains that in fact both "properties are interdependent" since the same "language that magnifies white heroes reduces black people" (143). In *Angelitos negros* we observe "white" characters in positions of control juxtaposed with the like of a mulatto old woman, who has always been, and continues to be until her death, a live-in housemaid. As the narrative unfolds we learn that her life is a tragedy, a story of dependence. We are introduced to her in a large mansion, rendering her character even more insignificant, and she is contrasted with Ana Luisa (Guiú) a young blond, well-educated woman presented as the owner of the house and her boss. Snead explains: "soon, by mythification and repetition, filmed images become models, positive or negative, for behavior, describing structures, limits, and an overall repertoire from which viewers in the real world select their actions and opinions" (143).

The second of Snead's tactics for coding is "marking." According to Snead, "Marking the black allows the viewer to 'register' the image" (145). He explains that this is necessary due to the fact that a strict definition of what "blackness" is cannot be provided. He says that "The terms of racial identity—'white' and 'black'—denote not any one thing, but a whole range of possibilities, all defined, not positively by being this or that, but negatively, by not being 'white'" (145). In *Angelitos negros*, Mercé, the nanny, Belén the tragic mulatto daughter, and Isabel the mulatto afflicted by her one-sided love for José Carlos are played by non-black people marked by heavy black paint. According to Snead, marking meets the "needs of the image-making rhetoric" and by making black representation as black as possible eliminates any ambiguity (145). Marking through contrasting black and white colors in clothing or by the use of light has been used "for stereotypical and ideological purposes" as well (145). The secondary black characters are dressed in various scenes with white clothes to

highlight their darkness and they are further marked as they speak *jarocho*, or black dialect, sing, dance, and play Afro-music in a supposedly white environment.

The third manner in which stereotypes are cast in this film is "omission." *Angelitos negros*, clearly omits any reference to "visibly" black Mexicans who are not children, servants or entertainers. Snead found that in Hollywood "[f]rom the earliest days of film, omission was the method of choice in designing and tailoring mass images of black people" (147). This perspective may be applied to *Angelitos negros*.

It is interesting to note that the story takes place in Mexico City in the late 1940s and that psychologically and socially urban "visibly" black Mexicans of that period are not significantly better off than urban blacks during the colonial period. The fact that historically prominent "visibly" Black Mexicans have existed--such as Yanga, José María Morelos y Pavón, Vicente Guerrero, Vicente Riva Palacio, Lázaro Cárdenas and the chinacos ("visibly" Black Mexican warriors during Independence and French Invasion wars) to mention a few—does not appear anywhere in the film. It cannot even be inferred. This is true despite the fact that by the time *Angelitos negros* was filmed at least two states of the nation were already named after "visibly" black Mexicans and that "visibly" black Mexicans helped shape the nation physically and culturally as leaders of the independence movement, presidents, and as cannon fodder, not to mention the life giving roles of mothers, wives, sisters and daughters.

Angelitos negros artificially separates the Mexican world of the late 1940s into two well defined paradigms: that of a few markedly mulattoes who live tragic lives, and that of people who appear to be-non-black and who, for the most part, are well-to-do. As to the reason why this inaccurate representation of black people has mattered little to the viewers at large may be derived from the fact that most Mexicans mistakenly believe they have little to do, if at all, with African-ness.

In *Angelitos negros*, white looking people are mythified while markedly black mulattoes are denigrated. In this manner the superiority of non-blacks is confirmed. Now, logical contradictions and historical inaccuracies aside, how could such misrepresentations of "visibly" black Mexicans be of any importance in a realm where the official discourse affirms, through all means of expression available, that black people are nearly extinct or "integrated"?

The academically documented "discovery" in the mid 1940s, mentioned previously, of enclaves in Mexico where black people, allegedly due to isolation, had preserved their Afro-characteristics, and the production of *Angelitos negros* among other films of the epoch on the Black theme, lead me to deduce that the system enlisted and supported cinematography to disseminate the notion that the whitening process in Mexico was still a reality. The possibility of engaging a problem long forgotten officially, or set aside by the myth of *mestizaje*, was neutralized through cinematic rhetoric. The collective lie of a binary *mestizaje* exclusive of its African root was reinforced in Mexico now through one of the most powerful means of mass persuasion.

The type of narrative found in *Angelitos negros* reproduces and reinforces cinematic stereotypes and it is aimed at penetrating

susceptible viewers who want-to-be-white (or those who believe they are non-blacks). This type of cultural text allows them to perceive themselves as they wish to be seen by "visibly" black people, namely as superior. "Indeed, racism in the cinema might be described as the tendency to recycle certain ethnic codes, already familiar to a series of privileged viewers, in order to reinforce their familiarity, despite the changes that may have gone on in the real world" (Snead 142).

Mercé, the body-servant/mammy/house-maid, while repeating and reinforcing the stereotype of "Aunt Jemima," also shields it from historical change. Every time the film is shown, unless the audience has been trained to question its propagandistic essence, it reiterates stereotypes of "visibly" black people. It promotes while it perpetuates a sort of dialogue between viewer and image based on power relationships (where "visibly" black people are forever trapped at the bottom of the physical, psychological and social scale) based on a White Aesthetic and Black phobia.

In Mexico at large, as a colonial legacy, one of the most derogatory names to be called is "*indio*" (Indian). It is my experience that a person will readily engage in physical violence when called "*indio*", even if he or she is in fact an Indian. This means to be ugly, and barbaric; it means to be an outsider, the "other." But an even worse insult, another colonial legacy, is to be called "*negro*" (Black). Most Mexicans I have spoken to will readily accept that they are *mestizos* of a sort, such as Euro-mestizos or Indo-mestizos or in between, but they will very rarely openly accept the possibility of having black blood, of being Afro-mestizos even when they preserve Afro-characteristics: "In Mexico it is o.k. to stop at brown on the way to becoming white" (Vincent 2).

Afro-phobia appears to be common among Mexican mestizos although they are likely the direct descendants of the *mezclas* who had African blood in them. This may be understood if one takes into consideration that while a considerable percentage of Mexicans are in fact "black" as well as anything else, "visibly" black women and men and their daughters and sons in Mexico, as well as in other parts of the continent, have been made to feel inferior and have thereby been physically and sexually abused. In Mexico, the most common way to escape slavery, literally, was through miscegenation. Thus, anyone capable of "passing" and liberating oneself from the stigma of blackness, as a matter of life and freedom, learned to follow the whitening trend.

In *Angelitos negros*, the complexity of this Mexican Afro-phobia can be observed in the blond Ana Luisa, a Mexican twist of the stereotype of the tragic mulatto identified in Shohat (195). We learn early in the story that Ana Luisa is in fact a mulatto and that she "really" does not know that she is part black. She is capable of accepting the services provided by Mercé, but she treats her as an infant even though Mercé has raised her. Ana Luisa also discriminates against José Carlos' friends. In a scene where Fernando is introduced to her she refuses to shake his hand, turns her back on him and leaves the room as if not wanting to breath the same air and share the same space.

Ana Luisa despises everything black, even recriminating José Carlos on one occasion for painting himself black in order to perform on stage. She accepts him as a performer but she does not hide her

dislike of the Afro-music and Afro-choreography of the show and expresses her desire to see him as what he "is." She clearly has a "better than thou" attitude while watching the performance. Her Afro-phobia escalates when, after a long and successful acting tour of Latin America (with seven months of a seemingly wonderful stay in Buenos Aires), they come back happily to Mexico City and she has a mulatto daughter. She does not want any part of her own daughter and she even accuses José Carlos of "dirtying" her life with black blood. The viewer is presented with the perspective that if one is a well-to-do white person, it is an understandable tragedy to have a "black" child.

Ana Luisa suffers tremendously, she shuts herself in to suffer her "misfortune" alone. Curiously, although she commits different degrees of child-abuse, all characters show a great deal of understanding towards her, including the well-respected Catholic priest. As mentioned before, the priest counsels José Carlos and Mercé that Ana Luisa should not be told that she is a mulatto due to her fragile emotional condition for she may go crazy or lose her life. Mercé begs José Carlos not to say anything to spare her "beautiful" daughter any more pain. José Carlos agrees to keep the secret and endures Ana Luisa's abuse due to "love."

The story climaxes when Mercé rolls down the stairs as a consequence of having been slapped on the face by Ana Luisa. José Carlos and the priest are on the second floor and José Carlos screams, "no, she is your mother!" Ana Luisa is startled and looks toward the priest. The priest comes down to hold her and confirms non-verbally what José Carlos has just said. Mercé dies as a consequence of the fall, at which point Ana Luisa "comes" to her senses. She promises to change and take care of her daughter. José Carlos, of course, exonerates Ana Luisa, his "goldy locks." Ana Luisa literally gets away with murder in *Angelitos negros*.

Until the last few scenes of this film Ana Luisa, the "tragic mulatto," does not know about her blackness and everybody is sympathetic towards her. This understanding continues even when Ana Luisa explodes, verbally and physically abusing Mercé who has cared for her since birth. Ana Luisa does not have to deal with "passing" as white for even in the end, and according to the official ideology in Mexico disseminated during the cultural phase of the Revolution, to look non-Black is to look "beautiful." Ana Luisa has been saved and her implied sentence is to have to accept her "black" daughter who nevertheless is on her way to whiteness.

The black stereotypes and white mythification marked by cinematic technique in this Mexican *churro* connect with other images and narratives distributed in Mexico since colonial times but adopted officially as discourse on nation at the onset of the cultural phase of the Revolution. Once the connection is made, and codes formed, the real world is bypassed. The cinematic narrative is pleasurable to the target audience (all of those susceptible viewers wanting to be, at least visibly, non-black) displacing the necessity of verifying the codes. Snead has said, "[s]o the history of black film stereotypes is the history of the denial of history in favor of an artificially constructed general truth about the unchanging black character" (139).

The Mexico of the late forties dealt in this manner with the "rediscovery" of

blacks. In a way, it told the public that everything was okay, that "black" blacks were few and that soon they would be willingly and happily assimilated. This discourse was "convincing" enough for its allies as well. It helped Mexico reinforce and preserve its "progressive" profile in the modern world, an appearance acquired as a result of its stance during WWII.

Today, one of the problems with *Angelitos negros* is that it continues to be copied and shown without warning. Caution, as to the negative—psychological, societal and political—effects the message in the film has had, ought to be given. This is of particular importance for a population suffering "false memory syndrome."[15]

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Notes

[1]Maximiliano Maza, in an effort to dispel confusion as to whether all black and white motion pictures are in fact from the Golden Epoch of Mexican cinematography creates a sub-category he calls the "Golden Years of the Golden Epoch." He explains, "Our television culture has conditioned us to consider any Mexican black and white film as part of The Golden Epoch. Being a purist the true 'golden years' of the Golden Epoch would coincide with the Second World War (1939-1945)," (Maza 1). Maza says "Mexican cinematographic production had reached a high level by 1939. In fact 'The Golden Epoch' began years before WWII, a factor often cited as a direct cause" (Maza, Introducción). Thus, according to Maza, the Golden Epoch began well before the war, but the best years, what he calls "The Golden Years" nevertheless coincide with the war. I should also note here that all translations in this work are mine unless otherwise noted.

[2]By cinematographic message I am referring to the capacity of film to transmit an idea with the advantages that are particular to this medium. Film has the capacity to influence a frame through sound for predisposing the audience to receive the message in an intended manner. It has the capacity to create an ambience to manipulate the general mood by the intensity, scarcity, or absence of light. It has the advantage of plotting the story in the style most convenient for a given cultural context in order to enable a "dialogue" with the audience across space and time (as an example, a film from another epoch, from another country, from another language capable of making us feel angry, melancholic, sad, happy or straight out sexual). Excellent examples of this way of projecting a message to the masses are *Cantinfla's* movies that "talked the talk and walked the walk" of the Mexican *pelado*. These films reached people from Chicago, Los Angeles, Florida, and all over Latin America where there was access to TV or to itinerant theaters.

[3]Up to today the existence of "visibly" black Mexicans, and of an African biological as well as cultural component of Mexican-ness, is little known and accepted in and out of the country. Academic investigation on the subject is in its early stages. Most of the work being done is relatively recent and is in the areas of history, linguistics, anthropology, ethnology, music and dance. A considerable portion of that investigation relays heavily on "non- Mexican" perspectives and "non-Mexicans" are doing an important part of the work. This may be understood if one considers that black Mexicans are part of the greater phenomenon known as the "African Diaspora." To my knowledge there is no local or international criticism about the manner in which people of African descent have been and are portrayed and characterized in Mexican cinematography.

[4]For a detailed account on how this ideology was developed and adopted see "The 'Afro-Mexican' and the Revolution: Making

Afro-Mexicans Invisible Through the Ideology of Mestizaje in La raza cósmica." *PALARA* 4 (2000): 59-83.

[5]James Snead defines film as a "series of recorded and repeatable moving images that aims to make a viewer believe in the story or reality it claims to portray" (134). I adopt this definition.

[6]In "Las mitologías del cine mexicano," Carlos Monsiváis points out, "The same as everywhere, in México US film industry is the inevitable model...everything is learned from Hollywood..." (2).

[7]Jackson 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..." 467)

[8]In a prior unpublished essay I deal with the manner in which the *charro* image, after being detached from the "Afro" part of its origins, becomes one of the stamps most telling of national identity during the cultural phase of the Mexican Revolution.

[9]In the case of *Angelitos negros*, the emergence of television would be favorable. The movie was shown on TV often and thus it reached a wider audience than it would have reached otherwise.

[10]See note 3.

[11]All of the mestizos with black blood, be it one drop or more, were classified as *mezclas* during the colonial period. The darker the person, the lower he or she was in the social class pyramid. This could explain why people in Mexico are quick to deny their African root. Celestino Gorostiza in his play *El color de nuestra piel* (1952) deals with the question of skin color and social status, or the White Aesthetic that dominates the Mexican psyche.

[12]In 1946, during the government of Miguel Alemán Valdés, the PRM became the PRI.

[13]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 (Aguirre 210). He creates absurd categories based on physical appearance alone.

[14]This concept is ascribed to the Brazilian Florestán Fernández.

[15]This concept was adopted from a commentary published on *The Vancouver Sun*, Thursday, December 23, 1999, E 1. People affected with this condition have been persuaded that something that exists never was: In my experience I found it common for Mexicans in general to deny their African ancestry.

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La creación de una cultura nacional negra en *Nochebuena negra* de Juan Pablo Sojo y en *Chambacú, corral de negros* de Manuel Zapata Olivella

por Antonio Tillis

Juan Pablo Sojo en su *Nochebuena negra* (1943) y Manuel Zapata Olivella en su *Chambacú, corral de negros* (1967) presentan la vida de los negros desplazados dentro de las sociedades postcoloniales de Venezuela y de Colómbia. Las dos novelas tratan de los efectos desarrollados en las Américas a causa del colonialismo y sus resultados. Estos efectos siguen una historia social y política empezando con el colonialismo en sí adelantando la época negrera y la implementación de la esclavitud en las Américas y la emancipación de los esclavos que se realiza unos doscientos años después de su llegada. Estos efectos presentan los temas que son una parte integrante de la base de la teoría postcolonial que incluyen la resistencia hegemónica, el asunto de "lugar" dentro del contexto postcolonial, el cimarronaje cultural, el exilio y el desplazamiento.

El propósito de esta investigación es mostrar cómo la hacienda Pozo Frío en *Nochebuena* y la islita en *Chambacú* se han convirtido en espacios geográficos simbólicos para la creación de una cultura nacional para los negros que viven en las dos localidades. En Pozo Frío, hay una cultura nacional afro-venezolana y en Chambacú existe una cultura nacional afro-colombiana. Aparte de la teoría postcolonial, la crítica de Frantz Fanon sobre la cultura nacional será utilizada para detallar, según él, la evolución de la cultura nacional negra en los dos lugares y para presentar a Pozo Frío y Chambacú como representantes de dos estados nacionales dentro de dos textos literarios postcoloniales.

Antes de empezar la investigación de la representación literaria de la creación de una cultura nacional en *Nochebuena negra* y en *Chambacú* y la etiología de su desarrollo, es crucial descutir el impacto de tres factores muy importantes ya mencionados: el exilio, el "lugar" dentro del contexto postcolonial y el cimarronaje cultural. Será revelado que estos factores tienen un papel de suma importancia en la presentación y la formación de la cultura nacional negra.

Una voz que proclama la existencia del exilio en la diáspora africana es la de Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha en su artículo "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and margins of the modern nation" (1990), ofrece lo que él considera el exilio y el génesis de su evolución. El dice:

> I have lived that moment of the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nation of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gathering of exiles and emigrés and refugees, gathering on the edge of "foreign" cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gathering in the ghettos or cafés of city centres; gatherings in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language;.... (291)

Para Bhabha, el exilio representa la existencia de una gente separada de su patria y esparcida en una nación aparte de la suya propia. Esta separación de personas de su patria natal crea una gente apatriada o sin patria. En el contexto de las dos novelas, *Nochebuena negra* y *Chambacú*, el exilio de los negros de Venezuela y de Colombia comenzó en el momento en que los primeros africanos llegaron a las Américas rompiendo la unión con África. Esta separación de África, de lo maternal,

produjo una desconexión no solamente de la tierra, sino que causó una separación de la lengua, de las costumbres, de las creencias, de la religión, de casi toda la cultura africana antigua. Bhabha explica el exilio en términos de una reunión de los exiliados en una tierra extranjera, dentro del contexto de una cultura extranjera. Si aceptamos lo que nos propone del exilio y aplicamos su análisis a los personajes presentados dentro de los textos, podemos deducir que los africanos exiliados de la hacienda venezolana Pozo Frío y los de la islita colombiana Chambacú son los productos de siglos de negros separados de África que viven exiliados en una patria extranjera.

El segundo asunto preliminar es el cimarronaje cultural. Paulette Ramsay, en su ensayo sobre la obra del escritor afrocostarricense Quince Duncan titulado, "The African Religious Heritage in Selected Works of Quince Duncan: An Expression of Cultural and Literary Marronage", ofrece una definición de lo que consta este concepto:

> Cultural marronage has been used to describe the psychological level on which the African slave resisted slavery through the preservation of the cultural forms which they brought with them to the New World...Cultural marronage was as effective as the various forms of physical resistance, in that it served to foster unity among the slaves and thereby confounded and confused their masters. Additionally, these cultural forms provided comfort to the slaves amidst the cruelty and hardness of their oppressive situation, until emancipation, when they were at liberty to openly practice them. (32)

Es importante notar los factores más importantes de esta definición de Ramsay: el elemento de la resistencia, la preservación de las normas culturales traídas a las Américas, la creación de la unidad entre los esclavos y la idea de la comodidad. Estos elementos enumerados por Ramsay son factores principales en el desarrollo de la cultura nacional según la crítica de Fanon y sirven para la creación del sincretismo cultural demostrando una afirmación de una negritud y de una unión con África en las dos comunidades negras. Todos los elementos de la definición de Ramsay están presentes en las dos novelas. En *Nochebuena negra* y en *Chambacú*, se puede ver esta idea de unidad entre los negros y la presentación literaria de una gente con una voz colectiva negra. Estos elementos son los que manejan el discurso narrativo de ambas novelas y se manifiestan en la práctica de la cultura del antiguo mundo en las dos sociedades postcoloniales en forma de la religión, el folklore, la tradición oral y el lenguaje.

Finalmente, analizamos el asunto del "lugar." En la introducción de la sección sobre el análisis de "lugar" en *The Post-Colonial Reader*, los redactores Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin dicen lo siguiente:

> By 'Place' we do not simply mean 'landscape'. Indeed the idea of 'landscape' is predicated upon a particular philosophic tradition in which the objective world is separated from the viewing subject. Rather 'place' in post-colonial societies is a complex interaction of language, history and environment. It is characterized firstly by a sense of displacement in those who have moved to the colonies, or the more widespread sense of displacement from the imported language of a gap between the 'experienced' environment and

> descriptions the language provides, and secondly, by a sense of the immense investment of culture in the construction of place. (391)

La importancia del "lugar" en términos de esta investigación es su relación a la creación del desplazamiento, su impacto en la idea del lenguaje y su impacto en los aspectos culturales de una sociedad en general. Entonces, la cuestión no tiene nada que ver psicológicamente con la tierra física de Pozo Frío ni tampoco con la de Chambacú. La cuestión del "lugar" con respecto a Pozo Frío y a Chambacú representa una reacción de los negros dentro de una sociedad desplazada y las manifesticaciones de la transculturación entre la cultura africana, la de Venezuela y la de Colombia.

Se ha dicho que uno de los puntos más fuertes de la convergencia para la resistencia del imperio y de la dominación imperial en las sociedades coloniales ha sido la idea de la nación. Generalmente, se ha aceptado que una nación representa una comunidad conceptualizada de gente que tiene su desarrollo en experiencias y tradiciones compartidas. El psiquiatra y analista político, Frantz Fanon, en su ensayo "*On National Culture*", habla del asunto de la cultura nacional y cómo se desarrolla. El dice:

> A national culture is not a folklore, an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of a people. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. (233)

Fanon sugiere que las culturas nacionales salgan con el propósito de describir, justificar y elogiar la manera en que una gente se ha creado y se ha mantenido en existencia. Él sugiere también que este proceso se manifieste en la celebración de esas uniones culturales entre la gente oprimida, su tierra natal, sus costumbres y sus tradiciones culturales. Lo que propone Fanon es una realidad en las Américas colonizadas como los africanos, en su intento de resistir la hegemonía cultural del Oeste, existían en un ambiente donde no podían practicar abiertamente varias formas de la cultura africana. Esta práctica en secreto resultó en lo que hoy clasificamos como tradición oral del folklore africano nacida por el útero de la resistencia cultural. Algunas formas de la religión africana, aspectos de la resistencia y la tradición oral del folklore africano están vivos dentro de las novelas de Sojo y Olivella. Y, son muy cercanos a los conceptos del exilio, el cimarronaje cultural y la búsqueda del "lugar." Juntos, éstos elementos forman para la gente de Pozo Frío y de Chambacú la frontera para la presentación y la creación de su cultura nacional.

El medio ambiente de *Nochebuena negra* de Juan Pablo Sojo es Barlovento, Venezuela a fines del siglo XIX. Toda la acción de la novela ocurre en la plantación de cacao de la familia Sarabia, Pozo Frío. La novela tiene como enfoque principal, la vida de la gente de Pozo Frío. Es interesante notar que se presenta Pozo Frío como una "nación" donde la familia Sarabia, los blancos, representan el poder imperial mientras los trabajadores de la hacienda, los negros, representan los

subyugados o el "Otro." Esta presentación del autor crea un contexto postcolonial dentro de la novela. El asunto del "lugar" dentro de la hacienda Pozo Frío es revelado por la existencia de una gente desplazada en Venezuela que existe dentro de un contexto colonizado donde son víctimas de la explotación, exiliados de la tierra natal, África, y son participantes en un sistema del cimarronaje cultural. La obra culmina en el día de la celebración de la *Nochebuena* o la Fiesta de San Juan el Bautista. Los personajes principales son Luís Pantoja, el nieto del dueño de la hacienda, don Gisberto Sarabia, quien viene a Pozo Frío como el nuevo administrador; el señor Crisanto Marasma, el padre de Pedro y Deogracia, quien tiene papel como cantador de la historia folklórica. También, están Morocota, Lino Bembetoyo y Cointa. La narración de la novela trata de la interacción de los personajes exiliados en Pozo Frío mientras que resisten el poder hegemónico de Luís Pantoja. El vino a la hacienda con la idea de implementar un nuevo sistema donde él tendría el control autónomo sobre Pozo Frío. Este control resultaría de la explotación de los obreros negros.

La hacienda Pozo Frío sirve como territorio para la evolución de una representación literaria de una cultura nacional negra dentro de la sociedad venezolana. Para Crisanto, Morocota, tía Iginia, Lino, Cointa y los otros negros de la hacienda, Pozo Frío se ha convirtido en un estado nacional. Por medio de las formas culturales de resistencia, evidencia del folklore africano, la práctica de tradiciones africanas en la religión y otros aspectos africanos, esta gente demuestra su deseo de conservar y utilizar lo que tiene en común culturalmente, como explica Frantz Fanon, para crear a sí mismo y para mantener esta concepción de "sí mismo."

En la novela hay muchos ejemplos de la resistencia cultural por parte de la gente negra de Pozo Frío. Una forma importante y notable es la función del tambor dentro de su "nación." El tambor es el instrumento que da una voz a los antepasados y comunica la historia de África a los africanos exiliados. Está presente en toda parte de la vida de los afro-venezolanos. La cita siguiente muestra la relación entre la importancia del tambor y la ascendencia africana:

> El paisaje y las costumbres saturan la curiosidad del turista que olvidó su ascendencia y la sombra de un ave fatídica aletea sobre el cielo de la noche eterna que arropa a Barlovento como un sudario de muerte. Y esta voz desesperada del abuelo nadie la oye. Se la siente en las venas, obediente al llamado del ancestro, perdida en las noches de la herencia. Es la voz desconocida que todos han negado tres veces...El tambor es la cruz del Cristo negro. (312)

Esta cita de la novela detalla, por lo mínimo, dos cosas que tienen que ver con la resistencia de los negros de Pozo Frío. En primer lugar, señala lo ya mencionado de la unión entre el tambor y la ascendencia africana. La presencia de esta unión dentro de la novela demuestra la importancia por parte de la gente de no abortar su cultura africana en las Américas. También, esta cita ilustra el asunto del sincretismo religioso (la combinación de la religión oficial, el catolicismo, y la religión popular, la de raíces africanas) dentro de Pozo Frío para mantener aspectos de la religión africana. La voz narrativa del texto usa una referencia bíblica para mostrar el intento de negar la

herencia negra. Usa los versos de la *Bíblia* sobre el discípulo Pedro, que iba a negar a Jesús tres veces antes del grito del gallo (Mateo 26:31-35). Inmediatamente después, cita el tambor como "la cruz del Cristo negro." Esta comparación textual forma una relación metafórica directa entre la cristiandad y la identidad racial. La asociación de Cristo con lo negro atestigua a la hegemonía revocada donde la voz narrativa le da al Cristo una identidad negra como un acto de la reclamación del poder cultural y la resistencia. Por hacerlo, estos exiliados construyen por sí mismos una imagen fenotípica que refleja su sentido de africanidad como un medio de la perservación cultural. Estas voces del margen reclaman su ancestro africano. Adicionalmente, esta reclamación culmina en el tambor que simbólicamente funciona para ellos como un recordatorio de su negritud de la misma manera que la representación religiosa de Cristo como uno para los cristianos: "(l)a gran voz del viejo *mina*! Voz del ancestro congregando el clan! Voz misteriosa, que reclama su sangre africana perdida en los recovecos de las venas como vaga reminiscencia..." (300). Esta cita alude al hecho de que la gente, aunque trata de olvidar su africanidad, no puede a causa de que es parte de sí misma y es lo que asigna su existencia: es como la sangre dentro de las venas. Es una afirmación que la sangre que corre por las venas es africana en sí.

El papel del tambor como símbolo de lo africano dentro del texto es dominante. El punto decisivo de esta representación se halla en el acontecimento culminante de la obra, *Nochebuena negra* o la celebración del Día de San Juan:

> Nochebuena de San Juan! El tambor repica en los solares. Su gran voz de sonoridades sagradas, vibra en la médula de todos, como una gran voz venida del ancestro a congregar el clan. En los solares, el mina repica: bam, bam, bam, quipán, bam, bam! (293)

Aquí el ritmo del tambor y del mina y su voz en un contexto africano representan una llamada para la congregación de la tribú para una celebración o un acontecimiento importante. Los ecos penetrantes de estos instrumentos antiguos de África se transforman en mensajes audibles que conectan estos exilios a su tierra natal y a su pasado. La voz onomatopéyica de los tambores tiene un papel doble. Por un lado, éste "bam, bam, quipám, bam, bam" llama a la población negra de Pozo Frío dándole noticia del comienzo de la celebración. Por otro, la cadencia del tambor transmite a sus oyentes hipnotizados la voz de los ancestros que se comunican con sus descendientes por medio del tambor como signo de África. Por la novela entera, estos tambores se presentan como aspectos principales de la vida y de la existencia de los habitantes negros de Pozo Frío.

También, los elementos de la historia africana folclórica y la tradición oral son de mucha importancia dentro de la novela de Sojo, funcionan como otras formas de la perservación cultural y la resistencia. La voz narrativa presenta a Crisanto Marasma, quien es uno de los personajes principales y opera dentro de la hacienda como el capataz de los obreros negros. Además, él se presenta por la voz narrativa como el cuentista africano no sólo de la hacienda pero de todo Barlovento:

> Ninguno en Barlovento, conocía más historias que Crisanto Marasma. Por su imaginación pasaban los nombres de

> todos los nativos y forasteros residenciados en aquellas tierras.... (73)

Crisanto, en el sentido folclórico, es el *griot* histórico de Pozo Frío y cuenta la historia de la gente en la tradición oral de África. Utilizando la voz de Crisanto y la de los otros, esta tradición africana penetra la obra desde las leyendas del tío Congrejo a las de la tía Culebra. La superstición es otra manifestación africana de la novela. Junta con las otras formas del folclór, crea un contexto cultural bien africano para los habitantes. Un ejemplo de su manifestación se observa en el episodio de Morocota, un personaje africanizado por la voz narrativa y el Aruco, una ave típica de Venezuela. Este episodio está basado en una leyenda afro-venezolana que dice que si este pájaro le habla a una persona, la persona se volverá loca. A causa de la violación de Cointa por parte de este Morocota, la tía de ella le maldice a él. Y la manifestación de la maldición viene en forma del pájaro, el Aruco, que viene a Morocota por un sueño y le habla a él. Y, de acuerdo con la tradición, Morocota se vuelve loco. La maldición de Cointa se actualiza y esta leyenda afro-venezolana de superstición continua.

Estas citas de *Nochebuena negra* de Juan Pablo Sojo y sus interpretaciones sirven para mostrar la presencia de elementos folklóricos, la preservación de aspectos de la cultura africana, y otras formas de resistencia con el papel de crear y conservar una identidad afro-venezolana dentro de Pozo Frío. Concomitantemente, éstos se convierten en tropos literarios esenciales a la sustentación de esta comunidad exiliada y funcionan como los vehículos que crean una cultura nacional afro-venezolana dentro de la novela, cultura que, según Fanon, les daría a los negros exiliados un sentido de autocreación y de autoperservación.

Chambacú: Corral de Negros de Manuel Zapata Olivella es una representación literaria de la vida de los negros exiliados que habitan la islita de *Chambacú* colocada a poca distancia de la frontera costal de Cartagena. Como punto de partida, el título tiene mucha importancia al tema postcolonial de esta obra. Se titula, *Chambacú: Corral de Negros*. Lo curioso es la connotación de la palabra "corral." Típicamente, se asocia este vocablo con la habitación de los animales y se caracteriza por condiciones sucias y un ambiente que no es adecuado para seres humanos. Es esta connotación que el lector asocia con la isla de Chambacú mientras que su población negra se presenta como voces oprimidas y unidas en la pobreza que hablan desde afuera. Y, como los no humanos, sus gritos por la justicia social caen sobre orejas sordas e insensibles.

Una de las premisas básicas de la novela tiene que ver con los gritos de una comunidad afro-colombiana que a través de los siglos existía como víctima de los sistemas violentos de la esclavitud, la pobreza, la marginalidad, la opresión social y la búsqueda de una salida. Como la comunidad negra venezolana de *Nochebuena negra*, los afro-colombianos de *Chambacú* han mantenido un sentido de la cultura nacional afro-colombiana por medio del cimarronaje cultural, el sincretísmo religioso y la unión con los antepasados. Aparte de su leitmotiv mimético, hay algunas diferencias entre las dos novelas. Una diferencia grave es el tiempo cronológico de *Chambacú* y el tratamiento por Zapata Olivella de esta época. La novela comienza en el medio del siglo XX cuando la región de Chambacú existe dentro de Colombia como una isla

separada, marginalizada y desplazada de la masa territorial. Su conexión con la tierra es por medio de un puente que facilita viajes entre Cartagena y *Chambacú*. Esta comunidad que consta de una mayoría negra y pobre existe en la forma más pura de la definición de Bhabha del exilio en plena mitad de la época moderna. La perspectiva del tiempo cronológico representa un enfoque global de la novelística de Zapata Olivella. La infiltración de los Estados Unidos se presenta en la primera parte de esta novela tripartita. En "Los reclutas," la primera parte de la obra, la participación de Colombia en la guerra coreana se desarrolla con una llamada para el reclutamiento de los negros para ayudar a las fuerzas norte americanas. Por medio de un apunte textual, el autor nos informa lo siguiente:

> En 1950, el presidente Laureano Gómez ordenó reclutar soldados colombianos para que lucharan junto a los norteamericanos en contra de los comunistas en Corea. Este contingente se conoce como el "Batallón Colombia" y su reclutamiento originó numerosas protestas tanto en el país como en el extranjero. (34)

El tratamiento novelístico de esta época es muy importante al desarrollo narrativo de la obra. La influencia norteamericana muestra dos niveles de la hegemonía postcolonial. Por un lado esté Colombia, un país explotado y sojuzgado por el poder mundial, los Estados Unidos. Por otro lado, yacen la islita y los "Otros", los negros de Chambacú, ambos explotados y sojuzgados por Colombia. Esta situación presenta dos niveles de resistencía postcolonial para los negros de Chambacú y coloca la obra de Zapata Olivella dentro de los parámetros de una obra de protesta social por ser una novela que ataca los sistemas sociales de Colombia que son injustos a los negros y a los pobres.

Los africanos exiliados que habitan Chambacú como los de Pozo Frío tienen una unión con el espíritu de los antepasados de África. En *Chambacú*, esto es evidente desde el principio de la novela:

> Galopaban las botas. Producían un chasquido que antes de estrellarse contra las viejas murallas, ya se convertía en eco. Los carramplones de la caballada humana resonaban fuertes. Sombras, polvo, voces. Despertaban a cuatro siglos dormidos. (33)

Esta cita se refiere a los esclavos africanos que son los antepasados mencionados que se despertaban después de cuatros siglos de dormir. Este chasquido que se ha convertido en eco representa la presencia de los africanos exiliados en Colombia. Estas referencias penetran el discurso narrativo de Manuel Zapata Olivella en *Chambacú* y la esencia de la memoria se revela por éstas citas y por los personajes como Máximo, el hijo revolucionario y educado de La Cotena, la matriarca de la novela. Su papel frente a la creación de una voz colectiva afro-colombiana entre los chambacoanos es inminente. Como Crisanto en *Nochebuena negra*, Máximo une las generaciones de exilio por su ascendencia africana. Es él que mantiene viva la historia de su pasado recordándoles a los habitantes de su llegada a *Chambacú* y de cómo llegaron a ser exiliados sin voz:

> —No es ocasional que *Chambacú*, corral de negros, haya nacido al pie de las murallas. Nuestros antepasados fueron traídos aquí para construirlas. Los barcos negreros llegaron atestados de

> esclavos provenientes de toda Africa. Mandingas, yolofos, minas, carabalíes, biáfaras, yorubas, más que cuarenta tribus. (189)

La voz ancestral de Máximo da un resumen histórico de la presencia africana en esta islita y de lo que pasó a los antepasados al llegar a Colombia. El reconoce el hecho de que los antepasados fueron exiliados y fueron traídos a Chambacú con el propósito de ser esclavos. Máximo, por medio de esta cita, hace una declaración profunda de la unión entre los negros de Chambacú de hoy y África. Pues ahora, para los afro-colombianos textualizados, Chambacú representa la construcción postcolonial del lugar donde el mundo objetivo se ha separado de sí mismo creando un sentido de desplazamiento para los que viven en la islita sin participación política, económica y social dentro de su "lugar desplazado", *Chambacú*. Máximo revela este hecho y el de la identidad desplazada de la gente por medio de una conversación entre él e Inge, la esposa sueca de su hermano José Raquel. Máximo le explica la pérdida de la identidad de los negros en Chambacú y exige que todos los negros reclamen esa identidad:

> Nuestra cultura ancestral también está ahogada. Se expresa en fórmulas mágicas. Supersticiones. Desde hace cuatrocientos años se nos ha prohibido decir "esto es mío." Nos expresamos en un idioma ajeno. Nuestros sentimientos no encuentran todovía las palabras exactas para afirmarse. Cuando me oyes hablar de revolución me refiero a algo más que romper ataduras. Reclamo el derecho simple de ser lo que somos. (188)

La pérdida de la identidad racial y étnica es común según la definición de Bhabha en su explicación de lo que pasa en los exilios. En su explicación a la sueca Inge, Máximo habla de la "estrangulación" de la identidad cultural de la gente en términos del lenguaje, de las costumbres y de su sentido de ser. Él termina por decir con mucha fuerza que la lucha contra esta estrangulación cultural tiene que persistir hasta que la gente haya logrado la reclamación de esta identidad perdida y robada y pueda expresarla sin límites. Máximo se da cuenta de que es importante que los negros logren esta meta para tener éxito en su lucha por la preservación de su cultura nacional negra en *Chambacú*.

Paulette Ramsay en su definición del cimarronaje cultural pone mucho énfasis en el hecho de que este concepto representa el nivel sicológico por el cual los africanos esclavizados resistieron la esclavitud y la hegemonía cultural del Este por mantener intacto algunos aspectos de la cultura africana. Uno de estos aspectos preservados de la cultura negra de *Chambacú* es la práctica de y la fe en la medicina popular. Esta forma de resistencia cultural es encarnada en el curandero del texto, Bonifacio. Llega a ser evidente dentro del texto que los de *Chambacú* ponen más fe en las prácticas populares de Bonifacio que en las de la medicina oficial. En un escenario donde Dominguito, el hijo mestizo de Clotilde, la hija de La Cotena, es herido por un gallo, se hace sabido. Al llevar al niño a los médicos blancos que representan lo oficial, ellos sugieren que el niño tenga que perder la pierna. Dicen que tendrán que amputárla. Al oir esto, La Cotena demanda vehementemente que la familia lo lleve al niño donde está Bonifacio. Esta acción por parte de esta matriarca pone en duda las prácticas médicas oficiales y crea un

donde las populares son superiores: "—Ellos sabrán mucho de cortar piernas, pero no cómo curar un espolazo de gallo. Me lo llevo a donde Bonifacio. —Salva a mi nieto, Bonifacio. ¡Sálvalo!" (177). Firmemente plantado en las prácticas de África, el remedio de Bonifacio demuestra las prácticas médicas populares de la gente utilizando elementos naturales de la tierra en vez de los extractos sintéticos de la oficial:

> "El ahogo lo matará", había vaticinado Bonifacio. El insistía en medicinarlo con escoria de manteca de cerdo. Hojas soasadas de higuereta en el pecho. Collares de dientes de ajo. (38)

Esta resistencia de la medicina oficial a favor de la medicina popular con su composicón antimicróbica constando de "escoria de manteca de cerdo, hojas soasadas de higuereta y collares de dientes de ajo" ilustra el mantenimiento de los remedios basados en la cultura antigua de los africanos y ayuda en la creación de una cultura nacional afro-colombiana en Chambacú por medio del cimarronaje cultural. Estos cimarrones exiliados abortan lo oficial para mantener culturalmente lo popular. Esta noción continúa la "afro-visión" de la obra. Es decir que por medio de la reclamación de lo afro-colombiano se construyen los parámetros de una conciencia afro-colombiana que sirve como plataforma de la creación de su representación literaria de una nación afro-colombiana en *Chambacú*.

Al tomar en cuenta éstas interpretaciones literarias de *Nochebuena negra* de Juan Pablo Sojo y de *Chambacú: Corral de Negros* de Manuel Zapata Olivella, la ideología de Franz Fanon del desarrollo de una cultura nacional se hace patente en ambos textos. Por medio del mantenimiento de una conexión con su pasado ancestral, de la preservación de algunos aspectos de la cultura africana y la muestra de la resistencia a la hegemonía occidental, estos afro-venezolanos y afro-colombianos han logrado la creación de una nación negra. Los esfuerzos de estos dos autores representan un ejercicio literario de auto-definir y de auto-justificar una existencia exiliada con el propósito de alabar y mantener una cultura naciónal negra en Venezuela y en Colombia.

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Rigoberto López: Filming Cuba, the Caribbean and the World

Interview with Ian Craig, Havana, 19.12.00

As a child, film director Rigoberto López (Havana, 1947) would watch documentaries about the big cats on the African plains and his father took him to see *Peter Pan*. From that moment on, he felt the urge both to make films and to travel. It is perhaps logical, then, that he eventually became a specialist in documentaries and made television programmes and films in various countries in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. In this interview, conducted during the last International Festival of New Latin American Film in Havana (5-15 December, 2000), he speaks of his consciousness of the Caribbean, of films about Latin music, of his new documentary on Port-au-Prince, and of his latest feature film project.

Explain how your experiences in the Caribbean have shaped the films you have made.

I have felt consciously Caribbean for many years now. My very status as a Cuban has led me to have a broader sense of myself as a man of the Caribbean. I think one way I have come to an understanding of my own country has been by getting to know other Caribbean countries. It has helped me as one who looks in a mirror and sees a multiplied image of himself, or angles of vision of himself that would otherwise have been invisible to him. It's given me a sense of perspective about our country.

I visited Grenada during Maurice Bishop's period in office and started working on a documentary, *Granada: el despegue de un sueño* (*Grenada: A Dream Takes Off*), that acquired a certain fame as a result of later events. This came about because it turned out to be the last interview Bishop gave on camera in his lifetime, and so became a kind of final statement, a kind of political and poetic last will and testament regarding the Caribbean, his vision for the Caribbean and for his own country. The documentary focuses on the controversy between the Reagan government and the Bishop government concerning the building of the Point-Salines airport. As a result of the US invasion of Grenada, the documentary —which reveals the truth about the construction of the airport and in which Bishop and other Grenadians had the opportunity to state their case—this documentary became a vital testimony to those events, was seen throughout the world by many people and won various awards and prizes.

In Barbados I spoke to the then Secretary of Culture and became convinced that beyond the barrier of language and even of cultural and traditional differences, such as those that exist between former Spanish colonies and former British colonies, it is easy to see many points of similarity, many areas of overlap. The legacy of the African cultures serves always as a bridge between us, a substratum that fertilises cultural exchange and direct communication. In my film *Junto al golfo* (*By the Gulf Stream*), I used the fact that the Carifesta was held in Havana in 1979 to show that dance is a language beyond words which has functioned historically as a vehicle of communication, an unending dialogue between the nations of the Caribbean with its distinct linguistic and cultural areas. I wanted to show the extent of the spiritual similarity of our countries, which inhabit a common poetic landscape, how much in common there is in the dances and gestures of Barbadians, Grenadians, St.

Lucians, Cubans or Haitians. I also wanted to include the foremost figures of Caribbean literature such as George Lamming, Edouard Glissant or René Depestre. In the documentary these writers, using their poetic vision of the Caribbean and a few historical observations, help to consolidate the notion of dance as an arena of common spiritual identity.

There seem to be few English-speaking filmmakers here at the Festival...

As I said, the Caribbean is one big nation, culturally speaking. As well as occupying a single geographic space, the countries of the region share common features of identity despite their differing colonial pasts. In this age of globalisation, reinforcing spirituality and national identity is ever more important. The notion of sovereignty has been shattered. You turn on the television and you can receive programmes from anywhere via satellite; there is no mechanism controlling what crosses a nation's borders any more. If countries are not to be homogenised, if cultures are not to be wiped out and replaced by foreign models, a creative, systematic and intimate dialogue between cultural producers is crucial. It is ever more important to build bridges, establish close relationships and have a sense of ourselves, and to promote greater communication between Caribbean nations.

Workers from many English-speaking islands came to cut sugarcane here in the twenties and thirties. Because they were all black, West Indian and not Spanish speaking, the Cubans applied the term "Jamaicans" to all of them. There were St. Lucians, Haitians, Barbadians...but all of them ended up being called Jamaicans. We might view this as a metaphor: all of us belong to the same cultural nation. That's why I think it's important that Barbadians should know something of the cinema, the plastic arts and the literature of Cuba, and by the same token we should move towards a situation in which, when you ask me whether I know any filmmakers from the English-speaking Caribbean, I'm able to give you the name of a Barbadian filmmaker, for example.

Do you think your film *Yo soy, del son a la salsa* (*I am, from Cuban Son to Salsa*) (1996) could be described as a forerunner of the avalanche of films about Cuban music?

It might seem immodest if I were to say so, but others have already said it. *Yo soy, del son a la salsa* in some sense opened a door and drew attention to a style of film in which Cuban music and musicians are the focus. It was the first time a film of this type had been made. It traces the history of Cuban music from the birth of *son* in the mountains of eastern Cuba right up to the music commony known as *salsa* today, the distinctive feature being that this is all narrated by the many artists who have made this music famous throughout the world, Cubans, Latinos in New York, Puerto Ricans, the Venezuelan Óscar D'León, etc.

The premiere of the film at the Havana Film Festival was a major event. There was constant applause throughout the film...not so much for the film as for those who appear in it, the artists themselves with whom the Cuban public identified, the things they said, the statements the film was making using their voices.

Sadly, the film is not as widely known as it should be: this is a film that won

nine international awards, including the major prizes at documentary film festivals throughout the world, and was honoured with special showings in the most prestigious festivals such as San Sebastián and Toronto...Unfortunately, the producer, Ralph Mercado, head of RMM Film-works, was taken to court by a Puerto Rican artist because one of his songs had been used without permission. I used the song, as I used many others, with a great reverence for the music and a real sense of what this film might represent as a tribute to the quality and the vibrancy not just of our music, but also of our very identity as Latins. I made the film with this intention, and with this goal in mind I used all the songs, with the generous consent of the artists in the film. Not one was paid so much as a cent, and all of them gave their permission readily. In the case of this Puerto Rican, there was a misunderstanding. Someone said the song could be used and I used it. Unfortunately for the film—not so unfortunately for the personal profit of the musician in question, because he won the case—all this meant that international distribution of the film was cut short. Just around this time, as you know, the well-known filmmaker Wim Wenders brought out a documentary on the Buena Vista Social Club project.

Both Ry Cooder and Wim Wenders are foreign, whereas you have lived and breathed this music since birth... Do you think the account of Cuban music in a film such as *Buena Vista Social Club* is sufficiently rigorous or profound?

I've always preferred not to answer that sort of question...out of respect for Wenders and because the success of the film has done Cuban music a big favour. However, I have certain personal opinions, which I've preferred to keep to myself because they're not entirely positive. I would summarise them by saying that I do not really share Wenders and Ry Cooder's vision of Cuba or their portrayal of the artists themselves. I think the way the film proceeds suggests the message is this: here are a group of forgotten musicians, musicians of exceptional quality; just look at the tremendous record they're capable of making...with us, who have come to rescue them from oblivion.

I've asked myself this question: if the theme of this documentary is merely a group of marvellous but forgotten—or out of fashion—musicians and how they recorded a wonderful album, why do we only see cars from the 40s and 50s, in a city where there are cars of all kinds—some from the 40s and 50s, yes, but also from the 80s and 90s—why are we given a dilapidated vision of our surroundings, where everything seems a little seedy, ugly, with paint peeling off, grim, depressing, everything is nostalgic. I detect an undertone of nostalgia that makes me ask why they have shot the documentary in precisely this way. Because, how odd it is to see Ry Cooder and his son, with their beautiful, billowing tropical shirts with palm trees, going about on a Russian motorbike of the type we used to see in Soviet war films...There are certain undertones in this documentary I cannot share...

I confess I was shocked to see some of the Cuban musicians walking around Manhattan, and then Wenders showing them saying "Wow, this is what life's really all about..." I love New York, but Wenders and anyone else who knows anything about film knows it's a matter

not just of what things are said, but also of how they're said and where they're said...For me, a somewhat patronising attitude creeps in at times. I didn't want to be quite so explicit on all this because I respect and admire the filmmaker who made *Paris, Texas*, for example, but since you press me to answer I have to give my views, which are entirely sincere and not in the least intended to offend anyone.

One version of history suggests that the *son*—because it is the music of the era of slavery—was frowned upon during a certain period of the Revolution, which promoted the Nueva Trova...Is it true that these musicians had been for-gotten?

Let's start by putting a few things straight. A singer I like very much, Ibrahim Ferrer, who has been called the Cuban Nat King Cole, was not a star in the Cuban music world in the 50s, nor the 60s nor the 70s. Ibrahim was a back-up singer in the Chepín Chovén band, then he was a back-up singer in Pacho Alonso's band. I'm delighted we can now enjoy Ibrahim as a solo artist, but we shouldn't pretend we're talking about someone who became a major solo artist at the time when Beny Moré un-questionably received the most attention, or Miguelito Cuní, or Tito Gómez, etc. We should recognise that at the time, Ibrahim was not as famous as the people I've mentioned were. This was not a case of a big superstar being forgotten. However, it must also be said that traditional Cuban music did indeed get pushed aside by the avalanche of new styles. It's true that the younger generations preferred these new styles and also that an erroneous policy led to traditional Cuban music losing its rightful place, which I think was most unfortunate. It started to get left behind...

I think it's right and good that these musicians should relaunch their careers. Nor should there be any friction between, on the one hand, more recent bands such as Los VanVan or Adalberto Álvarez y su son, and these fine examples of the essence of our traditional popular music. The recent film about Los VanVan is equally justified, because Juan Formell has achieved something incredible: creating a band that's been number one in a country of dancers such as Cuba for the last thirty years, thirty years in which that band has been blazing a trail in the world of popular dance music in Cuba.

I think this is a very good time for Cuban music and for Cuban culture in general. Yes, there were periods of time of more or less protracted mistakes, when the contemporary song or the Nueva Trova, and later the popular dance acts, were very much to the fore, and those old tunes got left behind. In any event, each new generation brings its music. Culture and the markets of culture swing back and forth like a pendulum. I think we're heading back towards a more spiritual age —let's hope so and let's hope it lasts —and an important aspect of the spirituality people need is being supplied by traditional Cuban music, by those amazing old-timers who wow audiences all over the world; sometimes when Omara sings *Silencio* with Ibrahim—"the spikenards and the lilies are sleeping"—even though they don't understand a word, there are women who cry in Paris or Stockholm...

Why did you feel the need to make *Puerto Príncipe mío* (*My Port-au-Prince*)?

As I said earlier, for many years now I

have felt closely connected to the Caribbean, and within the Caribbean Haiti is a crucial point of reference. I always say I had a kind of long-distance love affair with Haiti. I always knew how important it had been for Carpentier, as demonstrated in his marvellous work *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*), or for Nicolás Guillén, or Wilfredo Lam. I always felt Haiti was a place I simply had to know.

The directors of the organising commission of the 250th anniversary of Port-au-Prince decided a documentary should be made to chronicle the extraordinary plight of the city and they invited me to make it, for which I am most grateful to them. The film was made with a mixed crew. There were Cuban cameramen and sound technicians, whilst two Haitian women did the production work and field research. The renowned Haitian intellectual Frantz Volatire, a good friend and the person who had originally invited me to shoot the film, acted as consultant.

Many women appear in *Puerto Príncipe mío*. Are you particularly interested in the viewpoint of the Haitian woman?

Women play a particularly important role in Haiti. The woman is the principal figure in traditional Haitian society. In voodoo terms, the Haitian woman might be called the Potomitan, which is the role erected in the middle of the area where voodoo ceremonies are performed. This Potomitan is the centre of gravity of the entire culture. The mother is the Potomitan of the Haitian family: the influence she has on the family, on her children, is crucial. Women are those who suffer most the daily grind of life in Haiti. They work selling bits and pieces in Port-au-Prince, or sowing, they raise the children, they find food for the family, they do the housework...They are the day-to-day heroines of the Haitian odyssey and all the elements of the situation in Haiti are intimately related to their experience, which is why they are so prominent in the documentary.

There is also a key scene in which the pathos of being a Haitian male is pointed up: the scene in which we see a man pulling a big cart that gets stuck in a hole in the road...

For me that scene sums up the Haitian situation. The documentary was shown recently at an international seminar on "Myths in the Caribbean" held at the Casa de las Américas. The audience liked and was moved by it. Several times I was asked, "What do you think is the solution to Haiti's problems?" Imagine that. First of all, I of course had to explain that I'm a poet, not a politician, but if I look for an answer in my own documentary, the answer is suggested in that scene of the man with the cart that gets stuck in a hole full of mud and murky water, and he tries to get the cart out himself, but he can't and he has to wait until a car comes and knocks the cart out of the hole for him... for me this is a metaphor for the situation in Haiti. He can't do it on his own. That's why I made this documentary: it's an attempt to draw the attention of the public at large, of international financial organisations, of intellectuals, urban planners, architects, ecologists, to a situation that is not at all well-known, because very few people know about what's happening in Port-au-Prince. I've been seeing so many friends from all over Latin America who were amazed, shocked at what they saw, but Haiti is in Latin

America, it's in the Caribbean...

For me this project brought home once again, rhetoric aside, the value of the image, of documentaries, for showing reality as it is. I ask myself: how could you describe in writing a situation like the one this documentary allows you to see? I think it is only believable, plausible, when you see it.

At one point in the documentary some young men talk about being the lost generation, and their vision of Haiti's future is far from hopeful, but they smile as they say all this. From where do Haitians get the strength required to face up to such a harsh reality in this way?

This documentary doesn't seek to inspire pity or charity. Rather, it elicits identification, solidarity, and understanding. What I saw in Haiti was dignity and pride. We mustn't forget this was the scene of the first independent revolution of the Americas, it was the first country to abolish slavery, the first to found a black republic, and it was the country that defeated all the Generals sent by Napoleon. It has roots, a very solid history that lends a natural dignity to the demeanour of Haitians.

How were you received by the Haitians? Did someone give you an introduction into the various milieus you portray in the documentary?

I was very well received by the Haitians. Of course I didn't go about on my own: I wouldn't be so pretentious or stupid as to think that I could make this documentary on my own. Haiti is not my reality. Though at certain moments I might have felt like I was just another Haitian, in general I was well aware that I am not Haitian and I therefore needed the assistance of a guide, of my Haitian friends.

Did anyone refuse to let you film them?

Sometimes we would arrive somewhere, say, the market, and people would hide their faces with their hands, or object, or get aggressive. But this has a simple explanation: they are sick of being treated as objects, of foreigners showing up with cameras and filming them as if they were exotic animals or items to be displayed in a museum. They protest against what they regard as offensive. But when one of our field researchers would speak to them in Creole and explain the purpose of what we were doing, and that we were Cuban, everything changed. They became receptive and even enthusiastic. I felt a very real sense of patriotic pride, because they have great admiration, respect and affection for Cuba. Don't forget there have long been cultural and historical links between the two countries, and large numbers of Haitians emigrated to Cuba to cut cane there, settling in the eastern provinces, in Camagüey...Today also, there are many Cuban doctors working in Haiti, where they are much respected for the excellent job they do.

Did you manage to learn to speak any Haitian Creole?

None. (Laughs). But a very important feature of the film from the start was that I wanted it to be in Creole. Most documentaries on Haiti, even features from or about Haiti, have been made in French. The fact that it is in Creole was very important for the Haitians and they are very pleased it was made that way. It is not really used to make a point; rather, its consistent use allows the film to become a kind of medley of voices in which the

city, through various figures, speaks for itself, so that I as the author do not intervene directly in the discourse. From the beginning I wanted to avoid a narratorial voice-over so that only Creole was heard throughout. There are intellectuals in the documentary who are obviously capable of speaking French in the most refined and sophisticated way, but in the film they speak Creole because they are *Haitian* intellectuals. All social classes express themselves in Creole in the film. Even the poems we included are in Creole.

Tell us something about the film you're working on at the moment.

I always wanted to make fiction, feature films, but the mechanisms or policies that determined who got to make features did not always work in my favour. But I've never stopped making films, so that now I have an oeuvre that has finally enabled me to make a fiction feature that is going to be called *Roble de Olor*. It's a thoroughly Caribbean project and it will be infused with Carpentier's notion of "marvelous reality" ("lo real maravilloso"). It is based on a true love-story that is used as the platform for a fictional discourse. I co-wrote the script with the excellent Cuban playwright Eugenio Hernández Espinosa, on the basis of a newspaper chronicle by the Cuban writer Leonardo Padura, recounting a love story between a black woman from Saint Domingue and a German, who set up what was to become the largest coffee plantation in western Cuba. This framework is used to build a utopian discourse against intolerance and to address the possibilities and risks of building a utopia.

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El timonel y los tiempos modernos

por Blas R. Jiménez

Tenía que meterme dentro del cuento para hacer la historia, eso creía cuando escuché los murmullos de un espejo hablando por los poros de una necesidad escondida en las búsqueda de identidad, en las islas, que recreando el tiempo decía: "En el mes de Julio del año 1492 de la presente cuenta del tiempo, yo, Pietro Alonso, hijo de negros-ibéricos, timonel de profesión y aventurero por elección, decidí partir hacia India en la expedición de un barco mercante bajo las órdenes del capitán italiano Cristóforo Colombo".

¿A quién le importa? Pude haber soñado aquello, todo es posible. Siempre me asaltan las dudas cuando trato de recordar tiempos pasados. Es como si hubiera perdido el arte de imaginar cosas.

Pero recordé los textos de la escuela primaria y las vueltas que nos dieron por aquellas calles de piedras con sus velos de misterios enterrados en las palabras perdidas en los acuerdos firmados por los profetas del dictador. Al sentir el susurro de la voz creía ser un conquistador:

"De Colombo dicen había nacido en Génova, razón por la cual tenía un aire de marinero. Ojos perdidos en la distancia, pómulos hundidos por el hambre, pelo corriendo en el aire, sueños rotos en el silencio y la pasión en el contar de su historia". Viven despacio los habitantes de las islas, van saboreando el tiempo como lluvia de Mayo al besar el pavimento.

Nunca había sentido la presión de ser diferente. Dentro de la universalidad éramos parte de una historia hecha de verdades, hijos de un padre de patrias y glorias guerreras. Andando con el machete por los aires, nos Cargábamos de dudas al oler las tripas volteadas por el miedo... En aquel entorno era imposible dejar de sentir las palabras esculpidas por el nuevo narrador de la misma historia. Todos y todas marchaban en millones, formando su ejercito de voces... ¡Viva el Benefactor de la Patria!

"Pude haberlo conocido en una taberna de Sevilla, capital cosmopolita del naciente reino unificado de Castilla y Aragón, presentado por un amigo común de apellido Pinzón junto a quien habíamos navegado las aguas de las costas del Africa".

Creímos haber jurado quitarnos ese horror de la memoria y los miembros herederos de su corte quemaron las neuronas en espacios habitados por mentiras. Había que leer y releer los volúmenes prestados por las palabras calladas de la soledad vivida en los tiempos que pasaron como sombras de islas... ¡Como yo! el protagonista tenía que seguir mostrando sus identidades confusas... ¿Quién eres? "En aquellos espacios existenciales las tabernas de Sevilla eran las mejores de todo el mundo mediterráneo. Allí se daban cita los mejores filósofos judíos, las encantadoras gitanas de cartas de suerte, los musulmanes ricos, los guerreros cristianos, los nuevos ordenadores de la fe, hombres y mujeres libres, cocineros ambulantes y gente que vendía su tiempo como esclavos temporeros".

Como escapados de las noches perdidas en la ignorancia. Venían corriendo aquellos recuerdos de vivencias padecidas por los genes, en un ser tanto de acá como de allá, sin responder al espacio del ahora. Quería gritar algo igual: "Nací en Sevilla, capital de la provincia del mismo nombre, en los dominios de la Corona de Castilla, unos veintidós años antes de mi partida con Colombo por mares desconocidos. Mi familia llevaba varios siglos en la península ibérica y más de veinte generaciones habían muerto en esas tierras.

Uno de los abuelos me había dicho que los antepasados llegaron cuando la conquista por los musulmanes del país de los ibéricos. De tiempo hacía unos ochocientos años".

Reconociendo la vanidad escondida en las especificidades de los grupos humanos decíamos presente en los encuentros con la creación de una población de muchos y muchas diferentes, en aquellos tiempos de guerras de banderas cruzadas y estrelladas. Cuando los dueños de las realidades neuróticas de los profetas entonaban alabanzas a los muertos de sus causas, escuchábamos los quejidos interiores y nos escondíamos en el saber: "Educado por mi abuelo materno, Pietro el sevillano, aprendí bajo su atención a leer los textos del Corán, libro sagrado de nuestra religión musulmana, las leyes de la vida y el recuerdo de los antepasados".

Habíamos comprendido el poder de aquellas oraciones escondidas en las palabras brotadas de una vida plena, cuando el abuelo oraba por las almas de los fieles difuntos, Águeda, Pedro Abreu, Eulalia Encarnación, Catola, La vieja Belén, Teléforo Jaime, Nieve la de Ninito Capitán, Nono el de Tatá, el mismo Fello y la abuela Altagracia, el rocío mañanero escapaba entre olores a leche recién ordeñada y café de colador. "Uno de nuestros parientes directos fue un fiel escribiente de los Almohades, pueblo africano que tuvo por soberanos a Abd-el-Mumin y a sus hijos... Ellos arrebataron la Ibérica a los Almoravides y confiaron, en diversas ocasiones, el gobierno de Sevilla y de la Andalucía occidental al dignatario más eminente (el zaim o líder) de su imperio, el jeque Abu Hafs, caudillo de la tribu de Hintata. Según lo cuenta Ibn Jaldún en su historia universal".

A veces presentimos la historia en el futuro. Algo del hoy tiene que ver con mi presencia en la borrachera del primer encuentro. Ahí, en aquella taberna sevillana, había contado la historia familiar observando cómo brotaba el interés de los ojos de Colombo. Las pupilas salían de sus cavernas, como los murciélagos en el anochecer, tratando de copiar cada palabra brotada de nuestros labios... Así escuchó lamentos preñados de nostalgia... Comprendo que de pedazos enterrados en un pasto ganadero de la parte occidental de la ciudad de Santo Domingo, habíamos codificado la existencia de una relación entre lo que fueron y lo que seremos: —"Con Abu Hafs trabajó uno de los antepasados de mi madre, un viajero políglota quien tomó como nombre cristiano el de Almonzo Prieto, "el africano" para sus amigos... Dicen que vivió para ver varios sultanes morir, pasando de un monarca a otro su servicio intelectual".

"Decidí ser marinero cuando descubrí que las puertas de las aventuras habían dejado las caravanas del desierto, desde aquellas guerras de Los Cruzados por las tierras del noreste africano... Para 1480 las corrientes de los mares movían la mayor parte del comercio, el Atlántico parecía sustituir al Mediterráneo".

Los hombres y mujeres de la expedición habíamos perdido la lucha en contra de las corrientes modernas de una victoria cristiana impregnada de xenofobia y exclusión. Debíamos escapar de aquel horror homogeneizador y por esa razón podemos decir que de tanto creernos lo que nos decían los adulones hispanófilos de la camarilla corrompida del dictador: "A nuestros ojos las Canarias se mostraban como el archipiélago de la nueva "Grecia" Atlántica. Hombres desnudos, triturando la esencia de la razón, corrían por sus

puertos".

Conocer cuántos y quiénes estaban en la tripulación de las tres naos no importaba. Queríamos salir de aquellas tierras sin futuro y por ello comprenderán cuando digo: —"Nadie recuerda quién piloteaba la Niña o "Santa Clara", una carabela de dos lienzos con una tripulación de treinta hombres y tres mujeres. Olvidan contar que fueron esos hombres y mujeres, bajo mi supervisión, quienes socorrieron los náufragos de la nao Santa María o "la Gallega", cuando esta tocó fondo en la costa de la isla que los indígenas de allí llamaban "Haití".

Quinientos años después de aquella tarde de Verano los espíritus flotarán sin rumbo, como nosotros al encontrarnos en medio del estallido rebelde. No podíamos hacer nada:

"Habíamos navegado dos meses y medio, la lluvia nos había curtido el cuero del vestido y el hambre de sexo cegaba los pensamientos... El capitán clavó cruces diciendo cosas en su español de acento italiano. Pidió especias, piedras preciosas, oro y plata... Recuerdo que tomó como regalo de un jefe indígena llamado Guacanagarix, dos jóvenes en pubertad, quienes aprendieron castellano en la España unificada, siendo bautizados con los nombres cristianos de Cristóbal y Diego.

¿Quien soy para juzgar nuestras acciones?. Estábamos en medio de cambios universales. No podíamos imaginarnos lo que significaría el desembarco y la perdida entre las rocas de la costa de una de las naos. Ahí está el patrimonio de unos pueblos que se forman de sueños que contarán como historias. Nosotros vivíamos nuestro tiempo y sólo puedo decirle que: —Almacenamos muestras de frutas, plantas y animales. Saciamos todas las necesidades, vimos que había oro en abundancia, tomamos cuanto podíamos cargar y dejamos una fortaleza con quienes no podían regresar en las dos pequeñas embarcaciones que teníamos".

¿Por qué tenían que morir?

"Quienes quedaron eran en su mayoría hombres. Sólo dejamos cuatro mujeres de catorce que habían zarpado con nosotros desde Canarias. Una soldado del Rey quien había decidido salir en la expedición para evitar las críticas de la Iglesia Católica Romana; Juana de Canarias, cocinera y escribiente, quien bajo las órdenes de Colombo tomaba notas de los acontecimientos; una bárbara inglesa con olor a ron (spirit-decía ella) delatando su presencia y la sirvienta de un sacristán de la nueva iglesia católica española, encargada de limpiar sus errores.

Queríamos hacer lo que hacen los guerreros triunfantes, regresar al pueblo que nos había enviado a la muerte, con las manos llenas de trofeos. Hicimos todos los arreglos en tiempo record y cualquier historiador diría que: "Tomamos de nuevo las corrientes y nos aventuramos al viento del Sur, dejándonos balancear sobre las aguas del gran océano... Alá había sido bondadoso, ahora podíamos hablar de las cosas que vimos y pasamos entre las costas de Africa y las playas de un islote bautizado San Salvador".

Ahora que ocupo espacio entre las pasiones voy perdiendo la memoria y como aquel africano borracho de futuro repito: —"Las historias que han contado, desde Anglería hasta Moya Pons, hablan de un Colombo conocedor por instinto de unas islas continentes al Oeste de Africa... No puedo desmentir esas historias pero puedo contarle la mía, vivida en las corrientes que nos arrastraron por los mares oscuros del océano Atlántico".

Todo esto tiene un comienzo y por supuesto tendrá un final que debe iniciar un proceso de reflexión igual de interesante a los planteamientos de tertulias milenarias. Siempre tratando de comprender el porqué nos encontramos un karma que nos parece ideal pregonamos, siempre pregonamos:

"Cuando hablé con Colombo, en la taberna del manco Habid en la margen oriental del Guadalquivir, río grande que divide la Sevilla, quedé impresionado por el contrato que había firmado con los reyes, en las puertas de Granada, en el cual Colombo obtenía 8% de todas las ganancias del viaje a la India. Ahí me di cuenta de que tenía agallas de comerciante aquel genovés".

Le olvidaron al darle una fama que no se merecía... Sabemos muy bien cuales eran sus ambiciones y cualidades. Si fuera su biógrafo dijera: "El aventurero italiano llegó a Cádiz desde la India vía la costa del Africa... Desertó del navío bajo bandera portuguesa que le había traído y se dedicó a propagar sus intenciones de hacer viajes, similares a los que venían realizando los portugueses, si conseguía quien le financiara las expediciones y compartiera con él las ganancias... Habló con quienes eran potenciales inversionistas, frailes amigos y comerciantes florentinos. Al no conseguir oídos receptivos en Cádiz tomó el Guadalquivir, río arriba, llegó a Sevilla y de taberna en taberna trató de convencer a banqueros judíos y musulmanes ricos, hablando sobre la rentabilidad en su propuesta... Pero las cosas en la España de los reinos de Castilla y Aragón no estaban para pensar en invertir, sus palabras eran ruidos extraños en aquellos oídos nerviosos por las victorias de los cristianos... Ya en Sevilla le fue mejor, consiguió un amigo de aquellos reyes pobres y pudo llegar hasta los oídos reales... Tomando los caminos de Ronda pasó por varios pueblos fronteras y se vio en Ojaén, pueblo puerta de Granada. Allí los reyes trataban de ganar la sitiada ciudad joya del imperio musulmán... Así, entre los disparos de cañones, las cargas de los lanceros y el ruido de las espadas, obtuvo aquel contrato con la corona de Castilla y Aragón".

Comprenderán que hablo de Colombo para meterme dentro de una historia escrita sobre la piel y con la sangre de la familia: —"Como dije anteriormente, Sevilla era la meca de todo lo bueno y lo malo que teníamos en aquel tiempo. Situada en el corazón Sur de la España castellana se había convertido en una gran olla hirviente de cambios. La gente llegaba para hacer fortuna y abundaban los sueños de conquistas... El de Colombo parecía ser uno más... En una conversación entre copas de vino dije a Colombo que habíamos navegado las corrientes de las Canarias, una docena de veces en los últimos años. Conocíamos como las aguas al calentarse cambiaban de curso, hacia Cabo Verde o hacia Cabo Blanco, según la estación del año... El italiano escuchó con atención y me dijo: "Te vas conmigo en el primer intento, necesito gente con experiencias"... Pensé que con la paga podría hacerme pintor como Juan de Pareja, algo que me atraía desde que vi su rostro sobre lienzo".

Comprenderán que los tiempos no fueron siempre lo que son y que mañana serán otros tiempos. Desde que fuimos expulsados del paraíso de los dioses a tierras de hombres y mujeres, hemos olvidado que la distancia entre las cosas está en la percepción sentida por los órganos prestado en esta vida. Por todo eso le digo que fuimos nosotros:—"Yo era

miembro titular de la Cofradía de los negros de Sevilla; la de San Benito de Palermo, el africano. Por eso dije a Colombo que podría conseguir una veintena de hombres y mujeres negro-africanas dispuestas a hacer el viaje".

¿Qué hacíamos en la Ibérica medieval? Queríamos viajar al Africa, ver rostros familiares y regresar. —"El abuelo me había hablado del viaje de su padre a Tombuctú, la capital científica de Malí, cuando el emperador Abubakari Segundo equipaba las flotas expedicionarias por tierra y por mar con brújulas magnéticas". No puedo recordar en cual de los momentos perdí la historia pero si puedo decir que: —"Recuerdo haber hablado con Colombo de los cuentos ancestrales africanos durante una de las tantas borracheras... Ahí se mencionaban las hazañas de barcos comandados por guerreros y llenos de campesinos enviados por Abubakari hacia la otra orilla del Atlántico"...

En la historia que recuerdo no navegábamos a la India, habíamos salido con rumbo fijo, como decía el abuelo:- "Hacia y desde la tierra de los jaguares".

El timonel de la historia tomó el tiempo prestado entre los rayos del sol y dejó caer la necesidad que tenía de expresarse. Vomitó una leyenda olvidada y quedó en el olvido de un presente sin historia... Su "Nuevo Mundo" agonizaba en el Pensamiento Moderno.

Centro de Información Afro-Americano
Santo Domingo

El secreto de Niña Santacruz

por Cubena

Aquella noche de plenilunio, de calor sofocante y de aguaceros torrenciales, como caudalosos ríos amazónicos los periodiqueros inundaron las estrechas calles laberínticas de la ciudad impregnada con olores y sabores tropicales. Por las calles estrechas los periodiqueros, con periódicos en mano, pocos a bicicleta y muchos a pie, pedaleando y corriendo rápidamente aquella noche veraniega, todos pregonaban a voz en cuello: ¡Extra. Extra. NEGRA CRIMINAL!

Al día siguiente por la madrugada, como gallos madrugadores todo el mundo amaneció con mucha inquietud, por las ansias de enterarse de los pormenores del crimen, por lo tanto, todos los diarios matutinos se agotaron tan pronto fueron sacados de las imprentas. A primera plana en titulares gruesos se leía: NEGRA ASESINA A NIETO DE DON JUSTO. Luego, en las oficinas, en las iglesias, en las plazas, en los mercados y hasta en los prostíbulos, se comentaba bochinchosamente y se discutía condenatoriamente sobre el canalla y cruel crimen.

--Vecina, ¿leíste lo de la negra?

--Comadre, tú sabé que no sé lee ni escribí, pero en todos los vecindarios, como una papa muy caliente, el bochinche de la negra asesina anda de boca en boca.

--Pues, entonces todo el mundo sabe lo de la negra.

--Ay comadre, ese crimen no tiene perdón de Dios.

--Ojalá le den cadena perpetua a la negra.

--Deberían de fusilarla en una plaza y poner todo en la tele.

--Jesús, María y José. Al infierno con la hija de satanás y fuego eterno con esa negra.

--O decapitarla en la estatua de Vasco Núñez de Balboa.

—¡Cadena perpetua, plomo, fuego y machete con la negra!

—O azotarla quinientas veces y descuartizarla como se hacía con los negros cimarrones en la época de la esclavitud.

—¡Cadena perpetua, plomo, fuego, machete, latigazos y caballos con la negra!

La acusada de asesinar al nieto de don Justo había pasado de hacienda en hacienda desde la época de las ferias de Portobelo, como un mero objeto de ébano que se heredaba en la acaudalada y aristocrática familia istmeña, cuyo patriarca era el negrero don Justo Casanova, tesorero de la Casa de los Genoveses, el mercado de esclavos. En efecto, durante mucho tiempo, en la hacienda de los Casanova, la acusada fue niñera, aseadora, modista, cocinera... En la cárcel, la acusada se desvelaba, madrugada tras madrugada, por el hecho de que, a pesar de muchos años de empleo con los Casanova, carecía de los fondos suficientes para pagar los gastos de su defensa, porque durante toda su vida, viviendo y trabajando con descendientes de la misma familia, su único sueldo había sido cuarto, catre y los desperdicios de la jauría de perros.

La acusada del canalla y cruel crimen no tenía familia conocida ni en Portobelo ni en ninguna parte, y, según doña Blancaflor de las Nieves Newhouse, la tía beata del asesinado, durante su juventud, "se sabía que sin tener marido la negra había parido a muchos hijos, pero a una hija de la negra, a las pocas horas de nacida la niña, forzaron a la madre a regalar a su recién nacida chichí a los padrinos, para que no fuera un estorbo en su empleo". Y, además, le aconsejaron a la negra que "era más importante para ella entregarles todo su cariño materno a los hijos, nietos, sobrinos, ahijados y vecinos de sus amos".

hijita en el viaje a la libertad.

La niñita que fue lanzada al *odó* (río), durante los años de su adolescencia, trabajó en varios oficios domésticos en la hacienda de las familias Maisonouveau y Casanova, en Santo Domingo y Cuba, respectivamente. Luego, acompañando, como niñera, a miembros de las familias Maisonouveau y Casanova, viajó al Istmo de Panamá, donde más tarde, trabajó en la construcción del Ferrocarril y el Canal de Panamá".

—Muy distinguidos señores del jurado. Lamentablemente, nuestra querida patria ha quedado más enlutada. Me acaban de informar que la cultísima dama, doña Inocencia Aurora Newhouse de Casanova y Maisonouveau, esposa del cirujano asesinado, en este momento tan trágico para ella, sufriendo el cruel asesinato de su ser más querido, asesinado por las garras canallas de una negra, señores del jurado, es doloroso para mí comunicarles a ustedes que la afligida viuda acaba de tener un aborto. Es más, distinguidos señores, desgraciadamente, madre e hijo, en este momento de duelo nacional, son cadáveres. La criatura que no gozará de dicha y felicidad, señores del jurado, es tataranieto de un gran prócer y filántropo de nuestra patria, don Justo Casanova.

La fama de la esclava cimarrona cundió por todas las islas en el mar Caribe y hasta por Tierra Firme. Ella ayudó a muchos esclavos a escapar el yugo de la esclavitud, prendió fuego a muchos cañaverales e instigó muchas rebeliones de cimarrones en ingenios azucareros de Santo Domingo, La Habana, Montego Bay, Veracruz, Cartagena y Portobelo. Se dice que ella era la que preparaba el purgante mortífero para que las esclavas concubinas abortaran.

—Este distinguido jurado tiene una misión sagrada que cumplir ante Dios y la Patria. La muerte trágica de tan ilustre hijo de la patria... su bella y querida esposa... su hijito...

La *erúbinrin* (esclava), en Jamaica, jamás fue olvidada. Tan pronto la hija logró ahorrar algo de dinero, regresó a la hacienda de los Newhouse en la isla de Jamaica, para comprar la libertad de su *iya* (madre). Desde hacía mucho tiempo, la anciana esclava estaba inválida por los azotes que había recibido y, también, estaba sorda y ciega como resultado de un golpe que recibió en la cabeza por no revelar el paradero de su *omobinrin* (hija). Luego, cuando la anciana llegó al hogar de su hija, la nietecita alegremente la abrazó diciendo: "Abuelita africana, ¿no me reconoces? Hablo castellano, rezo en cristiano y canto en italiano. ¿Abuelita africana, ¿por qué no me reconoces?"

La anciana murió al quinto día de ser *abo* (mujer) libre. La nietecita, muy joven para comprender lo que era la muerte, rompió a llorar amargamente pensando que su abuelita se había marchado encerrada en un ataúd, para no contestar nunca la prengunta: "¿Abuelita africana, ¿por qué no me reconoces?"

—JUSTICIA. JUSTICIA. JUSTICIA. Distinguidísimos miembros del jurado, *fiat justicia, ruat caelum*. He dicho.

En el esperado fallo condenatorio, por el canalla y cruel crimen la anciana fue sentenciada a triple cadena perpetua.

La anciana condenada a triple cadena perpetua, además de no revelar que ella era testigo de que la esposa alcohólica del cirujano asesinado todos los viernes invitaba a su alcoba al jardinero, quien era, a la vez, el amante favorito del Dr. Ernestocabeza "Machito" Casanova y Maisonouveau, y que en una gritería violenta de celos, la alcohólica, a quemarropa, con un revólver le disparó

varias veces a su cónyuge impotente; es más, tampoco reveló y se llevó al sepulcro de la cárcel que su nombre verdadero era Niña Santacruz.

Niña Santacruz había sido la primera criatura africana en nacer en la bodega del barco negrero *Santacruz* cuando, en aquella madrugada, en el puerto de la Casa de los Genoveses, el mercado de esclavos, vendieron a su madre como esclava a la familia Newhouse, ricos dueños de cañaverales en Jamaica.

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El rey esclavo

por Cubena

En aquella época feliz de la más abundante cosecha, durante una copiosa temporada lluviosa, cuando en el reino de Nokoró, en Africa, se celebró jubilosamente con un gran festival de tambores, marimbas, maracas y danzas, otro aniversario festivo conmemorando el triunfo de la construcción de la Esfinge, la Gran Pirámide y otros monumentos y hazañas importantes en Egipto, Etiopía, Nubia, Ghana, Mali, Songhai y Zimbabwe, en honor a los faraones y los reyes africanos, antepasados nobles y valientes del rey Obadelé, extrañamente, durante una madrugada por allá apareció un hombre muy envidioso de la nobleza, bondad, popularidad y felicidad del más rico y poderoso rey de Africa, donde, tras las lluvias, una sinfonía de gorjeos anunciaba melodiosamente que el cielo de Nokoró lucía el arcoiris más maravilloso en toda Africa.

El rey Obadelé era el soberano más rico, poderoso y bondadoso de todos los reinos a las orillas del río Nilo y los alrededores del volcán Kilimanjaro. Sus súbditos, ahijados e hijos, siempre disfrutaban de lo mejor de todo, porque, felizmente, las riquezas en el reino de Nokoró eran para todos; pero más importante aún, era el respeto y amor paternal que el rey sentía ingenuamente por sus súbditos, ahijados e hijos. Además, en todos los reinos se sabía que, durante la cosecha de quimbombó, guandú, maní, ñame, yuca, plátano, guineo..., cuando por desgracia ocurría una guerra, o una plaga, o una sequía, o una inundación que destruyera la siembra de quimbombó, guandú, maní, ñame, yuca, plátano, guineo... de algún pueblo vecino, el rey Obadelé enviaba alimentos, chivos y vacas a todos los vecinos que sufrían hambre y miseria. Y, luego, también contrataba a agricultores para ayudar en la siembra, y a obreros para participar en la construcción de viviendas, reparación de caminos y todo lo necesario para mejorar la situación de sus vecinos damnificados; además, el rey Obadelé mandaba a los mejores conocedores de las hierbas medicinales para curar a los enfermos; y, por si esto fuera poco, además de los maestros que se dedicaban, con el mayor esmero, a las enseñanzas en las escuelas dirigidas por el mismo rey Obadelé, también, cuando era necesario, el sabio soberano solucionaba personalmente los problemas y las discordias entre familias, amigos y vecinos, para que vivieran en paz y armonía como hermanos.

Felizmente, a todos los recién nacidos en Nokoró, en el reino del rey Obadelé, a quienes en sus hamacas la cariñosa reina Ayoluwa visitaba durante los atardeceres, acompañada de un cortejo de ancianos y jóvenes, cantantes y danzantes, para con un tierno y cariñoso abrazo, tras la serenata de tambores, marimbas y maracas, darles la bienvenida a la familia nokoreña; y el rey bondadoso, por su parte, a los recién nacidos les obsequiaba regalos valiosos de marfil y oro: juguetes diseñados por los más diestros artesanos en figuras de elefantes, jirafas, cebras y leones.

En el reino del rey Obadelé, con frecuencia los tambores, las marimbas y las maracas sonaban ritmos melodiosos, invitando a todos los vecinos de Nokoró para celebrar alegremente con cantos y danzas los ritos en homenaje a los orixás Obatalá, Yemayá, Changó, Elegguá, Oggún, Ochún, Orula y a todos los antepasados en el Reino de los Muertos. En Nokoró también era costumbre dar festivamente bienvenidas y despedidas durante las visitas de otros reyes y sus

familias; y, además, con mucha alegría se celebraban las ceremonias vinculadas con siembras, cosechas, nacimientos, cumpleaños, matrimonios, aniversarios, heroísmos y sepelios.

Fastidiosamente, el hombre envidioso que apareció en Nokoró aquella madrugada, de día y de noche, temporada de lluvias tras temporada de lluvias, sin descansar, deambulando por todas las poblaciones, trataba de buscar obsesionadamente a enemigos del más rico, poderoso y bondadoso rey a lo largo del río Nilo y a lo ancho en todos los territorios a la vista del volcán Kilimanjaro; pero, atardecer tras atardecer, el envidioso, loco de rencor y frustración, no lograba encontrar a ningún cómplice de su conspiración ni a nadie que fuera enemigo del rey Obadelé.

Pero, una madrugada, por la borrachera, tirado en el lodo que había sido revolcado por perros sarnosos, y pisoteado por vacas diarreicas, el envidioso recordó que todos los años el rey Obadelé acostumbraba viajar con su familia a la costa atlántica de Africa, tras de navegar por el río Congo, para participar en una popular y famosa carrera de caballos, un pasatiempo favorito del rey, y también para llevar a Tombuctú especias, marfil y oro con el propósito de contratar a los mejores maestros, curanderos, agricultores y artesanos que desearan vivir en el más rico reino a orillas del río Nilo y cerca del volcán Kilimanjaro.

Luego, durante una madrugada triste: huérfana de tambores, marimbas y maracas, huérfana de cantos y danzas, huérfana de gorjeos, huérfana de fragancias encantadoras de flores y olores sabrosos de frutas, y huérfana de arcoiris, el envidioso se emborrachó con vino lusitano, y, cautelosamente, a la desembocadura del río Congo, durante una de las visitas del rey Obadelé y su familia a la costa atlántica de Africa, bajo el amparo de la tiniebla y la complicidad de mercaderes musulmanes y cristianos, llevó a cinco piratas que eran mancos, cojos y tuertos, veteranos de aventuras en el mar Caribe, para que secuestraran a la noble familia africana por cinco botellas de vino lusitano.

El secuestro de la noble familia africana ocurrió una madrugada. Y además de pasar muchas madrugadas con hambre y sed navegando en el océano Atlántico, encadenados en la bodega del *Santacruz*, un barco negrero al servicio de la Casa de Contratación, también, los africanos secuestrados del reino de Nokoró observaron con ojos inundados en lágrimas el último arcoiris ahogarse en el horizonte lejos de la costa de Africa, mientras toda la tripulación rezaba letanías en latín de analfabetas, rogando por un buen viaje. En cambio, sobre las espaldas desnudas de los africanos rebentaban, como relámpagos sobre palmeras, muchos latigazos dolorosos; y, tras de marcar con hierro candente a todos los africanos con una cruz en el hombro izquierdo, el que más latigazos recibió sobre la espalda desnuda fue el rey secuestrado, por insistir, con orgullo y tenacidad, que su identidad verdadera era rey y no esclavo, y sobre todo, que su nombre verdadero era Obadelé y no Bartolomé Santacruz, nombre que le impuso un sacerdote, capellán del *Santacruz*, quien bautizó a todos los secuestrados de Nokoró. Y, durante el lento y largo viaje transatlántico rumbo a los puertos negreros en el mar Caribe, bajo la amenaza de tormentas en el océano Atlántico, el rey encadenado se puso triste por la ausencia de arcoiris en el horizonte, y, también, se puso furioso cuando en la bodega nauseabunda del barco negrero murió de nostalgia su esposa, la reina

Ayoluwa, y, también, cuando echaron al mar a su madre por vieja y a su hijo joven, el príncipe Olabisi (porque el valiente príncipe con sus puños lastimados por las pesadas cadenas oxidadas, defendió el honor de su hermanita, la princesa Adesimbo), a los tiburones de voraz apetito que perseguían al barco negrero, desde la madrugada que los grumetes izaron las velas del barco para zarpar y, como ladrones perseguidos por la justicia, alejarse rápidamente de la costa de Africa.

Transcurrieron cinco meses de encierro en la lóbrega y nauseabunda bodega del *Santacruz*, en el océano Atlántico y el mar Caribe. Era de madrugada cuando el barco negrero, cargado con los esclavos africanos oriundos de Nokoró (menos de la mitad sobrevivió las penurias y las tormentas del viaje transatlántico), llegó al mar Caribe, y tras de primero echar ancla en Santo Domingo, La Habana, Veracruz y Cartagena, finalmente, cuando los grumetes bajaron las velas y, por quinta vez, echaron el ancla del barco negrero, esta vez, en Portobelo, cerca de la desembocadura del río Chagres, en la costa caribeña del istmo de Panamá, donde los aguaceros eran más torrenciales y no se veía ningún arcoiris, los cinco piratas tuertos, socios de un rico comerciante esclavista de la Casa de los Genoveses en Panamá, en las ferias de Portobelo vendieron a Bartolomé Santacruz y a su hija, a quien todos, excepto su padre, ahora llamaban Isabel Santacruz.

En Portobelo, el más famoso y acaudalado puerto negrero antes de los asaltos de Francis Drake, Henry Morgan y sus compañeros piratas, bucaneros, filibusteros y corsarios, el amo de Bartolomé Santacruz e Isabel Santacruz, llamado don Justo, dueño de barcos negreros, esclavos, hatos de ganado, cafetales y cañaverales, era muy generoso con la iglesia católica y tesorero de la Casa de los Genoveses, el mercado de esclavos en Panamá, y las sucursales en Santo Domingo, La Habana, Veracruz, Cartagena y Río de Janeiro.

—*Dominus vobiscum*. El Santo Oficio de la Inquisición te condena justamente a muerte. *Oremus*.

—¿Justicia? Esto carece de toda lógica.

—*Dominus vobiscum*. Los jueces de este Sagrado Tribunal te otorgan permiso para que selecciones tu preferencia...

—¿Decapitación? ¿Hoguera? ¿Horca? ¿Envenenamiento?

—O cuatro caballos para arrancar simultáneamente tus brazos y piernas. *Oremus*.

—Vuelvo y repito, ¿justicia? Esto no es cristianismo. *In manus tuas non comendo spiritum meum*.

—*Dominus vobiscum*. El ilustre y piadoso señor Obispo cantará la santa misa, en la catedral, para que puedas comulgar antes de que se cumpla la justa condena por la madrugada. *Oremus. In nomine... Per omnia secula seculorum*. Amén.

—¿Justicia? Y, peor aún, la sentencia carece de lógica, porque la Cédula Real, redactada en puño y letra de los Reyes Católicos, proclama con claridad, aunque en dicho documento brilla por su ausencia el verdadero espíritu cristiano, que los esclavos africanos que aprendan a leer y escribir Castellano en las Indias serán condenados a muerte. Pero, en mi caso, ya yo sabía leer y escribir, desde mi infancia feliz en el reino de mi noble familia africana a orillas del río Nilo cerca del volcán Kilimanjaro, mucho antes de ser secuestrado aquella madrugada allá en Africa, en la desembocadura del río Congo, y encadenado en la bodega del *Santacruz*,

para el yugo de la esclavitud patrocinada por los negreros musulmanes, judíos y cristianos. Sí, no lo niego, y con mucho orgullo declaro que sé leer y escribir en siete lenguas: Yoruba, Mandinga, Amárico, Arabe, Portugués...

El quiquiriquí de un gallo en el patio de la Casa de los Genoveses, y los llantos de la encadenada Isabel Santacruz, encerrada junto con cuncubinas de los capitanes negreros en un recinto nauseabundo que estaba ubicado al lado de la capilla del mercado de esclavos, donde, a diario, se celebraba la santa misa cantada y se comulgaba con devoción religiosa, despertaron a Bartolomé Santacruz, quien, aplastado en un rincón por el peso de varios esclavos muertos, estaba empapado con sudor por la pesadilla que dominó el sueño que había tenido sobre el juicio por saber leer y escribir, y la subsiguiente condena a muerte ordenada por el Santo Oficio de la Inquisición.

Allá en los cañaverales de don Justo, cerca de un convento, donde en las conversaciones de los clérigos dominaba más el tema sobre Aristóteles que sobre los santos y mártires, y, también, donde los capitanes negreros, las familias aristocráticas, los jueces del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición, las monjas y los socios de la Casa de los Genoveses, a diario, por la madrugada, asistían a misa y comulgaban fervorosamente, durante muchos años, tras de apartar de su pensamiento, repetidas veces, cada vez que empuñaba el machete, la imagen de caña de azúcar que, como un espejismo, el rey secuestrado y esclavizado veía en las piernas, los brazos y los cuellos de amigos, socios, ahijados, confesores y parientes de don Justo, no obstante, Bartolomé Santacruz aprovechó todas las ocasiones feriadas y religiosas, principalmente, Semana Santa, Pascua de Resurrección, Yom Kippur, Navidad y Hanukkah, para trabajar como esclavo asalariado en los cañaverales, cafetales e ingenios azucareros de los vecinos de su amo, para ahorrar suficiente dinero y comprar su propia libertad.

Valientemente, un martes al atardecer, tras de arrancar el rosario -un regalo de bautismo del capellán del *Santacruz*- que le apretaba la garganta, como soga inquisitorial, desde la madrugada en que a punta de latigazos el soberano del más poderoso y rico reino a orillas del río Nilo y los alrededores del volcán Kilimanjaro fue forzado, junto con su familia, tras la misa bautismal, al encierro en la bodega del barco negrero *Santacruz*, Obadelé rescató su libertad como cacique cimarrón en Portobelo y a lo largo del Camino Real. Luego, durante siete años trabajó mucho como carpintero, zapatero, herrero y barbero, para ayudar a su hija Adesimbo comprar su libertad, de igual manera como, luego, se hizo también con todos los ahijados, amigos y aconsejados de Obadelé.

Un hermoso atardecer de gorjeos melodiosos, fragancias encantadoras, suave brisa tropical y llovizna refrescante, como en aquellas épocas de los festivales de tambores, marimbas, maracas y danzas, allá en Africa, donde los cantos y gorjeos anunciaban, con alegría, que el cielo de Nokoró lucía el más maravilloso arcoiris, llegó Felicidad Dolores, a orillas del río Chagres, cerca de Portobelo, para conocer y felicitar, con besos y abrazos, a todos los que por su propio esfuerzo habían logrado, con éxito, romper las cadenas del yugo de la esclavitud, y, con orgullo, elogiar a los antepasados, rescatar su propia dignidad y defender, valientemente, la herencia africana.

Luego, durante siete hermosos atardeceres, a Felicidad Dolores, quien había sido secuestrada siglos atrás allá en Africa por cinco jóvenes irrespetuosos de su pueblo que fueron desterrados tras de rechazar las sabias palabras del Consejo de Ancianos en un asunto importante, cuando ella era una criatura en su hamaca a orillas del río Nilo y cerca del volcán Kilimanjaro, le ofrecieron quimbombó, guandú, ñame, fufú, guineo, arroz y maní; y, mientras ella saboreaba el manjar, le explicaron lo que era una cebra, una jirafa, un león y un elefante; y, también, con lujo de detalles le narraron los éxitos de los estudios de sus parientes en el campo de la medicina en Tombuctú, los negocios de especias, marfil y oro en la desembocadura del río Congo, el estudio de lenguas en Etiopía, las escenas pintadas en las pirámides en Egipto, y, por supuesto, las heroicas hazañas de sus antepasados africanos en Egipto, Etiopía, Nubia, Ghana, Mali, Songhai y Zimbabwe. Y cada noche, durante su visita, Felicidad Dolores se alegraba al escuchar, repetidas veces, el relato de lo que le ocurrió al niño Obicheré cuando ordeñó la vaca negra con siete manchas azules en forma de tortuguitas que ofrecía sabrosa leche chocolate, y lo que luego, maravillosamente, pasó en la oscuridad con los mosquitos de orixá Changó. Además, Felicidad Dolores pasaba muchas horas durante su visita en Cerro Nilo escuchando las hazañas de Estebanillo en su recorrido desde Florida hasta Tenochtitlán; en Cerro Kilimanjaro, con Nuflo de Olano, interesada en las aventuras en Quisqueya, Boriquén y Garachiné; en Cerro Mandinga, con Juan Valiente, asombrada por los relatos sobre los mayas, aztecas, incas, chibchas y araucanos; y, especialmente, en Cerro Lucumí, con Juan Garrido, orgulloso conquistador en Boriquén, Cuba y Tenochtitlán.

Antes de despedirse, al concluir los siete días de visita, Felicidad Dolores les narró a todos los presentes que en un sueño que había tenido se le reveló que Nenén y Papá James, los abuelitos de Obicheré (el niño goloso de leche chocolate a quien acompañaron los mosquitos del orixá Changó —metamorfoseados en luciérnagas — cuando Obicheré se perdió en la oscuridad en el camino rumbo al jardín de orixá Babalú Ayé), llegarían pronto para ser miembros del Consejo de Ancianos.

—Welcome, paisano mío, to Guachapalí. Your sistá very happy decir mi casa es su casa —anunció Nenén, con acento jamaicano, felizmente, sus ojos saturados con lágrimas de alegría, cuando Marcus Garvey llegó al umbral del cuarto en la casa para inquilinos Islas Caribeñas que ella, Papá James y sus nietos llamaban dulce hogar.

—Bonsuá monamí monsieur Garvey —saludó la vecina Tidam Frenchí al observar la llegada del paisano jamaicano de Nenén.

—Vecina, you, les truá petit muchachitas, and tu marido Louverture y cuñado Dessalines estar invited to meeting en Río Abajo —declaró en acento barbadiense Papá James cuando la vecina haitiana saludó al recién llegado Marcus Garvey. —Yes man, cho, everybody, toulemonde, todo el mundo invitar to sing and dance tamborito, merengue, samba y calipsó after comiendo mucha comida sabrosa de Nenén, cho, we eat mucho gungupeas and rice, chicheme, potato salad, plátano frito con yuca y bofe, mondongo, bakes, patí, sopa de guandú con domplín y rabito de puerco, cowfoot soup, morcilla, bollo, gingerbeer, saril, tamales, cucú, pollo... mejor jugador de

dominó está conmigo de Trinidad, St. Lucia and Grenada ajora vivir en Calidonia and Guachapalí. Mío pasieros diggers on Big Dich Canal en Gatún, Pedro Miguel y Miraflores. Ellos vivir by Cerro Ancón overder cerca en Chorrillo.

—Comadre, ¿qué hacen tantos chombos acá? —preguntó Karafula, una mulata de Portobelo, torciendo su mirada bisca.

—Me da pena y vergüenza ver a tantos negros antillanos aquí, porque ahora Panamá parece Africa. Los yumecas de religión jumpijumpi y los mecos de habla guariguari, o mejor dicho, los chombos son tan prietos, ñatos y, lo peor de todo, es el pelo cuscú. El color es accidente pero el pelo no miente.

—Me alegro de que al fin esta noche nosotros los dominicanos y haitianos vamos a reunirnos en la Plaza de las Antillas, en Río Abajo —dijo una dominicana, descendiente del gran mambí cubano Antonio Maceo.

—Boa tarde meu irmao —saludó Zumbí, abrazando a Bayano.

—Boa tarde Zumbí. Para la reunión ya llegaron mi primo jarocho Yanga, nuestro cuñado carabalí Benkos, mi tío lucumí Lemba, tu hermano garífuna Satuyé, el compadre mandinga Fabulé...

—¿Cuándo llegan Estebanillo, Nuflo de Olano, Juan Valiente, Juan Garrido, Santiago Basora, Gregorio Luperón?

—Allá están conversando con Juan Latino, Juan Francisco Manzano y el boricua Arturo Schomburg.

—Y, acá están Adalberto Ortiz, Manuel Zapata Olivella, Aída Cartagena Portalatín...

—Mamá Yemayá me contó que desde Guanabacoa y Marianao llegan un babalao lucumí y una iyalocha yoruba acompañados de orixá Changó y los otros orixás de las Siete Potencias, para iniciar la reunión con cantos y danzas. Y, a continuación, Plácido, Nicolás Guillén y Nancy Morejón van a declamar sus mejores poemas, y Beny Moré, Celia Cruz y Leonor González van a cantar antes de los discursos de Juan de Valladolid, Ganga Zumba, Satuyé, Luiza Mahín, Vicente Guerrero, Antonio Maceo, Marcus Garvey, Mamá Tingó... (este fue el último sueño que reveló Felicidad Dolores antes de despedirse con abrazos y besos de todos los presentes en Cerro Nilo...)

En un lugar secreto llamado Nueva Nokoró, centro cultural de Cerro Nilo, Cerro Kilimanjaro, Cerro Lucumí y Cerro Mandinga, donde se escucha el quiquiriquí de los gallos solamente durante el atardecer, cuando los mosquitos de orixá Changó metamorfoseados en luciérnagas salen a iluminar los caminos oscuros, a orillas de un río, cerca de una palmera, una caoba y una ceiba a la entrada del centro cultural (sembrados por Juan Garrido, el valiente conquistador de ascendencia africana, quien fue el primero en sembrar trigo en Nueva España después de participar en la conquista de Boriquén, Cuba y Tenochtitlán), la reina Adesimbo vive en paz y felicidad con todos los que, con el sudor de su frente, rescataron valientemente su propia libertad y dignidad, rechazando el yugo de la esclavitud, y, por supuesto, defendiendo, con orgullo, la herencia africana, como lo lograron los cimarrones africanos en Palmares, Haití, Veracruz, Xaymaca, Yurumei, Cartagena y Portobelo.

La venganza

por Cubena

El incesante lloriqueo de los mocosos y andrajosos chiquillos vecinos fastidiaba y enloquecía diariamente a todos en el vecindario. Los repetidos lamentos y el incesante lloriqueo eran polifónicos y, a la vez, cacofónicos. Lloraban por la mañana. Lloraban por la tarde. Lloraban por la noche. Lloraban, lloraban, lloraban...

En un rincón de un cuarto, huérfano de alegría, la madre de los chiquillos llorones, con el cuerpo maltratado por las mordidas, patadas y puñetazos propinados por el marido, todos los días, calentaba en el fogón de carbón agua azucarada en una lata oxidada, para apaciguar el hambre y el lloriqueo de sus hijos llorones.

En en cuarto de los llorones, ubicado en una casa para inquilinos en el Marañón, el barrio más paupérrimo de la ciudad, la mujer maltratada de un marido con fama de borracho, se acostumbró a la misma jeringa de siempre: cada quincena cuando recibía su sueldo, el padre de los llorones llegaba por la madrugada sin dinero, pero ebrio, meándose los pantalones y ladrando insultos; y, para colmo de males, se dedicaba a golpear sin piedad a la pobre mujer, dando así rienda suelta a su crueldad. Y, cuando el borracho se cansaba de la rutina pugilista, sus garras arrancaban violentamente el mismo remendado trapo desteñido, pero limpio, que cubría diariamente el cuerpo de la maltratada; y, cuando esto ocurría, ella hacía todo lo posible para alejarse de la cama y apartar de su lado al marido borracho, gritando: "Los niños, los niños...". Pero, antes de gritar: "Los niños", por quinta vez, ella y la cama se movían como si estuvieran en un terremoto.

Ya era chisme en el vecindario paupérrimo que, cada vez que la madre de los chiquillos llorones caía enferma, muy frecuentemente, la niña mayor era forzada a tomar el lugar de la madre en el fogón de carbón y, aún, en la cama del borracho.

El poco sueldo que ganaba el padre de los llorones en su trabajo de aseador, como barredor de calles, lo despilfarraba todo en el hipódromo, la gallera, el prostíbulo, la lotería y la cantina; y, consecuentemente, el hambre en el hogar de los llorones fue de mal en peor.

No era raro que la mujer maltratada hablara a solas. Sus soliloquios eran cada vez más frecuentes; pero, a pesar de que ella consideraba al marido un cero a la izquierda, en su presencia, no se atrevía a decir esta boca es mía. "Maldita lotería —susurraba a menudo mientras los ronquidos del borracho inundaban el cuarto— no nos favorece los domingos y mis hijos tienen hambre todos los días".

Un día de verano cuando el calor y las moscas fastidiaban más de lo acostumbrado, la madre de los chiquillos llorones decidió encerrar en el cuarto a dos perros callejeros, de esos que nacen, crecen y mueren sin amo y sin hogar. A ella, curiosamente, le había llamado la atención cómo esos animales callejeros de alguna manera buscan una manera para saciar el hambre cotidiana.

Luego, el otro chisme que andaba de boca en boca, en el vecindario, era el asunto de los perros en el cuarto de los chiquillos llorones.

—¡Epa! ¡Quiúbo vecina! ¿Cómo etá tú?

—Opa! Entre chivo y conejo.

—Vecina, ¿te contaron el bochinche de los perros?

—¡Je! ¿Y desde cuándo anda por allí ese bochinche?

—Pues, en el cuarto de los llorones...

—¡Ajo! Vea la vaina pué. No tienen dónde caer muertos y ajora tienen perros.

—E verdá. Pa que sufra usté, comadre, ajora son dizque gentes de categoría en

cajeta con perros finos.

Carbón y *Leche* eran perros flacos, cojos, calungos, tuertos y sarnosos. En todo el vecindario llamó la atención el hecho de que ahora los mocosos y andrajosos chiquillos ya no eran llorones y, en cambio, se divertían a cada rato con los perros, los únicos juguetes que llegaron a poseer. Y, según el chisme reciente, a la hora del desayuno, del almuerzo y de la cena, el juego favorito de los chiquillos era fingir ser «perritos» recién nacidos de Leche.

El padre de los chiquillos andrajosos, como de costumbre, cada quincena, llegaba por la madrugada embriagado después de gastar hasta los últimos centavos en carreras de caballos, peleas de gallos, aguardiente..., y sobre un cajón que servía de silla se sentaba tranquilamente a la mesa para que la esposa le sirviera la comida. El borracho, no tenía ningún interés en saber de dónde sacaba dinero la mujer para comprar comida; y, al ser servido en un plato de lata, primero, olfateaba la comida y, luego, lamía el plato, ladrando: "Esta comida está muy sabrosa".

Desde el día en que la madre maltratada de los chiquillos mocosos encerró a Carbón y Leche en el cuarto, el borracho empinaba el codo más que nunca, porque tenía más dinero para comprar más aguardiente. Y, se alegró de que su esposa ya no le daba en el codo para que diera algo de dinero para la comida, y además, ya no era necesario que ella saqueara monedas de los bolsillos mientras él dormía la borrachera.

Nadie en el barrio del Marañón, donde, en un abrir y cerrar de ojos, todo el mundo se enteraba de todos los chismes, sospechó por qué la madre de los hambrientos soltaba a Carbón y Leche, solamente, por la madrugada.

—Opa, comadre.

—¿Qué hay, coma?

—Algo huele a raro en el cuarto de...

—Sí, hay perros encerrados. Y ya no se oye: "Ay, hijo de... ya no aguanto más mordidas, puñetazos y patadas..."

—Y ahora los mocosos cantan, bailan, rien, juegan y dicen que todos los días toman leche. ¡Mire no má!

—¡Ajá! Eso no e ná. Oye ete bochinche. La vecina perequera...

—¿La chancletera que habla hasta por los codos?

—Pué, mire no más, me contó que hasta carne comen ajora en casa del borracho.

—¿Cómo es posible?

—Pué, sí.

—Pero, el borracho gasta toda la plata en lotería, gallo y, sobre todo, guaro, y por eso siempre está en fuego.

—A mí no me gusta esa vaina de vidajenear, pero, otra cosa...

—Apúrate que se me quema el arroz, y a mi cacique...

—Ya sé, te perrea si le das de comer arroz quemado, concolón.

—Pué, diga el bochinche ajora mismo.

—Bueno, se dice que Leche siempre está preñá, pero nunca se ve la cría de perritos.

—¡Ah! Me voy, pue yo no sabo de ese lío.

Todas la madrugadas, Carbón y Leche cojeaban hacia el matadero municipal, donde se hartaban de lengua, bofe, mondongo... que encontraban en los tinacos. Y, luego, al regresar al cuarto de los chiquillos andrajosos, antes de que las vecinas chismosas del vecindario despertaran, la mujer más maltratada del vecindario, hacía vomitar a los perros, para darle de comer a su marido borracho.

El Profe

por Cubena

En el Instituto Nacional de Panamá, en aquel entonces el colegio de mayor prestigio en toda la república, la gran tradición popular durante la ceremonia solemne en el Aula Máxima cuando los estudiantes recibían, orgullosamente, sus diplomas de bachillerato en ciencia o letras, los graduados tenían por costumbre legarles a los estudiantes novatos una importantísima nómina secreta con comentarios sobre los profesores del colegio.

En la nómina secreta se destacaba el Profe de las lenguas de Platón y Cicerón. La popularidad del joven profesor que enseñaba las lenguas clásicas: Griego y Latín, afectuosamente apodado Profegrecolatino, se debía a su sabiduría en las materias que enseñaba y, también, al respeto, cariño e interés que él mostraba, día tras día, al tratar con sus discípulos.

El joven intelectual era amable, tenaz, equitativo, elocuente, lacónico, de modales cultos e impecable en el vestir; y también, era un políglota idóneo. Además, era célebre por su meticulosidad en los asuntos académicos, y se sabía al dedillo todo lo relacionado con las materias que enseñaba en el colegio. En resumidas cuentas, cumplía las obligaciones docentes con el mayor esmero y al pie de la letra.

Se dice que ningún cura se acuerda de cuando fue sacristán, no obstante lo dicho, en el caso de Profegrecolatino, era todo lo contrario, porque no se daba ínfulas y para él no era vergonzoso codearse con los estudiantes. Y, sobre todo, sin titubeos, no era menester poner en tela de juicio sus opiniones y comentarios porque él llamaba al pan pan y al vino vino. Es preciso señalar, además, que no era un aguafiestas, porque cuando se presentaba la ocasión le gustaba, por supuesto con moderación, saborear platos suculentos, tomar vino, cantar y bailar tamborito, cumbia, rumba, samba, zandunga, tango, merengue...

Los pensamientos predilectos del profesor de Griego y Latín, los cuales utilizaba para dar fin con broche de oro las lecciones del día eran: "Para la muerte todos somos iguales. No hagas a tu prójimo lo que no quieras que te hagan. Más vale andar solo que mal acompañado. Lo cortés no quita lo valiente. El que no se arriesga no pasa el charco. El que a buen árbol se arrima, buena sombra le cobija. Bueno es culantro pero no tanto. No dejes para mañana lo que puedes hacer hoy. Un amigo en la adversidad es amigo de verdad. No firmes carta que no leas ni bebas agua que no veas. El tiempo es oro". Además, a menudo, Profegrecolatino citaba el siguiente pensamiento manriqueño:

> Nada en esta vida dura
> fenecen buenos y malos
> a todos nos hace iguales
> una triste sepultura.

El docto profesor logró, a duras penas, llegar a ser miembro del profesorado en el reputado Nido de águilas: el Instituto Nacional de Panamá, colegio cerca del cerro Ancón, a la vista de la costa pacífica del Canal de Panamá. En dicho colegio tuvo que luchar, contra viento y marea, a pesar de haber sido el Salomón de su grupo, porque, tanto en el presente como profesor como en el pasado como estudiante en el mismo colegio, solía quemarse las pestañas para lograr sus metas académicas. Y, en aquel entonces, cuando Profegrecolatino recibió su diploma universitario, a la estupefacta concurrencia le llamó la atención que las autoridades del Ministerio de Educación, le impusieron el segundo puesto de honor a él, y en cambio, a un pariente del vicerrector del colegio, el primer puesto de

honor, inmerecidamente.

Al *pariente* del vicerrector del colegio le ofrecieron, tras una letanía de ruegos y casi de rodillas, un sinnúmero de plazas para enseñar en los mejores colegios de la capital, y al joven del segundo puesto de honor, le prometieron un puestecito en las provincias de Bocas del Toro, Darién o Colón, regiones que se destacan por su atraso y aislamiento. Pero, en víspera de un exilio profesional, el Profe de lenguas clásicas obtuvo una plaza capitalina, porque nombraron a la persona que ganó el primer puesto de honor, por su palanca, a un alto cargo en el Ministerio de Educación.

En la clase de Griego que se reunía a las nueve de la mañana, de lunes a viernes, estaba matriculada Gracimarí, la más huraña aguilucha. Profegrecolatino estaba hasta la coronilla por las tardanzas de la joven de personalidad misantrópica. La estudiante acostumbraba llegar tarde a las conferencias, lecturas y análisis de *La Ilíada* y *La Odisea*. Y, siempre era la primera en salir disparada, como un cañonazo, del aula de clases, o como alma que se lleva el diablo, mientras el profesor explicaba las últimas frases de la traducción del griego al español.

Un martes, el perito en las lenguas de Homero y Virgilio, anticipando la intención de Gracimarí, se le adelantó a la estudiante, y, de un brinco, se colocó, a manera de obstáculo, entre la puerta y Gracimarí. Luego, al quedar el salón de clases a semejanza de un desierto cuando los otros estudiantes se ausentaron, para llegar a tiempo a la próxima clase, la joven huraña, entre sollozos, trató de explicarle al profesor que su problema era muy complicado y vergonzoso, por lo tanto no deseaba seguir viviendo más en este Valle de Lágrimas, porque... en ese momento, un mar de lágrimas naufragó la clave del enigma. Pero, ya el profesor se había percatado de que los compañeros de Gracimarí la torturaban constantemente con sus miradas maliciosas, muecas groseras, risitas burlonas y cuchicheos mordaces.

Nadie en el colegio atisbó que la silla que, por lo general, ocupaba con frecuencia Gracimarí, se había cubierto con polvo hasta que, en los periódicos vespertinos de un día lluvioso, apareciera la fotografía de un cuerpo mutilado. El cadáver era Gracimarí.

No obstante el atareado horario docente y las múltiples actividades del profesor de Gracimarí, el Profe observó que nadie comentaba sobre la estudiante difunta. Le extrañó también, que no se mencionara absolutamente ni media palabra sobre la sepultura y el velorio de la finada. "¿Y a quién darle el pésame?" —se preguntó el profesor para sus adentros, un poco perturbado mientras trataba de prestar atención durante una clase, en la cual una estudiante presentaba su interpretación sobre la función y significado del concepto del tiempo en la tela de Penélope.

Más tarde, por insistencia del profesor, se hizo una recaudación de fondos en la clase de Griego con el propósito de comprar una ofrenda floral para la difunta. El profesor no se había percatado de lo inútil de su empeño hasta que, a la postre, él tuvo que cargar con el muerto, ya que de su propio bolsillo se vio obligado a aportar más de la mitad del coste de la corona fúnebre.

En el escritorio del profesor, después de una clase de Latín, alguien dejó el siguiente mensaje garabateado en un papel arrugado y manchado con manteca: "Vida sin amigo, muerte sin testigo. *Sicut erat in principio et per omnia secula*

seculorum. Verum est. Flores y pésame... la mamá de Gracimarí, en Villamor".

Luego, por la noche, al llegar al lugar indicado en el mensaje garabateado, el profesor de Gracimarí se asombró al descubrir que Villamor era un prostíbulo, cerca de una iglesia y, peor aún, al lado de una escuela primaria. Profegrecolatino se sintió, como reza el refrán, entre la espada y la pared. Pero, después de titubear un rato, en el umbral del prostíbulo, decidió aventurarse y entró en Villamor. Allí, la música o, mejor dicho, la cacofonía que se escapaba del traganíquel se mezclaba con el humo de cigarrillos, sudor de borrachos y el triste aroma de perfume barato. El Profe observó que en las mesas sucias que estaban llenas de botellas de cerveza, los borrachos discutían, a voz en cuello, disparates sobre política internacional y machismo; también, otros hombres en el prostíbulo, en vez de acompañar a sus esposas a un cine y conversar con sus hijos en los hogares, se entretenían con las máquinas de billar romano. Pero, la gran mayoría en Villamor dialogaba con las mujeres semidesnudas que se paseaban constantemente entre los hombres y, de rato en rato, se escuchaba:

—¿Vamos?

—¿Cuánto?

—Cinco.

—¿Balboas?

—No. Dólares.

En el oscuro y bullanguero prostíbulo, saturado de hediondez y aroma de perfume barato, que lastimaba la fina sensibilidad del que estaba acostumbrado a las fragancias encantadoras y gorjeos melodiosos, allí donde estaba el profesor se acercaron algunas de las prostitutas creyendo que él era otro cliente nuevo; pero, cortésmente, el profesor de Griego y Latín no aceptó las invitaciones de acompañar a las mujeres a beber cerveza, o a ir a los cuartos, observando con curiosidad que todos los acentos hispanoamericanos estaban representados en Villamor. Al rato, una de las prostitutas, la más sensual de todas, se acercó al profesor y, al poner su mano izquierda atrevidamente en las piernas del profesor, vociferó:

—Oye negrito. Tú, chombito lindo, cómprame un trago.

—Ese negro bruto y tacaño es sólo un mirón —dijo el cantinero, soltando una carcajada estruendosa— y desde que llegó este ñato bembón de pelo cuscús dizque encorbatado, para que crean que es licenciado, solamente ha comprado chicha de tamarindo y maní.

—¿Maní? —preguntó la prostituta— comentando, eso y la chicha de tamarindo no tienen ni una gota de aguardiente.

—Para que veas, pues, no es macho como los hombres verdaderos de pelo en pecho. Si el negro ñato bembón de pelo cuscú no compra ni una cerveza o trago de aguardiente, ¿cómo crees que te va a comprar un trago de coñac?

—¡Demonios! Si le pido otra vez que me compre un trago a lo mejor me ofrece chicheme o agua.

—Este africano wacuco feo y bembón es un pichicuma, pilinque, runcho de primera clase.

—Entonces hay que darle en el codo.

El profesor trató de escapar de la mujer que empezó a gritar obscenidades. Se alejó de la que exigía un trago de aguardiente. En voz baja repitió, lo que los borrachos, quienes en circunstancias semejantes gritaban: «Amorcito, ahora regreso, voy a cambiarle el agua al pájaro», al encaminarse rumbo hacia el escusado para orinar. Pero, antes de que el profesor pudiera alejarse, la prostituta le lanzó una

mirada desdeñosa y, al mismo tiempo, masculló: "Pedazo de ya tu sabes qué de perro. No me compras ni un trago y tienes agallas de preguntarme por otra. ¡Ombe! Vete al infierno negro carbón. Esa bagasa que buscas tiene una clientela más numerosa que un ejército!" La mujer se quejaba de que no había cazado nada, ningún cliente en todo el día. Y, al escupir gargajos tuberculosos, la prostituta se alejó gruñendo obscenidades.

En un rincón del prostíbulo, una pareja bailaba, si se le puede llamar a eso bailar, porque el hombre y la mujer, ambos embriagados y sudorosos, por sus movimientos parecían un monstruo de dos cabezas sufriendo un ataque epiléptico. Y, en otro rincón del prostíbulo, el profesor políglota observaba la repugnante escena de compra y venta de triste alegría en ese lugar nauseabundo que no frecuentarían, sin duda alguna, perros callejeros tras una perra en celo.

Luego, el profesor de Gracimarí supo quién era la madre de la difunta. Era una mujer bizca, bocacha, de rostro desfigurado y una vieja cicatriz le rayaba horriblemente la cara de oreja a oreja. Además, tenía los senos blandos, caídos, arrugados. La madre de Gracimarí era muy popular con los borrachos por sus baratillos.

En el momento cuando Profegrecolatino trató, con dinero en mano, de explicar su propósito allí, se le hizo un nudo en la garganta. Sin escuchar bien las palabras que, nerviosamente, pronunciaba el profesor, la prostituta bocacha y cara cicatrizada le miró bizcamente de hito en hito, chillando atropelladamente: "¿Tú me hablar a mí pa dicir algo? ¡Negro del infierno! Chombo. No semos lo mesmo. ¡Negro de la porquería! ¡Qué vaina! Chombo, échate a un lao, tú tienes... ¡José, María y Jesú! Yo no me acuesto con negros chombos. Pue nunca. Jamá. Never, never en mi vida. No, no, no, nunca en la cama ni muerta con un negro. ¡Ave María Purísima! ¡Dios mío! ¡Santísima Virgen! Mejor muerta mil veces" —dijo la mamá de la difunta Gracimarí santiguándose con la mano izquierda.

Todos los presentes en Villamor fijaron las miradas en el profesor de la difunta Gracimarí. Profegrecolatino enmudeció. Tras un rato de silencio, estalló una carcajada estruendosa en la turbamulta de bullicio plebeyo en el prostíbulo, donde asfixiaba el humo de cigarrillos, el sudor de borrachos y el aroma de perfume barato.

San Diego State University

The Farming of Bones

By Edwidge Danticat
New York: Soho Press, 1998, 312 pp.

Reviewed by Flore Zéphir

Edwidge Danticat's poignant and powerful novel, *The Farming of Bones*, underscores in a searing manner one of the most painful vestiges of European colonization and slavery on the island of Hispaniola, split into two different countries with two separate ethnic heritages. On the western part of the island are the Haitians, who embody the African heritage, and on the eastern part, the Dominicans, who choose a Spanish ethnic identification. The nefarious consequence of the historical past is that Dominicans harbor strong resentment against Haitians and, in many ways, treat them in a manner that is too vividly reminiscent of colonial behavior. The novel highlights in graphic terms the hatred that Dominicans manifested toward Haitians under the Trujillo regime. Their unleashed hatred culminated in a true historical event in 1937: the massacre of thousands of Haitian sugarcane cutters working in the Dominican Republic, and the imprisonment of scores of others. The intensity of their sentiments is reflected in the following words that were repeated over and over to Haitian prisoners, and that become ingrained in the wandering mind of a Haitian priest, Father Roumain, who lost his sanity and became mentally ill as a result of his prolonged stay in a Dominican prison:

> Our motherland is Spain; theirs is darkest Africa, you understand? They once came here only to cut sugarcane, but now there are more of them than there will ever be cane to cut, you understand? Our problem is one of dominion. Tell me, does anyone like to have their houses flooded with visitors, to the point that the visitors replace their own children? How can a country be ours if we are in smaller numbers than the outsiders? Those of us who love our country are taking measures to keep it our own....We, as Dominicans, must have our separate traditions and our own ways of living. If not, in less than three generations, we will all be Haitians. In three generations, our children and grandchildren will have their blood completely tainted unless we defend ourselves now, you understand? (pp. 260–61)

Therefore, in order to defend themselves from the African flood and to prevent their Spanish (i.e. White) blood from being contaminated with Haitian (i.e. Black) blood, the Dominican soldiers, following the orders of Generalissimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, Supreme Commander-in-Chief and President of the Republic, undertook a process of massive ethnic cleansing that knew no mercy and no end, until the Generalissimo's death in 1961.

Early on in the novel, the reader can already begin to gauge the magnitude of Dominican fear of "darkest" Africa. Even Señora Valencia—one of the most "moderate" Dominicans in the novel —cannot hide her displeasure and worry at giving birth to a "colored" daughter whose "skin was a deep bronze between the colors of tan Brazil nut shells and black salsify" (p. 11). The daughter, Rosalinda, does not look anything like her twin brother, Rafael, named by his father after the Generalissimo. Little Rafi is "coconut-cream colored, his cheeks and forehead the blush pink of water lilies" (p. 9). The charcoal behind Rosalinda's ears deeply

troubles the mother who worriedly asks Amabelle, the live-in Haitian maid, who had helped her during the delivery: "Amabelle do you think my daughter will always be the color she is now? . . . My poor love, what if she is mistaken for one of your people?" (p. 12).

The majority of Amabelle Désir's people, whom the Dominicans despise so much, are impoverished Haitians, who have crossed the border in search of work in the sugarcane fields owned by well-to-do Dominicans, in the small town of *Alegría*. It is alleged that the city got her joyful name from the richness of the fields that brought joy and wealth to their owners. However, for the Haitians, the town could have well been renamed *Infierno*, for life in the sugarcane fields is a living hell; it is slavery all over again. Cane life has savagely scarred its workers and disfigured many of them. Amabelle, describing her lover Sebastien Onius, painfully acknowledges that "the cane stalks have ripped apart most of the skin on his shiny black face, leaving him with crisscrossed trails of furrowed scars," and that the palms of his hands "have lost their lifelines to the machetes that cut the cane"(p.1). What the machetes in the hands of the workers themselves have done to their bodies is premonitory of what these very same machetes, later in the hands of the Dominicans, will do: They will slaughter Haitians. Indeed, the reader later learns from a Haitian, Tibon, who is trying to escape, that fleeing Haitians who were captured by Dominican soldiers on their way to the Haitian border were taken out to a high cliff over the rough seas in La Romana, and there given two choices: "...it's either jump or go against a wall of soldiers with bayonets pointed at you and some civilians waiting in a circle with machetes. They tell the civilians where best to strike with the machetes so our heads part more easily from our bodies" (p. 173). Tibon never reaches the border; he dies from machete wounds inflicted on him by a young Dominican "perhaps fourteen years of age," in the middle of the square in the border town of Dajabón (pp. 191–92). Indeed, as the novel shows, hatred can be taught at a young age.

Amabelle's people crossed the border in hopes of making a living out of the farming of the sugarcane. However, it did not take long after their arrival on the Dominican side of the border to realize that they were not farming sugarcane, since cane life brought them no joy, no wealth, and no *alegría*. In the words of Sebastien, they "travay tè pou zo" (worked the land for bones). The farming of bones had all along been their plight; now a more painful fate awaits them at El Corte (the cutting). Haitians' hopes of finding a better life *al otro lado* are vanishing in the sea of their blood, the blood from their labor of death.

The farming of bones and death seems to have been their destiny, that which is reserved to an orphaned people. Again, in the words of Sebastien:

> Sometimes the people in the fields, when they are tired and angry, they say we're an orphaned people.... They say we are the burnt crud at the bottom of the pot. They say some people don't belong anywhere and that's us. I say we are a group of vwayajè, wayfarers. (p. 56)

The reader finds out in the beginning chapters of the novel that, as an orphaned people, Haitians' lives have never meant much to the mills' owners, and that a Haitian's death is not something that

would cause sorrow to any Dominican. After all, the Trujillian doctrine is: the fewer of them, the merrier. This is precisely why it did not bother Señor Pico, Señora Valencia's husband, that he was guilty of involuntary manslaughter when he hit a *bracero*. Señor Pico, who had just been informed of the birth of his twins, was speeding home; the closer he came to the house, the faster he went. When he reached the road near the ravine, there were three men walking. The automobile struck one of these men and sent him flying into the ravine. On the day that his two children came into the world, Señor Pico took a Haitian life with no remorse and no guilt (pp. 38–39). Having killed before so casually, it comes as no surprise to the reader that the same Señor Pico, a ranking officer in Trujillo's army, would be the one in charge of the subsequent cleansing operation near the border. Amabelle's orphaned people never find in the Dominican Republic what they had hoped to find: prosperity and dignity for themselves and their families. In every sense of the word, life on the Dominican side of the border is synonymous with slavery and death.

Amabelle herself was an orphan who had already experienced firsthand the meaning of death that one encounters almost unavoidably on the other side. Her parents died in her presence when she was a little girl. On a market day, they and their daughter had crossed the Massacre river to Dajabón. Later in the afternoon, as they set out to wade back across the river, it started to rain in the mountain far upstream. The doomed plan was for the father to carry quickly the mother across the river on his back, and then to come back for Amabelle who was waiting. The water rose above his head; the mother lost her grip on his neck; the strong currents swallowed them both under the frightened eyes of young Amabelle who screamed until she could taste blood in her throat. As she was about to throw herself in the murderous river, two of the river boys grabbed her and dragged her away from the river, leaving her to life as an orphan in the land where her people farmed bones (pp. 50–52). Once again, the Massacre river had been true to her name, claiming other victims, this time Amabelle's parents. It was on the bank of the river that Don Ignacio, a widower, and his daughter Valencia found Amabelle, who belonged to no one but herself. Ever since that day, Amabelle came to "belong" to them.

It is in the city of Alegría in the home of her owners that Amabelle comes to know her own people, in particular those working in the nearby mill of Don Carlos. There, she comes to know of the brutality of sugarcane life. She comes to understand that her lover Sebastien and all his *compadres*, Yves and Joel (who was the hit-and-run victim of Señor Pico), are virtually dying a slow death in the fields where they do no more than farm bones, day after day. It is also in her Dominican household that Amabelle gradually realizes that Dominicans consider themselves Europeans and, as such, they endeavor to maintain the purity of their race. She learns of the "border crisis," and of Trujillo's "border operation"; she learns that her people, the Haitians, are regarded as the greatest security threat to the Dominicans, who feel the pressing need to do something about them.

Amabelle's people believe in the earth, in the healing power of plants and herbs. In particular, they believe in the soothing ability of parsley or *perejil*. They use it

for their food, their teas, their baths, to cleanse their insides as well as their outsides (p. 203). However, at no point in time could they have known that their cleansing "perejil"—a word they pronounce 'pewegil' because they cannot manage to thrill their "r" and utter a throaty "j"— will become the "shibboleth" used by Dominicans to distinguish who is Haitian and who is Dominican. Let us not forget that some Dominicans can be as dark as Haitians, and can be easily mistaken for members of this "inferior" race. As a refinement of their cruelty, the Dominicans choose to cleanse their country with the Haitian *pewegil*. As Danticat tells in her novel, Haitians captured by the Dominican army are forced to say *perejil*. Their answers provide confirmation that they are, indeed, the right candidates for slaughter; moreover, some are even made to swallow peppered parsley.

Amabelle is more fortunate than her people; the overwhelming majority of them perish in the cleansing operation. At the end of the story, which spans a twenty-four year period (1937-1961), Amabelle is back at the bank of the Massacre river, in the coal-black darkness of the night. She wants to spend a moment with her parents, with Sebastien, with Mimi, with Wilner and Odette, and with the thousands of others whose graves are here. She is left with her reveries and dreams, wishes, and fantasies....

The Farming of Bones, although it is a work of fiction, is nevertheless based on historical events. Because of its historical quality, this novel is more important than Danticat's previous works, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, for example. In her latest work, Danticat addresses contemporary universal themes, such as prejudice, racial and ethnic discrimination, poverty, hatred, and death. In so doing, she sensitizes us all to the unfathomable cruelty of the human condition, which still persists today. The Haitian-Dominican story, which took place in the late thirties, is relived all over again in the Rwandan genocide of 1994 between the Hutus and the Tutsis, and in the carnage of thousands of Kosovars and other ethnic Albanians in Bosnia under Slobodan Milosevic in 1998.

Danticat is determined to expose wrong where she sees it, and she demands from us a change of heart. *The Farming of Bones* inscribes forever in our memory the images of the poor, the nameless, the faceless, and the hopeless. Her vivid descriptions and graphic images bring to the fore human misery and suffering. Danticat's words move, disturb, anger, and sadden the reader; they incite him or her to become compassionate again, and to open his or heart to our common humanity, a humanity that makes us no longer Dominican, no longer Haitian, no longer White, no longer Black; a humanity where we all endeavor to make our world *la isla de la alegría*.

University of Missouri–Columbia

Lo afro y la plurinacionalidad: El caso ecuatoriano visto desde su literatura

by Michael Handelsman

University, Mississippi: Romance Monographs, 1999, 214 pp.

Reviewed by Henry J. Richards

A significant and welcome addition to the growing number of books that examine the depiction of the African experience in the national literatures of Spanish America is Michael Handelsman's *Lo afro y la plurinacionalidad: El caso ecuatoriano visto desde su literatura* (1999). In the Introduction, "La plurinacionalidad como expresión de la transculturación," Handelsman establishes as a point of departure for his study the current debate between the various indigenous groups in Ecuador that see themselves as different nationalities and those intellectuals who oppose that concept. He associates the ideas of the indigenous groups with transculturation, which, as defined by Fernando Ortiz and others, is an inclusive process. By contrast, he links the views of those who reject the perspective of the indigenous groups with acculturation, a process that tends to exclude because it is based on a concept of *mestizaje* that does not recognize the nation's "multiple identities" (2). Handelsman analyzes the various aspects of the debate and concludes that the idea of a multicultural Ecuador espoused by indigenous groups ought to be expanded to accommodate the nation's true cultural heterogeneity through recognition of the centrality of her African heritage, which in general has been marginalized. The author justifies his decision to examine the depiction of the African heritage in Ecuadorian literature on the basis of the role that social protest has played in that literature since the eighteenth century and the extent to which it has been used to mold the image of the nation since the nineteenth. He also promises to provide an overview of the representation of the African presence in texts by black as well as nonblack writers. This approach enlightens in important ways: it underscores the interest of black as well as nonblack writers in the participation of Africans in the development of Ecuadorian culture and it allows the author to engage in analyses that lay bare contrasts in the depictions of Afro-Ecuadorian culture by writers belonging to the respective groups. Handelsman's Afrocentric approach to the study of the literature draws on a rich variety of multidisciplinary sources from all latitudes of the Afro-American diaspora and, as the author suggests, is applicable to significant portions of most if not all of the national literatures of the Americas.

In Chapter I, "La literatura afroecuatoriana en el contexto nacional: ¿Ilusión o realidad?," Handelsman continues to lay the foundation for his study by examining key social factors that have placed the Afro-Ecuadorian in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, he argues, historical documentation supports the significant impact of the African presence on the Ecuadorian nation and the national recognition of the works of several writers of African ancestry. On the other, he explains, the Afro-Ecuadorian presence is not officially recognized as a source of national pride but rather is viewed as a "folklorized aberration" (16). The author sees the national culture's official silence on Ecuador's African heritage as a manifestation of the extent of Afro-Ecuadorians' marginalization, which is the result of the widespread espousal of an ideology of *mestizaje* manipulated by

intellectuals to create the myth of a nonracist Ecuadorian society. Handelsman contends that the traditional conceptualization of *mestizaje* in Ecuador recognizes the involvement of indigenous peoples and whites in the process, to the exclusion of blacks, and is nothing but a call for whitening, or what some have called "ethnic lynching" (14). Another reason identified by the author for the state of affairs he describes is the society's extreme sensitivity to a regionalism that pits the *Sierra* with its mestizo/white population against the *Costa*, whose concentration of African-ancestored inhabitants marks its sociocultural links with the Caribbean. In addition, Handelsman argues, critics have imputed to Afro-Ecuadorian creative efforts a significance beyond that associated with the interests of the African-ancestored population, and Afro-Ecuadorian writers themselves have tended to privilege the expression of national and universal concerns over the depiction of the concerns of the Afro-Ecuadorian population. In support of this conclusion about Afro-Ecuadorian writers, the author mentions as cases in point Antonio Preciado, Adalberto Ortiz and Nelson Estupiñán Bass. Then, surprisingly, he cites views expressed only by the first two to substantiate his contention that a desire to capture universal principles in their works and acceptance of the Ecuadorian definition of *mestizaje* led the three writers to "relative and partial" success in interpreting the Afro-Ecuadorian experience (23). In the end, Handelsman calls for these writers to utilize an Afrocentric approach to their creative endeavors. The author's decision to exclude from his study a critical appraisal of at least one of Nelson Estupiñán Bass's major works is baffling. Equally surprising is the lack of an explanation for such a glaring omission. Yet, an Afrocentric reading of *El último río* or *Senderos brillantes*, for example, is called for in these circumstances, especially in light of the Handelsman's acknowledgement of Estupiñán's commitment to the promotion of Afro-Ecuadorian culture and the novelist's defense of the Afro-Ecuadorian heritage and the rights of Afro-Ecuadorians in a number of cultural magazines published in Esmeraldas and Guayaquil.

Chapter II, "Personajes negros y realismo social: El caso del Grupo de Guayaquil," is devoted to the study of black characters in works by members of the famous *Grupo de Guayaquil*. Here, Handelsman argues plausibly that inclusion of black characters in the works of these writers, even while they subscribed to the national myth of *mestizaje*, was inevitable. After all, members of the *Grupo* were committed to fictional explorations of the class struggle in Ecuador and to the fight for justice and freedom from oppression for the marginalized peoples on the *Costa*, among whom were blacks, *montuvios* and *cholos*. He also suggests that, given the writers' preoccupation with the deficiencies of the nation's social structure, their focus on the issue of race did not go beyond its phenotypical dimensions. This posture and the societal status of the black as Other, we are told, led members of the *Grupo* to give stereotypical portrayals of their black characters, thereby reinforcing in readers certain deeply-rooted racist attitudes. In the end, the author acknowledges that these nonblack writers did make blacks more visible in the national literature and in doing so advanced the notion of Ecuador as a true multicultural nation. Handelsman

follows his call for an Afrocentric approach to works by members of the *Grupo* with applications of the critical model to some texts in which the black character is portrayed as a vehicle for social protest and others in which the black character is the embodiment of the magical, the exotic, the primitive. The major works analyzed by Handelsman include novels, *Baldomera* (1938) by Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco, *Las cruces sobre el agua* (1946) by Joaquín Gallegos Lara, *Los monos enloquecidos* (begun in 1931, an incomplete version was published posthumously in 1951) and *Los Sangurimas* (1934) by José de la Cuadra, two plays, *Dientes blancos* (1955) and *Infierno negro* (1967), and the novel, *Siete lunas y siete serpientes* (1970), by Demetrio Aguilera Malta and the short story, "El negro Santander" (1933) by Enrique Gil Gilbert. By including in his study the treatment of black characters by nonblack Ecuadorian writers, Handelsman appears to be making the point that works about the black Ecuadorian experience by nonblack writers form a legitimate part of Afro-Ecuadorian literature.

In his study of the novel, *Tambores para una canción perdida* (1986), to which Chapter III, "Recuperando una canción dos veces perdida: Un análisis afrocéntrico de *Tambores para una canción perdida* de Jorge Velasco Mackenzie," is dedicated, Handelsman stays on message as he celebrates the novelist's depiction of the African heritage as a part of *costeño* culture and, by extension, as an integral part of Ecuadorian national culture as well. With this novel, we are told, Velasco Mackenzie, a native of Guayaquil, has defied traditional schemes that have been used to confine the African heritage to the province of Esmeraldas and, through reliance on the ideology of *mestizaje*, to suppress the true impact of African traditions that entered Ecuador from Colombia, Panamá, the Antilles and Africa. Handelsman's conclusions are not surprising based as they are on his Afrocentric assessment of a work that combines history and myth, while dramatizing the vicissitudes of José Margarito, el Cantador, a runaway slave who, with the help of various gods of the African pantheons, participates in historical events that have had a significant, though largely ignored, bearing on the formation of the Ecuadorian national identity. For Handelsman, the novelist, through a text whose complexity is intensified by its vast array of narrative voices, shows that he is determined to underscore the need for Ecuador to be appreciated as a multicultural society—in a broader sense than traditionally acknowledged—because of the African-ization of its national culture in ways that transcend phenotypical considerations. In addition, the author argues that the work belongs not merely to the Afro-Ecuadorian tradition but also to the Pan-African tradition that encompasses all of the Americas. Besides his appraisal of the cultural relevance of the novel by Velasco Mackenzie, Handelsman provides intriguing bits of information about the genesis and the reception of the work. He reveals, for example, that the novel, which won the 1985 National "Grupo de Guayaquil" Prize for the Novel, was deemed to have been plagiarized and that the level of its originality was questioned because it was produced in a literary workshop. Handelsman points out that these circumstances contributed to the novel's fall into oblivion, but he credits the work—whose intertextual affinities

with such novels as "*El reino de este mundo*, *Juyungo*, *Changó el gran putas*, *Raíces* y *Biografía de un cimarrón*" result from its treatment of a variety of *topoi* common to Afro-American literatures—with originality. In continuing his defense of Velasco Mackenzie, Handelsman relies on Zora Neale Hurston's view that originality implies a "masterful revision" or "the modification of ideas" (qtd. in Gates 118).

Chapter IV, "Lo afro, la costa y la plurinacionalidad del Ecuador: Un tríptico visto a partir de *Viajando por pueblos costeños* de Jorge Martillo," introduces readers to *Viajando por pueblos costeños* (1991), a series of chronicles by the poet and chronicler from Guayaquil, Jorge Martillo Monserrate. The unique feature of the work is its emphasis on elements of Afro-Ecuadorian culture that are evident in the Province of Esmeraldas and in Guayaquil and on their contribution to the national cultural life. Indeed, the writer touches on the circumstances surrounding the settlement of Africans in Esmeraldas, and on their contributions—in the areas of music, dance, culinary practices, folklore, folkways and worldview—to the cultural life of the country. In his appraisal, Handelsman argues that Martillo's work has succeeded in moving Ecuador's African heritage from the margins to the center. He also maintains that the work's Afrocentric approach to Ecuadorian culture is not merely of national significance but, like Velasco Mackenzie's novel, constitutes a model for the depiction of other Africanized cultures in the Americas.

In Chapter V, "Las contradicciones ineludibles del 'no racismo' ecuatoriano: A propósito de *Juyungo* como artefacto de la diáspora afroamericana," which is devoted to a reading of Adalberto Ortiz's *Juyungo* (1943), Handelsman lays the groundwork for his analysis by establishing the socio-historical and the cultural contexts within which the work is conceived. He then points to the fact that Ortiz, an individual of Afro-Ecuadorian and European ancestry, came under the influence of social realism that was espoused by Joaquín Gallegos Lara, his mentor and a member of the *Grupo de Guayaquil*. What is significant in this regard, according to Handelsman, is that members of the *Grupo* privileged efforts to foster solidarity of the working classes in the struggle for justice and freedom from oppression in a capitalistic society and downplayed racial issues out of fear that emphasis on such matters could lead to societal fragmentation and militate against the attainment of a socialist future that conceivably would be beneficial to all downtrodden groups in the society. It is important to note that the powerful influence of the *Grupo* on Ortiz led to his unconditional ideological affiliation with it and ultimately to his official initiation into that literary fraternity (Heise 11). Handelsman also expounds on the extent to which Ortiz also came under the influence of the Ecuadorian anthropologist, Justino Cortejo. Cortejo, we are reminded, called for the celebration of Ecuador's African heritage, even while espousing the traditional concept of *mestizaje* with its Eurocentric, paternalistic and racist underpinnings, and was oblivious to the fact that that approach was inherently inimical to the Afro-Ecuadorian heritage. Handelsman highlights these circumstances as factors that contribute to the tension, noted by critics, in the portrayal of the protagonist of *Juyungo*. Finally, he argues that the significance of the work resides in the fact that it represents a first step in the

reconstruction of a truly multicultural nationality by presenting an Afro-Ecuadorian protagonist, thereby undermining the ideology of *mestizaje* as traditionally defined by the majority in Ecuadorian society.

The many facets of the Afrocentric perspective of Argentina Chiriboga's historical novel, *Jonatás y Manuela* (1994), which is set in the last decades of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th, occupy Handelsman's attention in Chapter VI, "*Jonatás y Manuela*: Lo afroecuatoriano como discurso alternativo de lo nacional y lo andino," of the book. Handelsman believes that Chiriboga presents in the novel a vision closely linked to the struggle to find unity out of differences, and he sees in the work a search for a multicultural discourse that is essential to a genuine representation of the national image of Ecuador. The dramatization of the experiences of three generations of African women in the Americas reaches a climax with Jonatás who assumes a central role in the novel as fighter for the freedom of blacks and for the freedom of the Americas from colonial bondage through her influence on her white companion Manuela who is on the side of the Liberator, Simón Bolívar. Handelsman, who characterizes the Chiriboga novel not only as Afrocentric but also as "Afrofeminist," extols the extent to which the novelist champions the need for Ecuadorian society to be more inclusive and democratic.

In Chapter VII, "Del mestizaje al 'Proceso de Comunidades Negras': Reflexiones sobre la evolución de una política afrocéntrica en El Ecuador," Handelsman examines documents that show that Afro-Ecuadorians have rejected the traditional notion of *mestizaje*—which, as noted earlier, is associated with the whitening process and excludes blacks—and have embraced instead the notion that blacks themselves must be key participants in the debate on the multicultural nature of Ecuadorian society since they offer more complex proposals on the issue of race than those who view it only as a biological phenomenon. For Handelsman, the basis of said proposals is the idea that the Afrocentric project, as a process of identity formation in the Afro-American diaspora, involves a multiplicity of criteria and experiences that link the issue of race with economic, political, social and cultural considerations. Afrocentricity is characterized by Handelsman as the third and final phase through which interest in Blacks passed during the twentieth century, the earlier ones being *negrismo*, a Eurocentric movement of the early decades of the century through which intellectuals and artists turned to Africa for inspiration, and *negritud* of the 1930's and 1940's, through which a group of African and Afro-Caribbean intellectuals tried to defend the African heritage against the superficial primitivism imposed on it during the era of *negrismo*. In demonstrating how Afro-Ecuadorians have defined the concept of process and have expressed their identification with the Afro-American diaspora, Handelsman summarizes the salient points made in the following documents: "Algunos de los derechos que a los negros nos gustaría tener en la constitución," signed by "Proceso de Comunidades Negras del Norte de Esmeraldas," and the report on the "II Encuentro Afro Binacional Colombo-Ecuatoriano" that was held in San Lorenzo, Esmeraldas between May 30 and June 1, 1997. The former, he maintains,

roundly rejects the traditional notion of cultural assimilation, declares Afro-Ecuadorians—who have been in the region before Ecuador began to exist as a nation—to be entitled to all of the rights and privileges available to all Ecuadorians and underscores that group's acceptance of the responsibility for educating their children about their African heritage. The latter, we are told, emphasizes the transnational aspect of the African experience by calling for the solidarity of those in the "Comarca Pacífica" and rejection of the arbitrary notion of national boundaries. In the end, Handelsman emphasizes that both documents repudiate separatism and in reality represent a way of highlighting the multicultural nature of Ecuador and the call of Afro-Ecuadorians for national adherence to true democratic principles.

The final section of the chapter is devoted to an overview of ideas presented in a selection of Afro-Ecuadorian cultural magazines of varying longevity that appeared in Esmeraldas and Guayaquil during the course of the twentieth century. Basically, Handelsman examines the extent to which there have been constantly evolving expressions of Afrocentricity in the articles published in such magazines as *El Luchador*, *El Correo*, *Marimba*, *Hélice*, *Tierra Verde* and *Meridiano Negro*. The last magazine on the list, for example, appeared in 1980 and is credited with underscoring the impact of Afro-Ecuadorian culture on the nation and with recognizing Afro-Ecuadorians as key participants in a centuries-old struggle for freedom from oppression. Handelsman lauds the democratic spirit of Nelson Estupiñán Bass, the magazine's editor who, in an effort to eliminate class and social barriers and to highlight the lived experiences of all Afro-Ecuadorians, encouraged contributions by ordinary citizens and intellectuals alike.

Of the seven chapters of which *Lo afro y la plurinacionalidad: El caso ecuatoriano visto desde su literatura* is comprised, four are minimally altered versions of Handelsman's articles that appeared in refereed journals. Chapter I, "La literatura afroecuatoriana en el contexto nacional: ¿Ilusión o realidad?," appeared as "Ubicando la literatura afroecuatoriana en el contexto nacional: ¿Ilusión o realidad?" in *Afro-Hispanic Review* 12.1 (1993): 42-47. Chapter III, "Recuperando una canción dos veces perdida: Un análisis afrocéntrico de *Tambores para una canción perdida* de Jorge Velasco Mackenzie," was published in *Revista de estudios colombianos y latinoamericanos* 12-13 (1994): 13-17. Chapter IV, "Lo afro, la costa y la plurinacionalidad del Ecuador: Un tríptico visto a partir de *Viajando por pueblos costeños* de Jorge Martillo," was published as "Lo afro, la costa y la plurinacionalidad del Ecuador" in *Afro-Hispanic Review* 16.1 (1997): 16-24. And Chapter V, "Las contradicciones ineludibles del 'no racismo' ecuatoriano: A propósito de *Juyungo* como artefacto de la diáspora afroamericana," appeared in *Chasqui* 27.1 (1998): 79-91. Despite the evident uniqueness of its composition, the book, whose theoretical formulations draw on findings from a variety of disciplines, is remarkably coherent. Indeed, it may be viewed as a model for the study of the literatures—by black and nonblack authors—of the African experience in Latin America. As such, it is a vital contribution to the field of Afro-Hispanic literary studies.

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A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness

By Rachel E. Harding
Bloomington and Indianapolis:
Indiana University Press, 2000. 251 pp.

Reviewed by Russell G. Hamilton

A Refuge in Thunder, the poetic first part of the title, serves as a compelling invitation to prospective readers of the book under review. For those readers with a prior knowledge of who Candomblé's major deities are, the word "thunder" will more than likely conjure up thoughts of Xangô (pronounced Shango). Xangô is, after all, the Yoruba deity of thunder and one of the most popular *orixás* (orishas) in Bahia and, indeed, throughout Brazil. Whether or not Rachel Harding does mean to invoke Xangô with her use of the auditory image, she obviously does intend the title to convey to the reader that generations of slaves and their descendants did not seek quiet and passive refuge in that which afforded them spiritual, social, and cultural sustenance.

What follows the colon in the title constitutes a scholarly, albeit also metaphorical, rendering of what the book is about. Although the author does not explicitly make the connection between "thunder" and Xangô anywhere in the text, she is at pains to define and elucidate those terms in the title that state the work's thesis. Thus, in her "Introduction" Harding writes "[m]y usage of the term *space* in the title of this book refers to physical, socio-political, cultural, psychic, and ritual-religious locations within Afro-Brazilian experience" (xvi).

Also with respect to the book's title, Harding states in the introduction that during slavery times Candomblé "...provided through its emphasis on the cultivation of African deities and the use of African material and cultural elements in its rituals, an *alternate* meaning of Africanness, an *alternate* identity of blackness" (xvi; italics mine). According to one dictionary definition of the word, *alternate* constitutes an *alternative*, "...as in 'the alternate route is more scenic'" (*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*). Harding's use of *alternate* plays on *alternative*, which appears in the book's title as, according to *The Random House Dictionary* definition, an adjective meaning "[e]mploying or following non-traditional or unconventional ideas, methods, etc.; existing outside of the establishment." In slavery times Candomblé created "alternative spaces of blackness," which means, in effect, that spirituality and religious practices countered the Brazilian establishment's conceptualization of Africanness and social construct of "blackness."

Rachel E. Harding, who holds a doctorate in Latin American history, goes on to inform us as to what the book is and is not about. With respect to the former, she writes: "This book is an examination of the development of Candomblé in terms of the elements, experiences, and meanings which lie at its foundations in nineteenth-century Bahia" (xvii).

Harding's history of Candomblé, which focuses on the nineteenth century, consists of eight chapters, plus a coda or conclusion, a glossary, an appendix, and, of course, notes and a bibliography. *A Refuge in Thunder* is a well-documented work of serious scholarship. The author reveals herself to be well read in the scholarly literature dealing with Afro-Brazilian sects. She cites studies of Candomblé by such pioneering scholars as

Roger Bastide, Edison Carneiro, Jane Landes, Manuel Quirino, Artur Ramos, Nina Rodrigues, and Luís Vianna Filho. Harding also relies on the analyses and insights of such contemporary scholars and specialists on Afro-Brazilian topics as Yeda Pessoa de Castro, Vivaldo Costa Lima, Waldeloir Rego, João Reis, Joana Elbein dos Santos, Deoscoredes Maximiliano dos Santos, Stuart Schwartz, Thomas Skidmore, and Pierre Verger. Although Harding draws on the information imparted by and the insights of a number of scholars and commentators, her study is by no means derivative. In fact, while propounding her thesis Harding occasionally finds it necessary to take issue with some of the theories and conclusions of scholars whom she otherwise respects.

During an extended stay in Bahia she carried out archival work, and by consulting correspondence, police reports, official records, and other relevant documentation, Harding was able to base much of her argument on the data culled from primary sources. With respect to this archival research, in Chapter 5, titled "The Nineteenth-Century Development of Candomblé," Harding refers to a set of basic criteria she formulated "...for ascertaining which activities and characteristics described in the records most strongly indicated a relation to Candomblé" (69). These criteria include the role of the drum and other percussion instruments, figurative representations of deities, and divination.

Chapter 8, entitled "Candomblé as *Feitiço*: Reterritorialization, Embodiement, and the Alchemy of History in an Afro-Brazilian Religion," sets forth some of the book's most original and compelling insights. Because the following passage contains some of the most significant assertions in support of Harding's thesis, it is worth quoting in its entirety: "Candomblé, and African American alternative orientation more generally, became a premier location for the engagement of this corporeally contested identity. It is significant that so many of the alternative spaces of blackness relate to physical orientation (work, dance, escape, behavioral comportment, gesture, ritual, etc.) because the body has been the prime site of the degradation and Americanization of black identity through its commodification, enslavement, and signification. Candomblé can be understood as a ceremony, a performance of the *reclamation* of the body by a pan-African collectivity, a circle of Spirits and New World kin. This reclamation is an essential meaning of Afro-Brazilian religion and is distinct from African tradition—at least its pan-ethnic collective character and urgency in particular" (154).

One of Harding's most engagingly plausible theories has to do with the distinction between Africa and Brazil with respect to people being possessed by *orixás*. She points out that in Brazil possession has been much more common than in Africa. Harding theorizes that this distinction stems from the physical and psychic disjuncture caused by the experiences of the Middle Passage and forced servitude. According to Harding, "[d]ance, rhythm, and possession or trance are essential forms of the alternative orientation present in Candomblé. Possession is particularly significant because the occupation of black bodies by divine beings is a stunning contestation of subalterity. Also, initiation (and the material implantation of the essence or

energy of an *orixá* into the body of the devotee) is a form of marking blackness with divinity" (156).

Although rigorous in its scholarship, *A Refuge in Thunder* is basically jargon-free and certainly very readable. I might note, parenthetically, that we might attribute Rachel Harding's feel for language to the fact that she is also a poet. There is, indeed, little to take issue with as regards both the form and substance of Harding's study. I might make one minor observation with regard to the matter of the perceived African authenticity and concomitantly, the more prestigious status of Candomblé houses of mainly Yoruba origin. Harding notes that by the end of the nineteenth century the Yoruba language served as a kind of lingua franca among members of the various African ethnic groups in Bahia. She might have pointed out that in part because Yoruba is to this day the liturgical language of such well known *terreiros* as Axé Opo Afonjá and Gantois, these Candomblés Nagô and de Ketu, etc. are considered by many to be more "authentic" and are thus more prestigious than Candomblés de Angola and Caboclo, whose devotees chant in Portuguese, albeit an often somewhat creolized form of that language.

A relatively minor, but nonetheless curious omission, is the lack of a reference anywhere in the book to Macumba, the term by which the Rio de Janeiro equivalent of Candomblé is generally known. In referring to Afro-Brazilian religions in various regions and cities, the author mentions Xangô, the term by which Candomblé is known in Recife and other parts of the Brazilian northeast. Harding also mentions Umbanda, which, although very popular in Rio de Janeiro and elsewhere in Brazil as an African-based religion, relies heavily on western spiritualism, and thus, with respect to its origins and liturgy, is somewhat removed from Candomblé and Macumba as far as a real or imagined African authenticity is concerned.

Whatever flaws the book may have are relegated to a position of virtual insignificance by *A Refuge in Thunder*'s value and importance as a seminal and innovative work. I agree with Sheila S. Walker's assertion, which appears on the back of the book's dust jacket, that "...*A Refuge in Thunder* should become the leader in the field because of its contribution of new data, as well as for a theoretical analysis that advances the understanding of both institutional creation and identity transformation in the African Diaspora." Destined to become one of the classic works of its genre, *A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness* will appeal to a diverse audience, from general readers to scholars interested in African survivals in the Americas and to specialists on Afro-Bahian religious beliefs and practices.

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Postslavery Literatures in the Americas. Family Portraits in Black and White

by George B. Handley

Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000, 231 pp.

Reviewed by Edward Mullen

Published in the New World Studies Series of the University Press of Virginia, the title under review is based to some extent on the author's 1995 doctoral dissertation "Family Portraits in Black and White: Genealogy and Narrative in Post-Slavery Fiction from the United States and the Caribbean (Black Studies)," and while clearly not a reprint of the original, it reflects both the benefits and pitfalls of such an enterprise. While a great deal has been written on the impact of slavery in the New World in the last two decades, most of this work has been done by historians. Much to his credit, George Handley recognized that the history of slavery provides the literary critic (and most particularly the comparativist) with an opportunity to explore important yet often neglected links between the literature of the Americas. Handley's study specifically focuses on the parallels in plantation family histories as they were imaginatively recast through fiction. He views literature quite correctly as an ideal site "to understand not slavery's history per se but where we as multiracial nations stand in relation to it. Because stories have the power to remember the past, to shape the present, and move us toward the future, the stories we tell about slavery ...more directly engage and combat the forces of historiography and official memory" (187).

Postslavery Literature begins with a brief introductory essay which is followed by five titled chapters: (1) "Narrative and Genealogy: Toward a Postnational Study of Postslavery Literature;" (2) "Reading in the Dark: Cirilo Villaverde and George Washington Cable;" (3) "Reading Behind the Face: Martín Morúa Delgado, Charles W. Chesnutt, and Frances E. Harper;" (4) "Between the Insular Self and the Exotic Other: Alejo Carpentier and William Faulkner;" (5) "The Emancipation of / from History: Jean Rhys, Rosario Ferré, and Toni Morrison." The book ends with a conclusion (which goes well beyond a summary of what has already been stated), a bibliography and a serviceable index. Portions of the book, the introduction and chapters three and five have appeared in print before.

In the brief but well-written Introduction Handley defines his use of the term *postslavery* and is quick to point out that slavery in the Americas was abolished at very different historical junctures beginning as early as 1794 in Haiti, 1834 in the English territories, 1865 in the United States and as late as 1873 in Puerto Rico, 1886 in Cuba and 1888 in Brazil. The very late demise of slavery in the Caribbean is very telling since the whole region and particularly Cuba played a significant role in U.S. expansionism. The primary focus of this study then is the study of literary works which although written after the end of slavery "return to slavery's past...in order to understand its relationship to the present" (3).

The first chapter, "Narrative and Genealogy;" serves as the theoretical frame for the study as a whole and can be read quite independently from the book since the author explores ways in which a comparativist can read the major and minor chronicles of the postslavery experience. Handley proposes a post-national approach to his project which allows him to cross rigid politically and

ideologically constructed notions of nationhood. He begins by studying both the uses and abuses of genealogy in plantation cultures showing how genealogy, the foundation of descent-based societies, paradoxically produced considerable genealogic confusion and diversification than the plantocratic ideology intended. He maps out an ambitious comparativist agenda in response to his own question:

> How then might we go about a comparative study of postslavery literatures? The comparative critic needs to act much like Foucault's genealogist (and much like postslavery writers themselves), which means to follow accidents of biology rather than the rules of ideology. Our role is to insist rigorously on criticism that is not bound by national or linguistic boundaries, by ideologies, or by what Foucault calls 'any monotonous finality' (*Language* 140). Otherwise we will miss accidents, lost events, or even, just as important, 'those instances where [events] are absent, the moment when they remain unrealized' (140). The fact that racial relations, for example, have been imagined in Plantation America in a variety of ways raises questions about why some representations of race are chosen over others. Within the works of individual authors, we can look for and identify within the text the writer's own consciousness of the historical erasures that have made a pretended knowledge of origins possible. But this kind of reading impels us to go beyond the study of single texts or of single national traditions; if we are to understand how any nation in the wake of slavery has imagined its origins, we must also consider the historical erasures that have resulted when individual texts have been incorporated into a national literary history (30).

Handley's enterprise, as reflected in the above-cited question, is clearly both ambitious and highly original. He draws on a wide variety of theoreticians and critics, including but not limited to figures such as Michel Foucault, Doris Sommers, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Octavio Paz, Werner Sollors, John Irwin, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., to bolster his thesis and supply a factual basis for his project. The number of authorities cited is extensive and at times appears excessive. It gave me the impression at times that I was not reading an organic book but a doctoral dissertation.

The core of *Postslavery Literatures* consists of parallel readings of major novels from the 1880s to the 1970s by writers from the U.S. and the Caribbean that shows how fiction from different countries illuminate the tensions inherent in questions of genealogy and racial differences. Handley has organized his study diachronically. Thus he begins by comparing Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1882) to George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimos* (1880), moves on to treat the fiction of Martín Morúa Delgado (*La familia de Unzúazu*, 1901), Charles W. Chesnutt (*The Marrow of Tradition*, 1901) and Frances E. Harper (*Iola Leroy*, 1891). This is followed by juxtaposed readings of Alejo Carpentier's *El siglo de los luces* (1962) and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* (1936). The final chapter focuses on the works of three women writers: Jean Rhys (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, 1967), Rosario Ferré (*Maldito amor*, 1986) and Toni Morrison (*Song of Solomon*, 1967).

Taken as a whole, *Postslavery*

Literatures in the Americas offers those interested in diasporic studies an opportunity to reflect on the continuing impact of slavery on the imaginative eye. Particularly appealing to this reader was the author's decision to include readings of both canonical authors (Carpentier, Faulkner and Morrison) in conjunction with figures which may now have passed from memory. Thus Handley's commentary on Villaverde, Cable, Francis Harper, Charles Chesnutt, and Martín Morúa Delgado proved most fascinating. If the reader is patient enough to delve beneath the unfortunate rhetorical veneer of contemporary literary studies, he or she will find much to admire. George B. Handley's book is a first book which portends, no doubt, a bright future.

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General Sun, My Brother
By Jacques Stephen Alexis
Translated and with an introduction by Carrol F. Coates
Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999, 299 pp.

Reviewed by Valerie Kaussen

Jacques Stephen Alexis's *Compère Général Soleil* (1955) (*General Sun, My Brother*) is probably most familiar to contemporary U.S. audiences as a precursor to Haitian-American Edwidge Danticat's second novel, *The Farming of Bones*, in which she includes the following acknowledgement of her literary forebear: "To Jacques Stephen Alexis, for *Compère Général Soleil*. Oné [Honor]. Always" (312). Like *The Farming of Bones*, Alexis's *General Sun* is set in a sugar-producing region of the Dominican Republic near the Haitian border. Both novels depict the 1937 massacre of Haitian laborers by forces loyal to the dictatorship of Raphael Leonidas Trujillo. In revisiting this historical event and in acknowledging the first writer to treat it in fictional form, Danticat claims a shared identity with Alexis and with the whole tradition of the *engagé* writer in Haiti, those committed to depicting the plight of that country's impoverished black underclass.

Carrol F. Coates's excellent translation of *General Sun, My Brother*, from the original French, appears at a timely moment when the popularity of Danticat's work in the U.S. has enhanced the visibility of Haiti's considerable literary tradition. Never much given to the notion of "art for art's sake," throughout the twentieth-century especially Haitian writers have produced works of fiction and poetry with an eye to uncovering the economic and social inequities of the country's past and present. Haiti's history, since its glorious defeat of the French colonizer and declaration of independence in 1804, has been characterized by foreign economic imperialism, including a nineteen-year occupation by the U.S. military (1915-34), internal political instability, and an inexorable move towards peripheralization in the global economy. This history has created a fierce nationalist pride in Haiti, an acute sense of the economic, cultural and ideological stakes of the center/periphery relationship, and a commitment to representing imaginative solutions to the contradictions that beset small nations born out of the colonial encounter.

Alexis's *General Sun, My Brother* is a realist work that seeks to map the social terrain of nineteen-thirties Haiti and to situate the perpetual struggle between Haiti and the Dominican Republic in the broader context of the geopolitics of the World War II era. With a scope and detail reminiscent of the work of Emile Zola and other nineteenth-century French realists who influenced Alexis's novelistic project, *General Sun* tells the story of Hilarion Hilarius, a former peasant attempting to survive in the harsh urban environment of Port-au- Prince under the U.S. occupation. The novel opens with a feverish description of an unemployed and hungry Hilarius as he succumbs to the impulse to steal from a home in a well-to-do *quartier*. Hilarius is arrested, taken to prison, and violently interrogated. In prison, he makes the acquaintance of Pierre Roumel, an upper-class Communist organizer imprisoned for revolutionary activity. Roumel educates Hilarion on the sources of his misery, on his essential dignity as a worker, and on Communism as providing hope for the future. Upon his release from prison, Hilarion finds work through Roumel's help, and he meets and sets up

housekeeping with Claire-Heureuse, a hard-working street vendor. The couple and their neighbors endure a series of natural catastrophes (flood and a subsequent famine) while, in the hilltop suburbs of Port-au-Prince, Jerôme Paturault, a political "parvenu" (151) modeled on Haiti's future president Elie Lescot, throws lavish parties with his pampered and materialistic wife. Paturault, a Minister, schemes with the current Haitian President Sténio Vincent to appease the people whose unrest grows in proportion to their hunger. The regime, which among other things has embezzled aid money intended for the flood victims, also plans ways to suppress the Communist opposition. After a fire destroys their home, Hilarion and a now pregnant Claire-Heureuse move to Macorís in the Dominican Republic where there is plentiful work cutting sugarcane. In Macorís Hilarion enters an explosive situation in which exploited cane workers plan a labor strike, and where he makes contact with members of the growing international Communist underground. Gathering for work one morning, the laborers are surprised by Trujillo's drunken gun-toting soldiers, and the killing commences. With the assistance of their Dominican friends, Hilarion and Claire-Heureuse manage to escape the massacre, only to be caught by the Dominican police as they cross the river that forms the border between the two countries. Finally back on Haitian soil, Hilarion dies contented that he has once again reached his homeland.

Alexis lends an ethnographic precision to descriptions of the manicured and sumptuous *quartiers* of Pétionville, the rural peasant village, the working class districts of Port-au-Prince, and the Dominican sugar plantation alike. Describing his craft to a fellow writer in 1955, he wrote: "I try to be the chronicler of my time; I am determined to continue. Into our work..we must take note, in an objective manner, of the things that have taken place and those that are happening now" (quoted in Introduction xv). This leaves little doubt that writing realist fiction was inseparable from Alexis's Marxist praxis: objective description would be a means to demystify and diagnose a troubled society. Indeed, Marxist literary critics, most famously Georg Lukacs, favored realism over other art forms for its capacity to lay bare the contradictions of a capitalist society, i.e., to uncover the relationships between poverty and wealth, exploitation and extravagance. A representative passage from *General Sun* suggests Alexis's commitment to this narrative principle:

> The next day, all the human ants would begin bustling once more at the daily ritual of work—in the factories, soap-making plants, perfume shops, oil presses, slaughter houses, tanneries, seaside brick factories, cigarette and shoe factories, print shops, mahogany mills and sisal shops, and loading freight at the wharves. Each day, without faltering, they would work for others. They were selling their youth, their strength, even their old age, in exchange for a crust of bread to keep them alive...The more he was marked by work, covered with scars, and his body twisted by that work, the more things became clear in his mind ...Jean-Michel's words came back: "Your wages help to keep your muscles, bones, nervous system, and brain in shape, and to produce other workers for the boss. The day when you fully understand this, we'll have to restrain

> you."...Now those words were burning him. He had looked all around him with different eyes and without realizing it; he had listened with different ears and touched things with different hands" (170).

General Sun, then, a clearly *socialist* realism "reveals" the systemic causes for the misery of a character like Hilarion Hilarius and, self- referentially, for the rise of liberatory political ideologies that would seek to address that misery. In this respect, Alexis's three novels (*Compère Général Soleil*, *Les arbres musiciens*, *L'espace d'un cillement*) and short story collection (*Romancero aux étoiles*) continued the work of poet, novelist, and founder of the Haitian Communist Party, Jacques Roumain. Roumain's Marxist peasant novel *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (*Masters of the Dew*) (1944), probably the most famous work of fiction in the Haitian tradition, also represents the plight of an impoverished and exploited class of producers. In the novel, the peasants are "woken up" to the realities of their own oppression through the influence of a migrant cane cutter who returns to Haiti from hard labor on the cane plantations of Cuba where he has learned class solidarity and scientific irrigation. Particularly noteworthy about *Gouverneurs de la rosée's* Marxist orientation is the way it enables a global perspective on Haiti's underdevelopment: the Haitian peasantry's poverty is shown to be inseparable from capitalist development in nearby Cuba. Alexis's novel similarly employs Marxism to uncover Haiti's role in a global economy and to imagine solidarity and resistance within the network of relations created in and through that economy. Alexis marks the importance of Roumain's influence by representing him in *General Sun* as the activist/intellectual Pierre Roumel, who befriends and assists Hilaron when they meet in prison.

Born in 1922, Jacques Stephen, the son of novelist, militant nationalist, and ambassador to France, Stephen Alexis, spent his earliest years in France, returning to Haiti in 1929 and beginning medical school in Port-au-Prince in 1940. The young Alexis was deeply influenced by the nationalist movements that flowered during the period of the nineteen-year U.S. occupation (1915-34), especially *indigénisme*. As the critic Michael Dash has written, the occupation, while one of Haiti's darkest moments, also initiated a profound cultural and political *crise-de-conscience* that in a sense helped to create modern Haitian literature (95). Indigenist writers responded to the racism of the U.S. occupation and more broadly to colonial domination in non-western regions around the globe by turning away from European models, seeking to put an end to what a leading theorist of the movement, Jean Price-Mars, termed the Haitian elite's "collective bovaryisme." The indigenists sought inspiration instead in a pan-African sensibility and, closer to home, in the culture of Haiti's *vaudun*-practicing black rural folk. In this respect *indigénisme* suggests its similarities to international black cultural movements like *négritude* and the Harlem Renaissance, which likewise sought authenticity, resistance, and a new aesthetic in the African cultural retentions of the New World. A shared resistance to American market values and the racist ideologies of uplift that, in the case of Haiti, accompanied the U.S.'s mission to "civilize" the "little Africa" just off its own shores, created especially close affinities between *indigénisme* and

the Harlem Renaissance, and Langston Hughes and Claude McKay were revered writers in Haiti during this period.

Following the departure of the U.S. in 1934, writers associated with the indigenist movement tended to split off into two camps, the Communists, who argued that Haiti's problems were economic, and the *noirists*, who saw the country's ongoing difficulties as based in color conflict (Nicholls 165). The *noirists*, including François Duvalier, the future "Papa Doc," articulated an extreme form of racial essentialism, one based in European scientific racism. Claiming Mussolini and Hitler as influences, the *noirists* stated as one of their goals "the methodical detection of the biopsychological elements of the Haitian man" (Denis 153). The Communists and the *noirists* were the two major players in Haitian politics until Duvalier's election in 1958 effectively put an end to all political opposition.

Alexis, only twelve when the occupation ended, chose the Communist path. Along with René Depestre, he published and wrote for the Marxist journal, *La ruche*, and participated in the "generation of '46," the group of young intellectuals that eventually brought down the racist regime of president Elie Lescot, who appears in *General Sun*, as the Minister Jerôme Paturault. Paradoxically, the success of groups like the the "generation of '46" led to the 1958 election of François Duvalier, who shortly after his election, began to consolidate power by taking control of all civil and state institutions and media, and exiling or executing the opposition. During the brief period that Duvalier tolerated communism in Haiti, Alexis, travelled to Moscow, China and Cuba as representative of the *Parti Entente Populaire*, a Haitian communist group. The scope of Duvalier's power having made itself known while Alexis was abroad, the latter organized a small group to invade Haiti with the goal of rallying the Northern peasants to overthrow the dictatorship (Heinle 630). The five men were captured, tortured, and finally beaten to death. As Beverly Ormerod writes, "[Alexis] has now entered the world of anti-Duvalier legend" (87).

General Sun's representation of the World War II era struggle between Communism and fascism is perhaps a distorted reflection of the continuing and very real threat in nineteen-fifties Haiti of a fascism that would eventually result in the most bloody dictatorship in the country's history. Whatever his reasons for doing so (and we must here acknowledge that in 1955 Alexis was not aware of the threat posed by Duvalier and the *noirists*), Alexis situates the political events in Haiti of the thirties, and especially the massacre of Haitian laborers in the Dominican Republic, in the context of an internationalized struggle between these two opposed ideologies. Thus, while Hilarion and Pierre Roumel discuss socialist principles in the prison, an overheard radio broadcast reports that: "the battle is raging right now around Canton. In France, there are massive demonstrations in Paris. The C.G.T.U. has launched a manifesto" (57). The references to Canton, a battle between the Chinese government and the Communists, and to France and the agitations of the C.G.T.U., a French labor union, implies that the movement of which Roumel speaks is global and unstoppable. In another scene, Hilarion follows a conversation in which, "a [man] was talking about a bunch of things, about

dialectical materialism, the unequal development of capitalism, and cyclical crises. They seemed to be unhappy with some guy, a certain "Hikler" or "Hitler." There was another fellow who seemed to be their favorite, a certain Thälmann"[1] (77).

In Alexis' treatment of the era, the Caribbean has its own Hitler, Raphael Leonidas Trujillo, with the genocide of Haitian laborers in 1937 Trujillo's own "final solution" to the "problem" of racial difference in the Dominican Republic. A notorious dictator, Trujillo rose to power under the auspices of the U.S. government upon a platform of Catholic values and the promise to rid the Dominican Republic of the "African" presence, the scores of Haitian laborers who crossed the border each year to work on the sugar cane plantations (Nicholls 167). Denying his own African heritage and that of the Dominican nation in general, Trujillo, whose grandmother was of African descent, purportedly hid his own dark complexion under white make-up.

Alexis insists on a connection between Trujillo's rabble-rousing racist ideology and Europe's genocidal regimes by repeatedly calling Trujillo's followers "fascists." He represents them as a mob incited to express their most base and savage instincts: "with the effect of alcohol and the gesture of brutality and violence...the swine and jackal that took the place of conscience in their fascism was aroused" (256); and "the soldiers, the fascist police, and the militants of the Trujillista Party were running, staggering around town, howling with laughter and pride, drunken with blood, liquor, and looting" (264). Alexis, while not denying the racial politics of the event, gives a Marxist interpretation of the Haitian genocide in the Dominican Republic. In the novel, the massacre takes place in the context of growing labor unrest and worker militancy. When one of the labor leaders, Paco Torres, is gunned down as he gives a speech, the canecutters form a new resolve and decide to strike, with the genocide beginning shortly thereafter. Once the massacre is underway, it is the Dominican and Haitian Communists who try to save the victims: "the Communists had gone out into the streets to organize the evacuation under the very noses of the police, the soldiers, and the Trujillistas" (265). Nonetheless, Alexis also situates the battle between Communists and fascists in the Dominican Republic in terms of the bigger picture of U.S. expansionism, describing how, prior to the massacre, the U.S. ambassador was instrumental in foiling an attempt by exiles to overthrow Trujillo (234-5).

Indeed, U.S. imperialism in Haiti created the conditions for the labor migrancy into the Dominican Republic that we see depicted in the novel. Migrant sugarcane cutters, also termed *viejos*, were new types of the era, usually displaced peasants who were shipped off to Cuba and the Dominican Republic when the agricultural projects promised by U.S. development engineers failed to materialize in Haiti. On the industrialized sugar plantations, often owned by U.S. companies, the *viejos* experienced work conditions that hearkened back to slavery. Nonetheless, left-wing Haitian writers, while decrying the exploitation of the *viejos*, also depict the sugar plantations, somewhat utopically, as modern environments where industrial workers from around the Caribbean and Latin America together participated in the world-wide socialist struggle of the Third

International. In *General Sun*, the Dominican sugar plantation is indeed represented as providing the conditions for a mass workers' movement and for solidarity that cuts across racial, ethnic and national divisions. The pan-American nature of the workers' movement is figured vividly in *General Sun* in the description of the heroization of the dead labor leader Paco Torres: "carried by the ebb and flow of misery, workers would take [his legend] with them to the plantations of Cuba. Elements of the legend would reach Puerto Rico, Jamaica, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Panama, Venezuela, Mexico..." (240).

The *viejo* character, though, also functions as a working class analogue for the internationalism of Haitian writers like Alexis, who drew inspiration from the Paris avant-garde, Black American arts movements, and Cuba. As Carrol Coates describes in his informative introduction to *General Sun*, surrealism as a melding of poetics and radical politics, was an important influence upon young Haitian intellectuals of the era including Alexis (x). Equally significant, though, as we learn from Coates, was the influence of Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier, who visited Haiti in 1943 to present a lecture on culture and politics in Latin America. Carpentier's idea of "marvelous realism" —the idea that historical reality could be glimpsed through the legends, myths, and superstitions of the enslaved and formerly enslaved—had great impact on Alexis (xi). In 1956, at the first International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris, Alexis gave his own lecture called "Of the Marvellous Realism of the Haitians," in which he discussed Haitian art in terms of this marriage of the realist and the mysterious, the European and the African, and the rational and the supernatural.

Readers might have wished to see a bit more of the "marvellous" in *General Sun*'s depiction of daily life in Haiti. Alexis does include one *vaudun* ceremony in the first part of the novel, which takes place appropriately when Hilarion leaves the roiling urban space of Port-au-Prince to visit the village of this birth. The episode contains a particularly beautiful passage describing an elderly woman turning into flame as she dances to the *vaudun* drum rhythms: "then a miracle happened. The old woman rose in the air, like a flame with a fluttering of invisible feet. She was the dance itself, the ancient dance of distant Africa...she was a tree in the wind, a live beast in the fire, a bird in the sky" (109).

But such passages are rare in *General Sun*, and the novel, while demonstrating an undeniable respect for popular Haitian traditions also exhibits a certain ambivalence around superstition and the explanatory power of the magical. For example, Hilarion is an epileptic, a condition that his community ascribes to a variety of supernatural causes and that has gained him the status of a near pariah. Hilarion's life is in a sense given back to him by the intervention of the kind doctor Jean-Michel, who insists that his condition is physiological and can be controlled by medical treatment. Similarly, when a lonely, elderly woman of the neighborhood, Sè Choubouloute falls into a delirium, her neighbors are convinced that this is "no natural illness" (158). Dr. Jean-Michel eventually diagnoses her condition as the result of a "bilious hemoglobinuria," and takes the opportunity to chide the woman's neighbors for believing her to be a werewolf: "aren't you being a little batty

yourselves?" (160). Alexis's position on superstition and popular religion is inseparable from his Marxism, and his novel exhibits the conflicting agendas of Haitian cultural nationalism—which would unproblematically celebrate folk culture—and a left political project invested in notions of progress, development, and enlightenment. Contemporary readers are likely to experience impatience with the novel's faith in science and rationality (let alone Marxism) as the cure for social ills, leftwing notions that in our era may feel dated.

Nonetheless, there is much to enjoy and admire in this novel. Of interest to those in the field of Black studies, *General Sun*'s representation of imperialism and cultural contact in the Caribbean also provides much rich material for those working in the fields of hemispheric, postcolonial, and diasporic studies.

* * *

Carrol F. Coates has also published a translation of Haitian writer René Depestre's *The Festival of the Greasy Pole* in the CARAF series (Caribbean and African Literature Translated from French) at the University Press of Virginia. Coates's translations are excellent, and he will hopefully continue this valuable project of making available to English readers the great works of Haiti's literary tradition. But the task is monumental, and we can only hope that in the future Coates will be joined by translators as talented as himself.

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Note

[1]Thälmann was a left-wing two-time presidential candidate in Germany. When Hitler rose to power he had Thälmann executed.

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