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LOS DESLUMBRAMIENTOS DE AMÉRICA*

Por William Mina

En este laberinto de cegueras, DESLUMBRAMIENTOS y alienaciones, hijos del pasado sangriento de América y poseedores de la mirada prodigiosa que penetra los oráculos, debemos recobrar el timón perdido de los Argonautas. La realidad puede o no ser mitificada, siempre para salvar al hombre (Don Quijote) nunca perderlo (Mefistoles).

Manuel Zapata Olivella

Bajo el título *Los Deslumbramientos de América* pretendo presentar una serie de artículos y ensayos, unos inéditos y otros publicados, escritos por Manuel Zapata Olivella en el itinerario de su vida literaria. Los hemos seleccionado en tres partes diferenciadas y articuladas al mismo tiempo: *El Arte de la Novela*, *la Crítica Literaria y Arte Poética*. Al auscultar parte del archivo de documentos de MZO, me di cuenta que *Deslumbramientos de América* era el título original de un extenso libro sobre "América Mestiza" que incluiría un componente interdisciplinario: Antropología, literatura, arte, política. Parte de este proyecto quedó plasmado en el texto *La Rebelión de los Genes: El Mestizaje Americano en la Sociedad Futura* (1997), publicado parcialmente por Ediciones Altamir. Ellos decidieron excluir la parte política y social que estaban dedicadas al estudio de la obra cumbre del médico y psiquiatra afromartiniqueño, nos referimos a Frantz Fanon: *Los Condenados de la Tierra* (1962). Significativa obra sociológica afro, escrita en un contexto marxista y prolongada por "el gran intelectual" francés Jean Paul Sartre. La otra parte que integraría el megaproyecto ensayístico *Los Deslumbramientos de América*, eran parte de un memorial genealógico, artístico-literario de la "Visión de Europa" que Zapata se formó, cuando él estuvo recorriendo el continente europeo. Este apartado del proyecto se titulaba *Tambores de América para despertar al Viejo Mundo* (inédito). La parte que quedó inconclusa de *La Rebelión de los Genes* (1997), donde se abordan la temática de la identidad multicultural de la "América Mestiza" en sus tres troncos fundamentales de hibridez biológica y social-histórica (África-Europa-América. Intentando ser fiel a la personalidad de MZO como novelista, médico y Antropólogo, decidí el sugestivo título de *Los Deslumbramientos de América*, pues, aquí, están condensadas las grandes ideas y valores que siempre apasionarán, asombrarán, deslumbrarán al escritor americanista: El Arte, la literatura, la crítica, el lenguaje y el compromiso del escritor frente al mundo socio-político; todo con miras a revalorar la autenticidad, la imaginación y la creatividad del artista, propiamente americano frente al canon impositor europeo.

Procedamos pues a elucidar las tres partes que componen *Los Deslumbramientos de América*.

EL ARTE DE LA NOVELA

"La virtud del novelista y en general de todo artista, de trascender más allá de la observación del sociólogo, se debe a que el autor, por un acto voluntario e inconsciente a la vez trasfunde en la fábula de sus personajes gran parte de su vivencia".

M. Zapata

"El novelista, con más puntualidad que el historiador, nos dice siempre que el pasado no ha concluido, que el pasado ha de ser inventado a cada hora para

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que el presente no se nos muera entre las manos. La novela dice lo que la historia no dijo, olvidó o dejó de imaginar"

C. Fuentes

Según Manuel Zapata, la aculturación colonial marcó la senda de los patrones literarios que asumirán nuestros novelistas y escritores, desde el siglo XVI hasta la época contemporánea.

Era el modelo paradigmático europeo de sus narradores al único estilo y patrón legítimo de ser seguido, bien mediante la técnica de la "imitación" o la "repetición a secas". El canon europeo obnubiló la imaginación creadora del fabulador de la "América Mestiza", ya que ellos decidían los temas, el lenguaje, el espacio, el tiempo; los recursos literarios tenían que parecerse al referente discursivo de "Occidente" para ser considerado novela propiamente dicha. Primero intentábamos ser Iberos, luego británicos, posteriormente galos y por último norteamericanos.

A este arte de simular ser lo que no somos, es a lo que MZO denomina: La Colonización de la Novela, veamos lo que dice:

"El mundo de la novela permite reflejar con más libertad las vivencias del mestizo. Para ello es condición sustancial la autenticidad. En la medida en que el escritor pierde conciencia de su propio mestizaje y se abstraiga en una posición de científico o crítico extraño, surge la literatura colonizada".

No comprenderíamos la esencia del arte de novelar en nuestros dominios si no la entendemos como un proceso ligado a la enajenación y alienación psíquica de la mentalidad del escritor en América Mestiza.

No debemos negar que la novela como género literario adviene e irrumpe en la modernidad europea. Pero el hecho que Europa "invente" dicha forma imaginaria no significa que sean los depositarios absolutos para decir lo que debemos escribir y hacer. Sin negar la originalidad e invención de los maestros de occidente, se puede innovar y recrear nuevos modelos y esquemas imaginarios (épicos - líricos - románticos) del ser -novela- sin que sea una copia o imitación o repetición a secas; y ello lo puedo fabricar en África, en América o en planeta X; estamos frente al escollo de la creatividad, del descubrimiento del genio, de la obra de arte nueva, más allá de las estupideces del "Best Seller". Estos casi siempre son moda "Made in U.S.A.", pues, se cuantifica la obra por los ejemplares vendidos y no por la calidad literaria del libro. Los grandes "Clásicos" del pasado nunca hubiesen escrito "Best Sellers" sino obras para "grabarse en el imaginario y la conciencia colectiva, pues, como dice Ítalo Calvino, un texto "Clásico" nunca termina de leerse porque lleva una verdad escondida.

A la pregunta clásica de la Novela moderna ¿Cómo puede asirse el yo según Milán Kundera?, MZO responderá desde la experiencia, desde la vivencia, pues, no hay un yo sino una pluralidad de yoes. Lo primero que debe hacer un novelista des-alienado, es justamente afirmar su identidad multicultural en tierras de América Mestiza, donde hubo maridaje genético, lingüístico, histórico y social, a partir de lo colonial, suministrado por el acervo africano, el europeo y el amerindio. Negar esta realidad es escribir literatura "colonizada" como muchos intelectuales, académicos, pensadores y novelistas han hecho. Negar este evento histórico-social del ser novela y del hacer novelístico es estar esclavizado al canon europeo; afirmar la hibridez y la diversidad de la etnicidad en América, es empezar a escribir literatura de la autonomía, de la autenticidad, del reconocimiento y de la identidad verdadera. Escribir simulando que éramos "razas puras", son señas de inautenticidad. La novela propiamente dicha, es aquella que intenta dar respuesta a la creación humana sin avergonzarse de sus orígenes, sean éstos los que sean. En MZO la novela es un intento de respuesta a lo que

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somos sin pena de X ni de Y, ni de Z, esto es, de llevar en nuestros genes la hibridez de lo propiamente africano, lo europeo y lo colombiano.

¿Ha respondido nuestra novela y nuestros novelistas con autenticidad a esta realidad histórico-social de etnicidad y multiculturalidad? Son tan pocos y contados que la gran mayoría ha escrito a espaldas de sí mismo, a espaldas de su identidad para no mirarse en el espejo que lo refleja múltiple y con muchas caras. MZO afirma:

“Ni siquiera el vigoroso florecer de la novela indigenista y la negrista de la década de los treinta al cincuenta, con autores tan prominentes como Asturias, Carpentier, Gallegos, Icaza, Adalberto Ortiz, Alcides Arguedas, Ciro Alegría, han logrado dar carta de ciudadanía a las etnias oprimidas en la novelista hispanoamericana. En nuestras novelas más destacadas de nuestra literatura, apenas se hacen menciones muy secundarias de personajes afros o indígenas, perdidos en el esplendor del realismo maravilloso y mágico... lo medular, lo esencial en construcción de la cultura, el hombre y su condición étnica, poco o nada ilustran con su presencia la sociedad en que actúa, piensa y muere”.

Como lo afro y lo indígena se asoció a lo bárbaro y lo salvaje –Sarmiento y Alberdi- y a lo que no daba qué pensar; empezó en nuestras tierras con el devenir del tiempo una literatura que respondía a las exigencias que la realidad cultural demandaba. Surgió así el indigenismo y la africanidad en la literatura de América y de Colombia. La toma de conciencia ve emerger desde que nuestros narradores empiezan a introducir lo afro en sus obras, es el caso de Eustaquio Palacios con el *Alférez Real* (1886) y Jorge Isaac con *María* (1867).

“Al igual que en la novelística norteamericana, donde algunos autores anglos asumieron la defensa del esclavo, préstamo del renacimiento francés, los novelistas Ceballos, Cirilo Villaverde, *Cecilia Valdez* (escrita en 1839); Gestrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Sab (1841), iniciaron el alegato de la dignificación del Afro en Hispanoamérica”.

Pero, ¿en qué se diferencia MZO de toda la literatura y novelística afro, sobre la temática?, en que a partir de obras estudiadas en *Los Deslumbramientos de América* como *Changó, El Gran Putas* (1983), y *Hemingway, El Cazador de la Muerte* (1993), se percibe la autenticidad y originalidad de su estilística narrativa. Los personajes de las obras de MZO no están alienados, conocen su pasado, su origen africano y no quieren olvidarlos en tierras americanas, justamente son protagonistas invitados de primer orden que saben de la mitología y la cultura tradicional milenaria africana, donde los ancestros protectores, orichas y muertos, hablan con los vivos en afronorteamérica, en el Caribe y en América Mestiza.

Los personajes no asumen su “esclavitud”, ni se sienten “negros a secas”, aspiran a ser libres por su filosofía de la libertad, así lo reclaman, se sienten raptados por la “Loba Blanca” europea y la voz de la libertad de Changó, Yemayá, Odumare, Elegba, no se callará mientras todos sus hermanos independientemente de la etnia o religión, no lo hayan hecho también.

Los personajes de MZO son actores que están hablando en la primera persona del singular, quienes están coparticipando y cocreando el acervo de la humanidad en todas sus facetas. Es la creatividad del Muntú en su diáspora por la América Mestiza, con sus dialectos, sus mitologías, sus lenguajes, sus tradiciones orales.

Si *Changó, El Gran Putas* es la epopeya de los africanos libres y creadores en “las Américas Mestizas”, *Hemingway, el Cazador de la Muerte*, es la experiencia y vivencia del héroe y líder afro Nommo Kenyatha narrando como antropólogo y político, el origen del hombre en África y su destino en el cosmos y en el patria-tierra, siempre y cuando él no continúe depravando la fauna y la flora. *Hemingway, el Cazador de la*

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Muerte, es la novela de la conciencia africana de ser hijos del Muntú, de aquella filosofía de la hermandad entre vivos y muertos y todos los entes de la creación. *Hemingway, el Cazador de la Muerte*, es una obra con trasfondo ecológico y biológico, salvar la "humanidad" del desarrollo por el desarrollo, de la técnica por la técnica, aprendiendo de la sabiduría milenaria del equilibrio cósmico y del hombre inserto en la totalidad.

Para MZO, el caso de Gabriel García Márquez, por lo que hace de la identidad triétnica y la multiculturalidad es paradójica, pues es inconsciente – consciente de la misma pues construyó en *Cien Años de Soledad* (1967), oralidad y realismo mágico sin afrocaribeños, cuando el peso de la herencia africana en estas facetas está marcado. Es el intento del genio Gabo de desalienarse, ya que en uno de sus viajes como periodista a Angola (1978), se dio cuenta de su marcada cultura africana. El autor adquiere conciencia de la etnicidad, del mestizaje con su personaje Sierva María de Todos los ángeles en *El Amor y otros Demonios* quizás porque en *Cien Años de Soledad*, intenta mostrar la negrumbra sin "negros"

"A la inversa de Isaac, el Creador de Macondo, prefiere quedarse con sus pocos guajiros, turcos, árabes, pero sobre todo, con los presuntos "blancos" que ocultan su sangre pigmentada. Extraordinario observador y superior novelista, Gabo nos describirá en la estirpe de los Buendía, el prototipo de quienes pretenden ignorar que sus abuelos conquistadores, de hábitos polígamos y sin mujeres europeas, debieron amancebarse con amerindios y africanas por varios siglos en el Caribe y el resto del continente. He aquí la originalidad de Gabo, "mostrándonos la negrumbra sin negros".

Dos últimas aclaraciones sobre el arte de novelar en MZO. La novela no es meramente una actividad estética donde se exalta la belleza de las palabras o de la escritura. Se debe agrandar y decir las cosas en un "código" claro, para establecer una comunicación audible y visible entre el autor y los lectores, pero más allá de estas consideraciones del "Arte por el Arte", la novela es en esencia una experiencia viva del mundo histórico-social, nunca un panfleto; sí un instrumento revolucionario donde las analfabetas e ilustrados intentan hablar, hacer y pensar por cuenta propia, para crear conciencia política y pedagógica de otro hacer social y este era el segundo dispositivo de la novelística comprometida de MZO. Y es por ello que Lucía Ortiz estudia la articulación entre "raza, poética y sociedad" en Zapata.

CRÍTICA LITERARIA

"Y es evidente que el único patrón que nos interesa en este momento en una América deseosa de desalienación, es la de que lo bueno o lo malo que ella tenga, se relacionen en función de su propia existencia"

M. Z. Olivella.

Así como ha habido una alienación histórica-social en el mundo de la cultura de América Mestiza, el crítico literario y escritor también ha sido víctima de ella, la razón fundamental, al decir Zapata Olivella, es haber sido herederos de una "lengua prestada", la de Castilla para describir una realidad totalmente diferente como la americana en su geografía, en sus códigos, en su fauna, en su flora, en su biodiversidad natural y en sus mestizajes culturales.

Una lengua que de mano de los novelistas y narradores del imperio, no permitió durante varios siglos el enriquecimiento del castellano con aceptaciones del español hablado en América Mestiza. William Ospina nos recuerda el caso de Marcelino

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Menéndez y Pelayo el hecho de que ciertos narradores mencionarán la "realidad americana" con vocablos amerindios, le parecía: *Tiranía Estética*.

Ni nos imaginamos lo tortuoso que debió ser la enajenación e imposición del castellano al indígena para nombrar el paisaje, sus costumbres y vivencias americanas, ni nos imaginamos lo difícil que fue la aculturización del castellano en la psique del africano, pues, las culturas amerindias y mesoamericanas, las lenguas y dialectos africanos poseían sus propios códigos y esquemas imaginarios lingüísticos para nombrar su mundo -real- de significados. Pero por más coacción física y adoctrinamiento psíquico, siempre habrá invenciones de la creación humana que supervivan: las religiones, los mitos, las leyendas.

Vemos que la conquista y la colonización quisieron extirpar las lenguas indígenas con la cruz y la espada, pero no lo consiguieron, fuimos testigos de la expansión, aunque minoritariamente de los mismos imaginarios por toda América. Aunque muchas no son oficiales, hoy continúan siendo habladas en varios países del continente. Con el universo africano sucedió algo parecido, como los "esclavizados" hablaban un sinfín de dialectos y lenguas, la meta ideológica a través de la domesticación del africano por su "pseudo lengua" no fue posible por parte de la corona y de sus séquitos religiosos. Cuando creían que habían materializado su propósito, la capacidad creadora del africano en América, "inventa" el palenquero. Una nueva lengua en América, en un mundo extraño, con categorías distintas para renombrar la realidad americana y recordar sus culturas africanas. Las investigaciones de los etnólogos y los antropólogos lingüistas nos han dado a conocer que desde que llegaron los africanos aquí, las significaciones suyas se mezclaron con las amerindias y las castellanas. He aquí el mestizaje lingüístico a pesar de la pureza del lenguaje de Castilla, que siempre imperó en la novela y en la literatura de América Mestiza. Palabras de origen indígena son: Tabaco, batata, sabana, hamaca, ají, cacique, etc., palabras de origen africano son: Chiripa, Macondo, Cumbia, guineo, bananas, bamba.

Es esta autenticidad en la lengua castellana, que Olivella le reclama a los críticos literarios para que afirmen que no es posible juzgar las novelas de un autor sin desconocer esa realidad híbrida lingüística. Es esa perspectiva de la búsqueda de un lenguaje de expresión americano lo que debe configurar al escritor, al narrador nuestro y es propiamente este estilo de un lenguaje popular, oral, de los analfabetas de América y de los descendientes de africanos, lo que le da la originalidad a la novelística de MZO; esto es, la respuesta de un lenguaje autónomo, auténtico, propio para expresar nuestras costumbres, vivencias, experiencias, ideas, y creencias y valores. De allí los méritos de Zapata Olivella hacia escritores como Rulfo, García Márquez, Borges, quienes en el pasado empezaron esa labor lúcida de desalienar y desajenar el lenguaje del formalismo de la Real Academia de la Lengua. De aquí sus simpatías hacia un novelista como Jorge Isaac, que no sólo "reinstítuye" el mundo africano en la novela colombiana, sino que es consciente de esa nueva realidad histórica y social como es el lenguaje americano y crea una nueva sensibilidad para expresarla.

"Ese complejo europeizante, ignorar el momento de la ruptura del cordón umbilical, cuando América deja de ser Europa, trastrueca el sentido vital del romanticismo. Isaac, como otros muchos, se forjó en la lectura de los románticos europeos, pero esa influencia sólo predispuso el ánimo de ser una escuela literaria para convertirse en una escuela vital. Este es el único y real sentido de lo nacional de "María" que trasciende más allá de la literatura para servir a un propósito patriota".

La toma de conciencia de Zapata Olivella como novelista "que aspira a ser libre con la palabra", creando una nueva "estética" que vaya más allá del canon occidental, desde un lenguaje reivindicativo nacional que exprese lo regional, sin perder la óptica

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universal de la literatura, empezó cuando dirigió *Letras Nacionales*, entre 1965 y 1986. Todos saben de *Piedra y Cielo*, de *Mito*, pero muchos ignoran que la Revista *Letras Nacionales* fue un verdadero heraldo de libertad de expresión artística en el lenguaje americano. *Letras Nacionales* fue una resistencia al boom latinoamericano y a la avidez de las multinacionales editoriales que sólo les interesa vender, aunque aquello que intente venderse sea una mera mercancía sin ningún valor artístico. Quizás el mercado sea la gran amenaza para las grandes proezas literarias, que pueden pasar desapercibidas ante tanta banalidad en esta era de insignificancia cultural.

Zapata Olivella tenía conciencia de ello, por ello escribió, narró e hizo siempre ensayos lejos del canon y de la estética occidental; creo que este es el factor de su invisibilidad en Colombia por los novelistas y del silencio de los críticos literarios que todo lo afro les suena a satánico o a simplemente “cosas de negros” y por ende, cosas sin importancia.

Creo que como la obra novelística de Zapata está dirigida a las analfabetas y semiletrados, a su tradición oral, a la creación anónima de ellos, sólo esta colectividad creativa, fuente de su inspiración valorará su literatura, en el instante en que la gran mayoría de los ciudadanos del “tercer mundo” adquieran la conciencia y descubran que sus vivencias imaginarias y reales adquieren allí todo su significado.

Fue en *Letras Nacionales* donde Zapata Olivella comprendió que toda crítica literaria tendría que ser interdisciplinaria, de lo contrario no servía para nada. El escritor tiene que ser un conocedor fehaciente de su historia, de la sociedad en la que vive y de la cultura en la cual está inmerso. Por ejemplo, hacerse un análisis de la violencia en Colombia a partir de 1948 sería mezquino, pues una aventura narrativa lúcida del mismo fenómeno habría que empezarlo con el desplazamiento africano hacia América y la destrucción violenta de la cultura indígena, sólo la Sociología pobre y la mísera violentología de los historiadores y analistas sociales puede hacer ello; para el analista inteligente una elucidación a partir de esa fecha es un despropósito.

El acto de escribir, pues en Zapata Olivella, parte de reconocer una identidad étnica, multicultural en la cual el narrador está inmerso, donde la lengua hace parte no sólo de unas estructuras semánticas, lógicas y gramaticales, sino una arma subversiva de sobrevivencia y posesión creadora de un mundo de valores e ideas para defender la libertad y los sueños de las culturas oprimidas.

ARTE POÉTICA

Bajo esta categoría queremos asociar los artistas, poetas y pintores, quienes desde la forma, verso y color, han resaltado el valor y significado inventor del afro en los horizontes de la América Mestiza. Si vamos a los Estados Unidos, nos encontramos con los insignes nombres de: Douglas y Jhonson; si nos detenemos en el Brasil hay que mencionar al escultor y pintor Mulato de Mina Gerais, el lisiado Alejaidinho. Sin regresamos a México, hemos de dilucidar sobre las imágenes pictóricas de los tres grandes muralistas para ver emerger lo “bello”, por ello Siqueiros pinta “Su Esclavo” y Orozco representa a “Hidalgo dando la libertad a los esclavos”, henos aquí con pinceladas de belleza desde el espíritu africano. Todo mientras Rivera ve vislumbres de africanidad al plasmar el rostro de Manuel Zapata Olivella en un rostro olmeca –cuadro que reposa en el Ministerio de Educación Nacional Mexicano-.

A Zapata Olivella le interesan poetas colombianos como Carranza y el Tuerto López, porque en ellos se combinan lo criollo con lo universal, pero sobre todo porque en la palabra poética hay un anhelo profundo de ser Colombia, una afirmación auténtica al espíritu nacional, cantado uno desde los Llanos y los Andes y el otro desde la costa.

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A Artel no sólo le llama **El Maestro** porque fue su profesor en su secundaria, sino porque es el poeta afro que mejor conjuga nuestra identidad mestiza, siendo un “defensor de las razas oprimidas de América”. Martín Góngora es el poeta afro por excelencia, quien convierte el paisaje del litoral en manglares de raíces enigmáticas, donde los Orichas se secretan con los vivos para cantarle al amor. A Obeso no sólo hay que verlo como iniciador de la poética afro en Colombia, sino como el artista donde el lenguaje se vuelve creación a innovación de expresiones verbales y orales africanas al idioma castellano. Damas, el gran poeta de la hermandad afro, que como Neruda convertía todo lo que veía en poesía. “Fue ese gran invisibilizado del continente americano”. Césaire, la voz del Muntú en el Caribe y uno de los grandes ideólogos, junto a Senghor y Damas de la Negritud. Entendida ésta no como una estética basada en el color de la piel, sino como una filosofía de lo bello que exalta lo propiamente africano, en todas las artes para entender la vida, la libertad y la imaginación creadora de la diáspora afro.

Los Deslumbramientos de América, son las confesiones artísticas y literarias del escritor que aspiró siempre a ser libre y a exaltar la invención del elemento imaginario afro. Fue por ello que las balas de la enajenación nunca penetraron en la psique del gran pensador, narrador y ensayista de la América Mestiza: Manuel Zapata Olivella.

NOTA

*Prólogo para el libro de Manuel Zapata Olivella. *Los deslumbramientos de América*.

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LA ARTICULACIÓN DE LA IDENTIDAD AFRO-CHOCOANA EN LA POESÍA DE HUGO SALAZAR VALDÉS

Por Alain Lawo-Sukam

“Hugo Salazar Valdés constituye hoy
por hoy en Colombia el representante
de la poesía chocoana”

(Mejía Duque 734).

Los estudios sobre la literatura afro-hispana han cobrado gran importancia a partir del siglo XX bajo el impulso de críticos literarios como Richard Jackson, Marvin Lewis, Laurence Prescott y Miriam DeCosta-Willis entre otros. Merced a su dedicación y empeño, los escritores afro-hispanos que por siglos habían sido olvidados empezaron a hacer su entrada en los círculos literarios. Este fenómeno constituyó un paso más hacia la redefinición de la cultura y de la tradición literaria hispanoamericana en su totalidad.

A pesar de su valor literario, la mayoría de los escritores afro-colombianos siguen siendo pasados por alto en los principales anales, bibliografías, antologías e historias de la literatura colombiana. El ejemplo de Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda es símbolo de este descuido literario. Conocido por sus talentos literarios, ni siquiera menciona en su antología canónica, *Historia portátil de la poesía colombiana (1880-1995)*, a los escritores de ascendencia africana. Discriminación o ignorancia, este fenómeno sigue siendo común. Los pocos escritores que a veces acertan romper el estatus quo del anonimato literario son Candelario Obeso, Jorge Artel, Arnoldo Palacios, Manuel Zapata Olivella y en cierta medida Helcías Martán Góngora. La producción literaria de aquellos pioneros literarios ha sido objeto de múltiples traducciones en diferentes idiomas así como materia prima para tesis doctorales y artículos publicados en revistas. Desgraciadamente, la mayoría de los escritores afro-colombianos siguen esperando el día de su de-marginalización literaria debido a la poca atención que se les prestan los críticos, las casas editoriales y de la política exclusivista del canon literario.

En los últimos años, la prosa afro-colombiana ha captado la atención de muchos críticos de la narrativa afro-colombiana. La poesía queda poco estudiada. Dicha poesía constituye un espacio discursivo en el que los poetas concretizan sus experiencias de vida con la aplicación del ritmo, la imitación de los instrumentos musicales que marcan la africanidad de la costa y del valle. Entre los poetas afro-colombianos dotado de talento excepcional, se destaca la figura del prolífico Hugo Salazar Valdés (1924-1996). Poco conocido en la arena literaria, Salazar Valdés da una dimensión especial a la literatura del Pacífico colombiano con una producción poética que honra las letras colombianas.ⁱⁱ

Salazar Valdés surge en la época de los post-piedracielistas y de los cuadermicolas, pero resulta tarea difícil clasificar a Salazar Valdés dentro de un movimiento o generación literaria precisa en Colombia. No quiere que se le asimile a ningún circuito literario. Lo declara en “Sapiencia” de *Casi la luz*:

No tengo círculos, ni nexos
Con los mundillos de café
Soy solo y libre como un hombre
Detesto, oídme, la falsa
Y la enseñanza de la época. (85)

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El primer suceso literario de Salazar Valdés vino en 1948 cuando publicó consecutivamente *Sol y Lluvia* y *Carbones en el alba* de fondo regional. A finales de 1953, se mudó del Chocó a Bogotá para desempeñar el papel de secretario de Extensión Cultural y Director de Cultura Popular. Bajo el auspicio del Ministerio de Educación Nacional publicó *Casi la luz* (1954) que encierra la versión corregida de *Dimensión de la tierra*; *Patria convocada* (1955), *El héroe cantado* (1956) y *Toda la voz* (1958). De Bogotá, regresó a Cali de manera discreta donde publicó *Pleamar* (1975), *Las raíces sonoras* (1976) y *Rostro Iluminado del Chocó* (1980).

Sus poemarios son bastante heterogéneos y abarcan la temática de la naturaleza, del amor, de la vida. Sin embargo, una de las preocupaciones mayores del poeta se arraiga en la búsqueda de la identidad afro-chocoana. Gracias al gran conocimiento de su tierra y de su cultura, sus poemas no son metafísicos o anecdóticos; son más bien, versos de los hechos del vivir cotidiano, con una combinación armónica de símbolos, imágenes y metáforas originales. Salazar Valdés trata de presentar al mundo aquella cultura suya ignorada y/o desconocida. La poesía de Salazar Valdés se inscribe así dentro del paradigma de la poesía afro-hispanoamericana de sus antecesores literarios como Nicolás Guillén, Palés Matos en el Caribe, Candelario Obeso, Jorge Artel, Helcias Martán Góngora, Virginia Brindis de Salas, Nicodemes Santa Cruz, Nelson Estupiñán Bass y Adalberto Ortiz en América del Sur. Pero a diferencia de los anteriores, Salazar Valdés da prioridad a la presentación lírica del Chocó.ⁱⁱⁱ El poeta no se aferra a un canon estético sino que se mueve con libertad en búsqueda de su propia voz, a través de la copla, la canción, y del lenguaje local y/o popular.^{iv}

Para explorar la identidad afro-chocoana nos valemos de los parámetros (post-coloniales) de la negritud. Tanto la negritud como la teoría post-colonial tratan con la temática de la representación, la opresión, la resistencia y emancipación frente a la cultura dominante (Lewis 3; Ashcroft 2). Enfocamos la temática del mestizaje somático, el contexto socio-cultural del afro-chocoano (con sus rituales sagrados y seculares) así como la opresión político-económica de la que es víctima.

Hugo Salazar Valdés aborda la problemática del mestizaje étnico-racial, importante para la definición de su propia identidad (como mulato y afro-chocoano) y la de la nación colombiana. En *Dimensión de la tierra* reafirma la composición triétnica de la identidad del país: “la raza a que navego, la triétnica voz americana” (77). El postulado de la tri-étnicidad es símbolo de la americanidad y por consiguiente de la colombianidad. El blanco, el negro y el indígena forman parte integrante de la herencia americana. En segundo lugar, hace una referencia explícita a su doble herencia biológica o mulatez por medio del conflicto que traspasa su alma:

Voy perseguido por las fauces
de dos ancestros sin orilla:
uno de fuego devorante
otro de piedra perseguida
que en el oleaje de mi sangre
muerden su propia lejanía. (“Canción introspectiva”14)

Estos versos reflejan la lucha existencial que enfrenta el mulato. La imagen del fuego devorante es la metáfora de la sangre europea que corre en sus venas. La piedra perseguida se refiere a su herencia africana. Esta lucha interna caracteriza la disparidad histórica de ambos mundos. El blanco conquistador, esclavista y opresivo enfrenta al negro esclavo y oprimido por el blanco. La figura del mulato aparece en este contexto como un ser perdido entre dos destinos. En efecto Richard Jackson deja implícita la idea del mestizaje biológico como una poderosa fuerza de exclusión que puede llevar a la pérdida de la identidad africana:^v

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Just as cultural fusion and in some instances government pressures have not encouraged the development and existences of separate black cultural heritage, the process of racial bleaching denies the Latin-American black the recognizable African characteristics of his physical features and thus his black identity. (2)

Frente al problema que puede engendrar el mestizaje, Salazar Valdés reconoce también el privilegio que conlleva el ser mulato en *Rostró iluminado del Chocó*:

El mulato es conjunción
de amoroso regocijo
de las razas negra y blanca
en pos de fin y principio. (62)

El tono de alegría que caracteriza esta estrofa refleja el lado positivo de la mulatez. El hecho de llevar en sí dos historias, dos civilizaciones, coloca al mulato en situación de privilegio para comprender y conocer ambos mundos. Esto le permite, en cierta medida, ser universal. El mulato no debe pasar por alto ni su origen europeo ni el africano. Ambos elementos están arraigados en su destino. Como lo analiza Richard Jackson en *Black Writers in Latin America*, este mestizaje positivo valora la síntesis racial como fuente de armonía y de equilibrio (14). La re-conceptualización positiva del mestizaje no funciona únicamente a nivel biológico sino también al nivel social. Las diversas razas deben unirse y complementarse. Dice el poeta:

Hay que habitar la Selva humanamente
con hombres blancos, con amarillos
con mestizos, con negros, con mulatos.
(*Dimensión de la tierra* 58)

Salazar Valdés se vale de la metáfora inclusiva de la Selva para enfocar el valor de la fraternidad racial que no se limita sólo al negro o al blanco, sino también a los demás componentes étnico-raciales del Pacífico. La convivencia racial aquí es también una coexistencia cultural. Este discurso de cohabitación y fraternidad en la Selva realza el humanismo del poeta.

Como mulato, Hugo Salazar Valdés reconoce en la valoración de su herencia africana, una oportunidad para conciliar su mestizaje e identidad afro-chocoana. En *Pleamar* reafirma el apego a sus raíces africanas a través de la metáfora de las "uvas". Las uvas en la poesía de Salazar Valdés son según Marvin Lewis "a euphemism for black" (163) y por analogía para África. El continente africano se mitifica en esta búsqueda de la identidad personal y colectiva.^{vi} Salazar Valdés no hace un discurso celebratorio de África sino que la alude simbólicamente para crear una imagen nostálgica de identidad y de herencia biológica.^{vii} Esta idea se concretiza en "Canción" donde el poeta hace un desplazamiento mental a África:

Una noche sencilla
imaginable, pero noche de altares
maduros de utopías.
Las que vienen conmigo de los antiguos ríos
del África descalzas y danzantes,
son el vaso de amor
sin labios y sin límites,
inmortal en el oro de los sueños. (53)

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Se nota aquí un deseo de conexión con el continente negro pero sin ambición ninguna de profundizar en las grandes tradiciones africanas. De esta manera, la poesía de Salazar Valdés se inscribe dentro de los parámetros de la "literature of African survival" definida por Edward Kamau Brathwaite como "a literature which deals quite consciously with African survivals ... but without necessarily making any attempt to interpret or reconnect them with the great tradition of Africa" (80). La voz del discurso que evidencia el origen africano viene también mediante la experiencia de los abuelos, y de la ruta dolorosa de una travesía que enfatiza la crueldad e inhumanidad de la esclavitud. En un extracto del *El héroe cantado* el poeta recrea poéticamente la diáspora africana hacia el Nuevo Mundo. El sufrimiento de los negros en las galeras, su venta como mercancía y su trabajo agonizante en las minas son comparados con el holocausto.

La esclavitud forma parte de la identidad y del bagaje personal y colectivo del afro-chocoano. Esta identidad se arraiga también en la lucha por la libertad. Si en la historia de las rebeliones africanas en el Nuevo Mundo se ha enfatizado, por lo general, mucho más el papel del hombre, Salazar Valdés da tributo a las hazañas de las mujeres de ascendencia africana. En *El héroe cantando* son las mujeres los verdaderos héroes. Son ellas las que empujan la revolución con su vocerío avasallante. Se destaca la figura imperante y poco conocida de Mañuela Beltrán quien,

arranca de las tablas el edicto
que rompe en alto y luego pisotea
en valiente ademán de libertad. (276)

En este contexto, el género femenino participa en la liberación de un grupo étnico-racial del yugo de la esclavitud. Paralelamente a la esclavitud, esta ansia de libertad representa también un elemento importante en la definición de la identidad del afro-chocoano en particular y del afro-hispano en general.

La identidad afro-chocoana se manifiesta también en las prácticas culturales. En *Rostro iluminado del Chocó* la voz lírica dice: "Quiero contar las costumbres/de las regiones chocoanas/en crónicas bien vestida/de color y letra clara" (30). Estos versos encarnan el compromiso literario del autor. La identidad afro-chocoana se evidencia a nivel sociolingüístico por la reproducción del habla coloquial del Chocó. En la canción "María Teresa" Salazar Valdés plasma el habla popular mediante la voz de la afro-chocoana María Teresa:

Ay, ay que me tá quemando
la sangre entre laj ateria;
Virgen rel Cajmen, María,
San Antonio, Santa Elena,
la calentura mi gente
la juelza re la arrechera
y er picaro rel injuante
¡que me tiene toa ejtrecha! (48)

Como todo dialecto, tanto el habla de los afro-chocoanos como el de los afro-hispanos tiene una dimensión social ya que funciona como un idioma de identificación (Kubayanda 21). En el poema arriba mencionado, este habla se particulariza por la presencia de modismos locales como "arrechera" (pueblo) e "injuante" (campesino). En el plano fonético se divisa la aspiración del "es" en **está**. La "s" se convierte en "j" en **laj** y **ejtrecha**; la "r" vuelve a ser "j" en **Cajmen**, y "l" en **juelza**; la "f" se convierte en "j" en **juelza**; la "l" en "r" en **er picaro**; la "d" es substituido por "r" en

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rel injurante y **re** la arrecha; la “r” por “c” en **acteria**. El dialecto popular se presenta como una (re)afirmación de la identidad afro-colombiana que por muchos siglos ha sido denigrada. Detrás de la exteriorización formal del dialecto, aparece un discurso religioso que revela el patrimonio cultural de la comunidad negra. Las formas de expresión ritual dentro de los contextos sagrados se materializan por el culto a los santos. El panteón de santos aunque deriva de la tradición católica, es también producto de un sincretismo entre las creencias de África occidental y de España durante los siglos XVI a XVIII (Whitten 12). El negro se apropia de la figura de los santos católicos para reavivar su espiritualidad.^{viii} Eso le permite también re-territorializar la veneración de los santos, del templo a las calles y en las casas dando a los rituales un toque popular.

El personaje poético María Teresa alude a los santos que constituyen la fuerza física, mental y espiritual del pueblo: Virgen de Carmen, San Antonio, Santa Elena. Los santos son invocados por las mujeres durante los arrullos para que cumplan con sus peticiones y las de los hombres en búsqueda de una pesca fructífera. Como lo revela Norman Whitten, cada santo es implorado por diversas circunstancias en un escenario en que participan los percusionistas, las cantadoras y la presencia imprescindible de más de un bombo (155). Es menester señalar que las festividades mayores en el calendario eclesiástico en Quibdó incluyen los rituales públicos dedicados a la Virgen del Carmen todos los 16 de julio. Las veredas alrededor de Quibdó también celebran sus propias fiestas, muchas de las cuales son las de San Antonio, los 13 de junio (Ochiai).

En el poema “Las fiestas” de *Rostro Iluminado del Chocó*, Hugo Salazar Valdés sigue penetrando en los rituales sagrados del Chocó. Exhibe las celebraciones dedicadas los 24 de septiembre a la virgen de Las Mercedes en Itsmina. Con repique de campanas el pueblo sale a las calles. La belleza de los ceremoniales se refleja en la procesión rica en cantos y alabados a la Virgen así como los altares adornados y las balsas donde es aromatizada y embalsamada la Santa. Durante la noche, la vacaloca^{ix} toma el paso, dando a la fiesta patronal un sabor más africanizado (o pagano) con bailes frenéticos y trances. La fiesta no encarna sólo un momento de respeto y agradecimiento a la Virgen de Las Mercedes sino también una ocasión de regocijo y de diversión en que entran en juego el aguardiente, los ejercicios acrobáticos. Constituye también un espacio físico y temporal adecuado para trabar relaciones sociales y amorosas:

por acá bulle amistoso
y gentil en abundancia
zahiriente y guapetón
de cortesía no cata
y es fino además de hielo
el arte de su navaja. (31)

Los excesos de la fiesta la convierten en cierta medida en celebraciones seculares. Al lado de la fiesta matronal de la ciudad de Itsmina se distingue otra fiesta celebrada en Quibdó, en honor de San Francisco de Asís. Es el santo más venerado entre los quibdoseños todos los 4 de octubre. La gente le llama con afección y apego, San Pacho, dándole una connotación más vernácula.^x En “San Pacho” el poeta recuerda la historia de la fiesta y su ambiente ceremonioso:

Diez mil noches y un perfume
de clavel, han celebrado
los fieles de San Francisco
de Asís, la edad de su santo. (32)

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La sinécdoque diez mil noches^{xi} se refiere a la década de los años 1940 y 1950 en que el santo cobró gran valor entre los quibdoseños (Velásquez 34).^{xii} La fiesta de San Pacho se ha convertido en un sincretismo religioso en que participan prácticas católicas y paganas mediante la presencia de los “ritmos europeos y africanos” (32-34). La mezcla de lo europeo y lo africano se manifiesta por la presencia de las vacalocas, los globos, los salmos o cánticos bíblicos, sin olvidar la imprescindible abundancia del aguardiente. El desfile por las calles se hace en forma de procesión donde lucen las carrozas que se mueven por un mecanismo interior acompañado por los cantos de las mujeres disfrazadas llamadas “reinas del aplauso” (“San Pacho” 34). Las festividades de San Pacho no sólo se dedican a la devoción al Santo sino también ofrece un espacio privilegiado para recordar la identidad africana. El relato de las leyendas de la extranjera patria “perdida del otro lado del mar” (32) es una muestra del apego del pueblo a la memoria del continente africano. La fiesta de San Pacho constituye también una plataforma de diversión social.^{xiii} La imagen de la contienda “rigorosa palmo a palmo” (32) sirve para resaltar la pasión del populacho por el torneo de boxeo (tradicional) público que opone a los barrios.

Aún más importante es el papel unificador que desempeña las fiestas patronales. Como dice el poeta, la fiesta de San Pacho,

une de arriba y de abajo
allá en el cuatro de octubre
del Citará entrelazados
indios, mulatos, mestizos
negros y fraternos blancos. (35)

Durante la fiesta en Citará (antiguo nombre del Chocó) se rompen, pues, las barreras étnico-raciales y de clase. El espíritu de concordia supera la violencia y el odio. El negro, blanco, indio, mestizo y mulato entierran su animosidad. Ricos y pobres se confunden en la muchedumbre. El calificativo “fraternos” para calificar a los blancos puede funcionar, aquí, como un eufemismo para expresar (humorísticamente) la mentalidad a veces segregacionista del euro-chocoano. Sin embargo este espíritu negativo desaparece durante las fiestas, dejando paso a la convivencia fraterna.

El retrato que hace el poeta de la fiesta de San Pacho revela también un elemento constitutivo de la identidad afro-chocoana: la dieta. Durante la fiesta de San Pacho se consumen platos típicos del Chocó que encierran el sancocho de pescado con yuca y plátano, arroz, queso:

Al amanecer alienta el sancocho
de pescado con yuca de sonreír
y tierno y torcido plátano
en verticales de queso
de gentilicio sinuano
y arroz del mejor habido
en casa de maestrazgo. (“San Pacho” 35)

El marco temporal (“amanecer”) permite establecer una diferencia entre las tradiciones occidentales y locales (del Chocó). Si el café con pan y leche suele constituir el desayuno en los países occidentales, para los chocoanos no hay mucha diferencia entre el desayuno, el almuerzo y la cena. Este fenómeno se debe a las prácticas culturales o a la escasez de recursos financieros. En lo que reza con el yantar diario, la dieta consiste en la combinación del plátano con queso, panela y agua de ric

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que comen los pescadores después del boga: "Plátano cocido y queso/agua de ric y panela/es el yantar cotidiano" ("El boga" 22). Tanto la comida como las fiestas patronales constituye un marco de identidad colectiva y participa también en la construcción de la identidad del Chocó y de Colombia. Es de interés señalar que los rituales religiosos, sean familiares como los arrullos a los santos, o públicos en las celebraciones patronales anuales dan espacio a un contradiscurso que forma parte del patrimonio cultural del afro-chocoano en su forma híbrida.^{xiv}

En el mismo contexto sagrado se destaca también la ceremonia del *alabao* dominado por los cantos fúnebres. El *alabao* se manifiesta en el poema "Velorio" de *Rostro iluminado del Chocó* en que el poeta cuenta el velorio de Manuel Toro, personaje popular en el pueblo de Tamaná que falleció envenenado por una culebra. La casa del adulto difunto se llena de cantares de lamentaciones en que retratan en versos su biografía, enfatizando las buenas obras que hizo durante su estancia terrenal. Eso se explicita en los versos siguientes en que el poeta es testigo de lo ocurrido:

Cantares de aguja son este lamentarse que oigo
.....
En improvisados versos de natural quejumbrosos
se escucha la biografía en frente de los despojos
del conquistador en vida de sus postreros elogios
al embellecer su tiempo en servir y amar al prójimo. (50)

La improvisación de los cantos es una costumbre entre los pueblos africanos y expresa la habilidad creativa del pueblo. Como en las demás tradiciones occidentales, la vida positiva del muerto es el recuerdo que se deja a los vivos. Es de interés señalar el papel de los géneros sexuales durante el *alabao*. Las mujeres llamadas *cantadoras* o *rezanderas* son quienes inician los cantos de marchas fúnebres. Riegan el agua bendita para abuyentar al demonio y se queman ramos de olivo para que el santo apóstol lleve el alma del difunto buen puerto. Dice el poeta:

Riegan el agua bendita
para ahuyentar el demonio
y queman ramos de olivo
en memoria del apóstol
que las buenas almas guía
sin contratiempo ni estorbo
por el camino que lleva
derecho al supremo trono. (50)

Las mujeres constituyen en cierta medida la vía hacia el paraíso, las mediadoras entre los santos y los humanos. Durante el *alabao*, son ellas que sirven café, cigarrillos y fósforos, aguardiente y cigarrillos (50). Si el aguardiente y el café sirven para combatir el "hielo de difunto" como lo declara Norman Whitten (149), Salazar Valdés apunta también que prolongan el insomnio "mientras la brisa del río/ hace tiritar los hombros" ("Velorio" 50).

La cultura afro-choacoana se enriquece también con los rituales seculares. En "Baile negro" el contexto secular se verifica con el baile de la rumba. El sonido del tambor y la danza negra son elementos importantes a la negritud. Se inicia el poema con la presentación de los instrumentos musicales que participan en la rumba. Eso ocurre mediante el uso recurrente de la onomatopeya y de la aliteración que dan una orientación acústica a la versificación:

Tin tan, tin tan, tin tan

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suenan el tambor, suenan el timbal
Porongo, borongo, marongo
canta el bongó. Gime la flauta
ruge el tambor y entre los "chaquis"
de las maracas va el lagrimón.
La voz gitana de la marimba. (44)

El timbal, el bongó, la flauta, el tambor, las maracas y la marimba son los instrumentos creadores de la belleza de la rumba y simbólicamente encarnan la expresión la identidad africana. La presencia imprescindible de la mujer es su atracción en el baile. Se inicia la danza al compás del son de los instrumentos musicales. La cadencia sensual de los cuerpos se yuxtapone a la armonía de los instrumentos multicolores de percusión que lleva entre los dientes:

La negra danza mil maravillas
y entre su boca
de rojo y negro
rieles, panderos y cascabeles
y lunas brillan.
.....
Ay. Ay, aiii
la negra da media vuelta.
sube los brazos y en epilepsia de la cadera
hay fogonazos y batatazos
y entre los senos boas perversas
como en los ojos de borrachera
laten los perros de los ancestros
y los ritos de África negra. (44-45)

Estos versos resaltan la sensualidad de la negra bailadora y no constituye en este contexto un estereotipo de objetificación sexual sino que se inscribe dentro de la glorificación de la belleza de la bailadora de ascendencia africana. De ahí que el poeta haga un viaje mental al continente negro al tratar de vincular los gestos de la mujer afro-chocoana con los ancestros y los ritos de la "África negra". La anatomía femenina negra (por el meneo de los brazos, las caderas, los senos) profundiza la hermosura y la atracción física de la mujer negra.

El papel preponderante de la mujer en la rumba contrasta con el de la salsa o el tango en los que el hombre guía los pasos. En la rumba, la mujer controla los movimientos y guía de la interacción. La entrada del hombre lleva el baile a su apoteosis pero sigue a la mujer con pasos adecuados. En "Baile negro" el poeta, con una minuciosidad descriptiva, presenta la introducción del hombre en el baile. Se vale de la onomatopeya "Chin, chin, chin" (45) para presentar los platillos que esgrime la bailadora al invitar al varón a ser parte de la escena. Entre zalemas y giros, le sigue el hombre al compás de la música. Aunque la rumba representa una celebración a la identidad afro-chocoana, también constituye para el negro un espacio que le permite olvidar por un momento su miseria y dolor existencial:

El hierro de la alegría
sobre el yunque de la angustia
galopa la voz alcohólica
de las visiones esdrújulas.
.....
Los negros danzan mil maravillas
los negros matan sus agonías

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los negros beben y se emborrachan. (45-46)

La dicotomía alegría y angustia capta el efecto del baile en la vida del negro. En el baile encuentra una liberación temporal (de su miseria material).

La miseria socio-económica es también uno de los temas de la poesía de Salazar Valdés. El problema mayor que mina a la comunidad negra es la desesperación: "El pueblo que siempre va y viene desesperado" (*Raíces sonoras* 79). Esta desesperanza tiene sus raíces en la explotación y la miseria socio-económica y política que sufre el departamento. Los principales agentes de atraso son el descuido del gobierno y la explotación de las riquezas naturales y humanas por compañías estatales y privadas que no benefician a los locales. El poeta considera el Chocó como un "Muñeco de políticos" (*Dimensión en la tierra* 68). Esta idea refleja la actitud manipuladora que tiene el gobierno por esta región. Los políticos la usa por fines electorales sin hacer nada para que prospere. La población les sirve como fuente de votos electorales para consolidar y controlar el poder.

Salazar Valdés no se limita sólo a criticar a los políticos, también critica la miseria que padecen los maestros y profesores, los artesanos, las sirvientas, a los empleados públicos que no llegan a mantener a su familia (68). La explotación del negro en las industrias logra mayor resonancia en las fábricas de Andagoya donde gime en el calabozo de la miseria. El poeta se vale de la anáfora "y" de las expresiones de desolación como "muerte" "agonía" "locura" "desventura" para expresar el dolor y sufrimiento de los negros mal pagados y explotados.

La situación miserable del negro se extiende también en las fábricas donde sigue trabajando de sol a sol en los socavones para buscar el pan cotidiano. El minero no sólo padece las inhumanas faenas de las minas sino que eso afecta también a su familia. Sus hijos se encuentran "en urgencias de pan, de abrigo y drogas" cuando la mujer muere de "úlceras sangrante/ con la mirada de ansiedad" (67). La alusión a las drogas y la úlcera dan a conocer los graves problemas de salud entre la comunidad negra. En efecto entre las principales enfermedades que diezman al pueblo se nombran el aldo de la bilis y el paludismo (44). Las consecuencias nefastas del paludismo en el Chocó debilitan los recursos humanos del departamento y como lo señala Peter Wade: "Malaria is the most widespread and debilitating disease in the lowlands. It is estimated that in the Atrato and San Juan valleys of the Chocó over 50% of the inhabitants are periodically incapacitated by malaria fever" (83).

Detrás del discurso creador de identidad, aparece la denuncia y la protesta de la deshumanización del afro-chocoano en las minas, fábricas, empleos públicos, se destaca en filigrana una profunda ideología marxista de clase. La palabra ideología aquí se define en el sentido althusseriano que corresponde a la "imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 11). La dicotomía obrero vs. patrón asienta la base de este pensamiento marxista. En Andagoya por ejemplo el poeta alude la infelicidad del obrero en estas palabras: "Oh factoría donde hacen la muerte/ con inhumana paga de salario/ y que el obrero [negro] come en su miseria" (*Dimensión* 61) y luego "Aquí clama el obrero de fiebre envilecido/ la gélida sordera del patrón inmutable" (*Casi la luz* 106). Al hablar de la situación del afro-chocoano, Salazar Valdés trata de presentar también la lucha del proletariado víctima del sistema capitalista. La alienación del obrero se verifica al nivel del usufructo. El obrero no se beneficia de la labor de su trabajo sino los patrones.

Al hablar del obrero negro, Salazar Valdés se dirige también a los proletarios del mundo. Este discurso universal lo describe Richard Jackson en *The Black Image...* cuando afirma que "Much like for Césaire, for Nicolás Guillén, and to a large extent for

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most Afro-Spanish-American writers, beyond the black-skinned men of his race it is the battle of the world proletariat that is his song" (130).

En conclusión podemos decir que Hugo Salazar Valdés lleva al Chocó a la esfera nacional y quizás internacional. Logra ser la voz de aquella tierra sin voz; de aquel paisaje abrupto y riquísimo que se está hundiendo paulatinamente en el abismo de la miseria. Con mucha ingeniosidad trata de redescubrir los valores culturales del afro-chocoano a la vez que rechaza los embates de la opresión y la enajenación que sufre. La valoración (que hace Salazar Valdés) de la identidad afro-chocoana por medio del dialecto, de la dieta, de las prácticas religiosas y profanas se conforma con los postulados de la negritud. Como bien lo define Laurence Prescott, la negritud es "... una tradición literaria en la que el negro se expresa a sí mismo con voz auténtica; en despertar una conciencia racial que le permite al negro verse de manera positiva" (205).

La crítica de la opresión y explotación del afro-chocoano se inserta tanto dentro de los parámetros de la negritud como de las teorías postcoloniales. Como lo subraya Klor de Alva: "... postcoloniality can best be thought of as a form of contestatory/oppositional consciousness, emerging from either preexisting imperial, colonial, or ongoing subaltern conditions, which fosters aimed at revising the norms and practices of antecedent or still vital forms of domination" (120). Por medio de sus poemarios, Salazar Valdés trata de revelar y salvaguardar la identidad afro-chocoana. Es una poesía de resistencia frente a la opresión de la cultura dominante que por siglos ha silenciado y denigrado la cultura afro-chocoana. Salazar Valdés se sirve de lo regional para universalizar un discurso que traspasa las barreras étnico-raciales y las fronteras locales. El caso del afro-chocoano puede leerse como una metonimia del afro-colombiano, del afro-hispano y de todos los grupos étnicos marginados del mundo. Este artículo invita a una exploración de la producción literaria de los poetas y/o escritores marginados por el canon literario colombiano. Por la riqueza estética y ética de sus obras, enriquecen el panorama literario y cultural de Colombia y del mundo latinoamericano.

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ⁱⁱ La producción literaria de Hugo Salazar Valdés abarca las siguientes obras poéticas: *Sol y lluvia* (1948); *Carbones en el alba*. Bogotá (1948); *Dimensión de la tierra* (1952); *Casi la luz* (1954); *La patria convocada* (1955); *El héroe cantado* (1956); *Toda la voz* (1958); *Pleamar* (1975); *Las raíces sonoras* (1976); *Rostró iluminado del Chocó* (1980); *Lectura para ti* (Inédito). Es menester señalar que algunas de los poemarios encierran otros poemarios. Por ejemplo en *Casi la luz* encontramos a *Dimensión de la tierra*. Otros poemarios tienen sólo un poema muy largo; como *El Héroe cantado*, *Pleamar*, *Las raíces sonoras* o *Dimensión de la tierra*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Como lo subraya Ulrich Oslender, tanto la población del Chocó como la del Pacífico colombiano es en su la mayoría de ascendencia africana: "90 percent are Afro-colombian, an estimated five percent indigenous population of various ethnic groups and about five percent are mestizos who have come from the interior of the country" (91).

^{iv} Salazar Valdés se sirve en mayoría del español como lenguaje poético. No se vale mucho de la jitanjáfora y la onomatopeya sino más bien del lenguaje popular (una mezcla del español con intonación africano).

^v El mestizaje como fuerza de exclusión del negro y también del indígena al final del siglo XX, ha sido tratado por Leslie Root en *The African Experience* (1976); Ronal Stutzman en *El mestizaje* (1981); Norman Whitten en *Pioneros negros* (1992); Nina Friedemann en "Estudios de negros" (1984), y Peter Wade en *Blackness and Race Mixture* (1993).

^{vi} Marvin Lewis afirma que: "... most writers examine the African connection not in the sense of a physical retreat to Africa or things African but rather as a quest for a format upon which to construct a mythic world. Myth, in this sense, represents a symbolic projection of people's collective values and aspirations" (5).

^{vii} Como bien dice Marvin Lewis "Africa represents more than an escape; it symbolizes a type of spiritual and psychical liberation that cannot be achieved in the poet's present, concrete situation. Indeed, the poeticizing of Africa represents an attempt to reconcile mythic and profane time search for a positive ancestral values in a set of negative circumstances" (176).

^{viii} El sincretismo religioso afro-chocoano cuadra con el pensamiento de Michel de Certeau en *The Practice of Everyday Life* en que estipula que el subalterno encuentra en su diario vivir modos de adaptar los sistemas culturales que le son impuestos. Emplea técnica de camuflaje:

aparentemente acepta las leyes y prácticas de representación hegemónica pero las dirige a fines diferentes de los perseguidos por el orden dominante (29-32).

^x Rogelio Velásquez define la vacaloca como una "armazón de palos forrados con encerados, cuernos humeantes y cola de ramas de limón, que carga un hombre que corre, aceza, se para un momento y embiste después, que produce sustos y templa de nervios. Cuando el que la porta se detiene, le cantan los músicos o el público: "Si el torito fuera de oro, y los cachos de aguardiente, me volviera torador.../Qué torador tan valiente!" (26)

^x Según el folclorista chocoano Rogelio Velásquez, todos los quibdoseños desean ser enterrados al morir con el hábito de San Francisco: "Con el vestido franciscano, se dice, el cielo está más cerca" (Velásquez 36-37).

^{xi} Diez mil noches y épico equivalen a 27 a 30 años y se refieren a los años alrededor de 1948-50. Eso depende también del momento en que Salazar Valdés escribió el poema (i.e. alrededor de 1978-80). Según Rogelio Velásquez, la estatua de San Francisco de Asís llegó a Quibdó en 1899 y la parroquia en que reside fue construida en 1945 (34). Salazar Valdés se centra en la época en que las ceremoniales empezaron a lograr importancia entre la población multirracial con la aparición de nuevos barrios en la década de los 50. De 1950 a 1977-1980 fecha en que supuestamente se escribió y publicó el poema, transcurre aproximadamente 27-30 años.

^{xii} La introducción del santo en Quibdó remonta en 1899, así como la construcción de la catedral en 1945 y la división del pueblo en varios barrios para celebrar al santo (Velásquez 34).

^{xiii} Para profundizar el carácter de recreo de la fiesta San Pacho, Rogelio Velásquez señala que: "A fin de que la festividad alcance mayor esplendor y animación, Quibdó, para el tiempo de San Francisco, aparece dividido en barrios o sectores. La idea data de 1929, y, con la aceptación unánime, se partió el poblado en trozos que emulan y luchan por ser los primeros en la fiesta. La disputa ha servido para que las actividades sean más complicadas y las diversiones más amplias y numerosas!" (21) y más tarde revela que "cada quien lucha por su barrio para que se luzca en el torneo de boxeo, las carreras de caballos, bicicletas y encostalados, la vara de premios, etc" (22-23).

^{xiv} De acuerdo a Juanmaría Cordones-Cook, el proceso de hibridez crea nuevos espacios y nuevas formas de poder, de ser y saber y produce "un contradiscurso que tiene efecto de resistencia y antídoto contra el esencialismo, la univocidad y el control cultural, a la vez que pone de manifiesto la vitalidad de los grupos marginados" (651).

OF COCKS AND BOXERS: [BLACK] MASCULINITY AND
NATIONAL BELONGING IN
MANUEL ZAPATA OLIVELLA'S *CHAMBACÚ, CORRAL DE NEGROS*¹

By Ligia S. Aldana

Soy un gallo de pelea
y no me dejo arrumar.
Tengo la casta
y no me voy a malpelear.
...pico y espuela les doy.
Pa' que respeten
gallo de pelea soy.

Pico y espuela, Luis Towers "El Rasta."

a uno como negro no le queda otra
alternativa que el ring y la fama, marica,
porque las demás profesiones, Ud. lo sabe
viejo Davidson, son oficio pa' blanco.

El Flecha, David Sánchez Juliao

Extensive critical work on nation building and nationalism has established a consensus in Latin America, affirms Rebecca Biron, that "cod[es] the active citizen as male...operating within a fundamentally masculinist framework" (1). This analysis is grounded on the importance of including gender in the national equation. Later, class and race became recognized as equally important constitutive elements of national phenomena.² In light of the new plurinational paradigm brought forth by the new Constitution of 1993, the critical discursive space in Colombia reflects the country's new reality through the proliferation of necessary discussions on cultural and racial identity.³ The new Colombian constitution recognizes the rights of Afrodescendants and Indigenous peoples to claim and preserve their cultural and linguistic identity. Issues of marginality and lack of economic and political participation among said groups have also been acknowledged as obstacles that prevent inclusion in the national body. A more incisive consideration of gender as it intersects with race and national belonging still requires more attention. This need is particularly pressing in the Northern coast of Colombia where the national epic has been synonymous historically with the saga of the white and *blanqueada* upper class intelligentsia. As a result, the powerful contributions of Afro groups and their struggle to claim their rightful place at the national level have been dismissed. While the Pacific coast has generated considerable discussions on black women and their political activism,⁴ conversations on blackness on the Northern coast continue to address race from a general perspective and with a focus on racial taxonomies and social, economic and political participation, omitting the centrality of gender and the need to contextualize and pluralize racism.⁵ It is important, therefore, to deconstruct the ideal male [white] citizen—or *mestizo* in the case of Colombia and Latin America—to examine representations of masculinity in relation to race and nationality.

In this study, I examine the relationship between black masculinity and national belonging in the Northern coast of Colombia, as depicted in Manuel Zapata Olivella's novel *Chambacú, corral de negros*.⁶ The text clearly portrays subjects whose lives are marked by race and who exhibit relationships with nationality and gender that pose a series of important questions. In addition, looking at blackness and gender in relation to national belonging in *Chambacú* provides an opportunity to explore the currency of Zapata Olivella's agenda of representation to this very day. Definitions of self in the

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novel are determined, to a great extent, by work, the type of which is, in turn, related to traditionally established gender categories. Thus, I concentrate my analysis on the novel's treatment of cockfighting and boxing, two central occupations performed by *chambaculero* men, and two of the very few careers available to them for their subsistence. By probing the elements offered in *Chambacú* when blackness and masculinity intersect, the rationale behind the models of black males that the text projects comes alive. Ideally, this analysis aims to contribute to transcend the very artificial racialized gender categories exhibited in the novel to raise questions about their own legitimacy, and to envision the possibility of attaining what Paul Gilroy defines as a non-Spartan male subjectivity that can subvert the limited design of patriarchal maleness in the context of the modern nation (*Small Acts* 8).

Masculinity and Blackness

To begin, it is important to address a poignant question pertinent to Euro-North American approaches to studies of gender and sexuality: Why focus on masculinity at a time when so much effort is directed to the de-essentialization of traditionally defined gender categories and to destabilizing heterosexual patriarchal national imaginaries? Can gender function as a productive category of analysis that can allow us to examine and question the very principles that fix it? Can we dismiss binary gender categories in societies where heterosexuality and the model of the nuclear family are invested with legality, and the lives of children, the elderly, and the extended family still depend on the functionality of these models in terms of access to jobs, education and social inclusion? I believe that we cannot. At the same time, I argue for not losing sight of the possibility of debunking such limiting models, especially when women in marginal groups continue to prove their ability to mobilize more resources for survival. The ideal strategy, then, involves moving critically *to* and *from*, in a pendulum type of movement that can allow all—visionary feminists as defined by bell hooks, cultural workers, political activists and even mainstream thinkers—to articulate pluralistic concepts that will help us deconstruct the very limited spectrum of subjective identities offered within a linear patriarchal national cosmogony. Both, traditional visions of gender and new and alternative modes of self definition, should be included to analyze what *is*, to then move towards what we individually need and desire, and what the national collectivity must accommodate to coexist somewhat harmoniously.

The term masculinity then begs the question already posed and answered by scholars of all walks of disciplines: What is masculinity? Taking into account the conclusion of a good number of scholars, Rebecca Biron states that

masculinity is something individuals or entire cultures have. Having it somehow explains what one does. When masculinity is defined as a set of prescribed social roles or as a power structure, it always functions as an ambiguous standard against which to measure people and their actions...If males possess masculinity inherently, through having a penis or through overdetermined hormonal and psychological structures, then the fact that they must also earn it through prescribed behaviors and rituals or initiation poses a serious contradiction. Is it a birthright, or is it an elusive sign of status that men are obligated to obtain in order to bear meaning in the social order? (10-11)

Biron's affirmation is not intended to privilege one position over the other; that is, biological arguments versus manifestations of gender through performance. Her own analysis leans towards the psychoanalytical dimensions of gender studies that recognize masculinity as a process of negotiation between master and secondary signifiers (14). What is perceived in the realm of the "real" would be the outcome of said negotiations, that is its projections. It could be argued that masculinity is both: a self-appropriated

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birthright legitimized by the Symbolic Order, and the result of a social obligation to perform the part, lest the individual does not care to invoke self-deprecation. Having at stake inclusion or exclusion from the national community, individuals are under duress to prove their capacity to be valuable and reliable citizens. If we return to the premise of citizen = male subject, men find themselves under the gun, another very phallic symbol. This may imply that women must find their place in the nation in the spaces devoid of the masculine. However, a lot has happened in Latin America to subvert this axiom, thankfully, mostly through upper and middle class women participation in the public arena, but with an increasing presence of women from marginalized groups. In Colombia this recent increase in the number of women in public roles also applies to Afrodescendant women, more so than indigenous women. Nonetheless, the ideal national subject remains male, rich and white, or mestizo, if diversity is required.

Within the previous scenario, and as a site of oppression and a historically marked sign, black masculinity must remain a functional category of analysis, for countless male Afrodescendants still face marginalization and persecution due to their ethnic identity, and especially because their realities spill over to their partners, children and communities. In the midst of an urban regional and national paradigm that continues to privilege an axiom of whiteness and *blanqueamiento* that imbricates with class, the majority of Afrodescendants in Colombia occupy a subjugated space.⁷ Paul Gilroy discusses a similar equation in Great Britain and in the Western continuum in general, and affirms that "blacks enjoy a subordinate position in the dualistic system that reproduces the dominance of bonded whiteness, masculinity, and rationality" (*The Black Atlantic* 45-46). In the Northern coast of Colombia, inserting masculinity into the realm of blackness denounces the elements that continue to ensure the subordination of Afrodescendants to predominant notions of general inferiority. Dualistic gender categories can, then, be examined from a feminist perspective to breakdown their multiple meanings. This is particularly important, states Mary Hawkesworth, for women/people of color and lesbian feminists

who have suggested that the 'multiple jeopardy' characteristic of their lives raises serious questions about the validity of gender generalizations. If gender is always mediated by race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexual orientation, then an analytical framework that isolates gender or construes gender in terms of an 'additive model' is seriously flawed and may serve only to mask the numerous privileges of white, middle class feminists who have the luxury of experiencing only one mode of oppression. (147)

In the Northern coast of Colombia, consequently, and in the case of male Afrodescendants, it is important to inscribe the very particular aspects that determine their quality of life and the possibilities for self-empowerment available to them to attain a better quality of life.

Manuel Zapata Olivella's novel, *Chambacú, corral de negros* inscribes race onto the sign of *costeño*,⁸ an individual from the Northern coast, to deconstruct this category of self, and to question dominant discourses that erase issues of racial identity and national belonging. In the 1960s, Zapata Olivella's agenda becomes explicit through this social realist novel, published initially in 1963 and later again in 1967, the same year of publication of Gabriel García Márquez' *A Hundred years of Solitude*. Set on the late 50s, *Chambacú* inserts itself in the problematic history of the real space of Chambacú, a black urban settlement that existed since the XVIII century through the late 1980s outside the walls of the Old City of Cartagena.⁹ Published at the height of the magic-realist movement, *Chambacú* serves as a starting point in the process of examining the representation and articulation of a black male (national) subject. Much like the current moment in Colombian history when there is an immense preoccupation for projecting a

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new plurinational image, the 50s, the time of Zapata Olivella's novel, unveils the central government's intent to modernize, pacify and reinvent the national realm to project itself onto the international and the then nascent global stage.

The central story of *Chambacú* is the tale of Cotena's family, a matriarchal group, completely marginalized economically and with no possibilities of changing its destiny. From this private circle and space, the reader enters the public and collective, urban, regional and national spaces. The family's daily events and the lives of each of the novel's typological characters imbricate with community events and national, and even transnational crisis, as is the case with the Korean War. In this text, Zapata Olivella offers an array of black male characters articulated within the possibilities allowed amidst marginality, compartmentalization and discrimination.

Cotena's sons form an array of male models: Máximo is a self-taught intellectual and political leader who pushes the *chambaculeros* to resist eviction from their homes and total eradication from their settlement. José Raquel, whose sexual abilities are questionable, is a drug addict, a professional smuggler, and a police informant who gains status in the community by "possessing" a white European wife, Inge. He brings her to Chambacú as "booty," along with a new red motorcycle, when he returns from the Korean War, in which he participates voluntarily, while others fight their forced recruitment. "Kid Medialuna" and Crispulo, Cotena's younger sons, perform the two professions that occupy this study: boxing and cockfighting, respectively, both traditional jobs for many *chambaculeros* who dream of getting out of Chambacú. Zapata Olivella further establishes the limited scheme of possibilities for survival available to successive generations of black males in Chambacú through the character of Dominguito, Clotilde's son. Clotilde is Cotena's only daughter. She is a domestic servant and single mother who is "impregnated" by "el blanco Emiliani" (Zapata Olivella 14).

Fighting Cocks and (Black) Men

The scene of cockfighting emerges in the novel as a site in which a good number of elements converge to analyze representations of black masculinity. Cockfighting unveils black masculinity in this text as it is contained within an urban and national space that struggles to achieve coherence and stability. In a Foucaultian paradigm that renders the nuclear family, heterosexuality and patriarchy as necessary elements to attain a utopian homogeneous, pacified and modern consolidated national space, cockfighting offers infinite possibilities of scrutiny to examine masculine rituals and the construction of maleness. Among *chambaculeros*, cockfighting is viewed as an "inherited" occupation passed down from one generation of black males to the next, and is part of a rite that articulates male subjectivity in the novel.

For centuries,¹⁰ cockfighting has been a significant cultural and economic practice in communities around the world, in many of which still is, even illegally. In Latin America, cockfighting is widely practiced and, according to Alan Dundes, "in those areas of the world where cockfighting thrives, it is virtually the national (male) pastime" (vii).¹¹ Even though cockfighting has been thoroughly studied, Dundes' anthology *The Cockfight: A Casestudy* is perhaps one of the most complete of recently published works on the subject. The text includes excerpts of novels, essays on legal issues surrounding cockfighting, and anthropological studies. Geographically, Dundes' text covers work on cockfighting representative of places from different areas of the world, using studies from Brazil, Venezuela and Puerto Rico to illustrate this practice in Latin America. A more substantial comparative study of representations of cockfighting in Latin American literature is needed; a conversation that this study aims to begin. Aside from Manuel Zapata Olivella, Juan Rulfo and Gabriel García Márquez offer two of the clearest inclusions of cockfighting in literary texts and film.¹²

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Anthropologist Clifford Geertz's pioneer ethnographic study about cockfighting in Bali is still one of the most important sources of information on the economic and social function of cockfighting. His arguments are duly contested by Dundes, for the latter feels that Geertz focuses more on the social and economic dimensions of cockfighting, and leaves its *unconscious* charge largely unexplained. Indeed, Geertz's ethnographic study of cockfighting in Bali describes the complex betting system that rules the cockfighting ring, and how it maps the social and economic coordinates of rival cock owners and spectators (425-432). Geertz's observations are still pertinent and transcend the merely quantitative dimension he addresses. Julie Sheridan states that Geertz's analysis "provides a 'metasocial commentary,'" (497), a helpful consideration in relation to *Chambacú*. Indeed, Geertz's interpretations surrounding cockfighting emphasize key elements in Balinese culture, regarding Balinese people's views on animals and how the Balinese relate to them.

The relationship of Balinese people with animals is governed by a cosmogony that perceives animalism "as the direct inversion, aesthetically, morally, and metaphysically, of human status" (419). According to Geertz, babies are not permitted to crawl for fear of displaying animalistic behavior (420). Conversely, Geertz perceives a clear identification between Balinese men and fighting cocks. It is important to spell out how this identification occurs to later contrast Geertz's conclusions with the dynamics of the relationship between cockfighters and their animals in Zapata Olivella's novel. Among Balinese people, Geertz states, views on animalism derive from believing that the human body is "a set of separately animated parts" (417). This belief helps Balinese men not to identify themselves with fighting cocks for fear of adopting animalistic behavior. Consequently, Geertz determines that for the Balinese, "cocks are viewed as detachable, self-operating penises, ambulant genitals with a life of their own" (417). Granted, there is no access, states Geertz, to the unconscious material that could corroborate Balinese men's connection to their fighting cocks, an aspect of Geertz's work that Dundes finds lacking. However, their behavior evidences what could be interpreted as a narcissistic, sexual-like, pleasure experienced by Balinese men when

grooming them [the roosters] feeding them, discussing them, trying them out against one another, or just gazing at them with a mixture of rapt admiration and dreamy self absorption. Whenever you see a group of Balinese men squatting idly in the council shed...half or more of them will have a rooster in their hands, bouncing gently up and down to strengthen its legs, ruffling its feathers with abstract sensuality, pushing in and out against a neighbor's rooster to rouse its spirit. (418-419)

These phallicentric and highly homoerotic images reveal a performance of masculinity by proxy, meant to reassert male power publicly. Understandably, a great deal of pleasure could be obtained when "ruffling" cocks' feathers and watching cocks fight, for the cockfight itself, says Dundes, "a symbolic, public masturbatory, phallic duel" (275), defining "phallus as gallus" and aiming to correct Geertz's reluctance to name the act. Foremost, the cockfight is an instance of folklore, states Dundes, and its function is "to allow individuals to do or say things they could not otherwise do or say...It is in the final analysis precisely the *unconscious* content of folklore (as fantasy) which allows it to function as it does, that is, as a socially sanctioned outlet for the expression of taboo thoughts and acts" (241-242). As a source of gratification, the cockfight can be addictive, and "attending cockfights is a harder habit to kick than smoking or heavy drinking," says Marko Maunula (81).

Geertz's analysis of Balinese beliefs regarding animals, as well as his suggestions on the sexual symbolism contained in the cockfight are helpful when examining

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cockfighting in *Chambacú*. And so are Dundes' very direct conclusions on the function of the cockfight as a manifestation of the unconscious desire to masturbate. Some, if not all, of the same elements contained in the performance Geertz describes in Bali are at play in Zapata Olivella's novel, since, much as in Bali, in *Chambacú*, "it is only apparently cocks that are fighting. Actually, it is men" (417). And fighting cocks and being a cocker are more direct ways to retain a manhood under attack, in the case of *chambaculero* men, within a exclusionary national agenda that leaves them out of the national home.

Furthermore, they are men who physically need to eat and feed their families. *Chambacú* offers enough support to confirm that, for Crispulo, his cocks are a vehicle to earn much needed money. "En las tardes afortunadas, con la totalidad de sus gallos victoriosos, traía un poco de alegría a su casa. La madre, con desgano recibía el dinero que le entregaba" (Zapata Olivella 24), that could help feed the family.

But the elements involved in the relationship between men and cocks in *Chambacú* disclose a very familial connection, a dimension explored neither by Geertz nor by Dundes.¹³ The care, attention and dedication that Crispulo manifests towards his animals, outline a relationship that bypasses the economic aspect. Upon each return to Cotena's house, Crispulo cares for his cocks' wounds and keeps them alive: "Los dedos [de Crispulo] abrían sus párpados hinchados. Taponaba nuevamente sus heridas con yodo" (36). Crispulo also protects his cocks from the hungry rats and shares his own living space and food with them, "[g]allero y animal se entendían. Aceptaban las mutilaciones como un ritual ineludible" (115). An attractive angle of analysis can indeed simply define this passage as a narcissistic act that equates Crispulo's care for his cocks as a masturbatory act, according to Dundes, for his own mother sees cockfighting as a vice and his sister Clotilde fears it as a "maldita pasión" (107). Crispulo's behavior towards his cocks is in actuality as much a strategy to ensure their survival and as an act of self-preservation. Like his cocks, Crispulo is engaged in a daily struggle for economic and personal survival to remain alive. He is faced with constant persecution by the police, and must endure the dangers of living in unsanitary conditions, in which mosquitoes, rats and "hambre" (74) are constant companions. At the gallera, Crispulo pushes his cocks to win and hopes for prize money that can contribute to his family's subsistence.

Crispulo's battle for survival is ultimately lost, for his cocks are blind and too old to win their matches.¹⁴ Under constant threat of being attacked by rats in Crispulo's house, the cocks have to sleep and stay in a sack since "habían intentado las ratas comerse un gallo herido" (72), circumstances that diminish the chances of keeping them healthy and strong enough to fight. Destined to fail in the pit, Crispulo's best cocks, "el gallino" and "el camagüey," "se encalambra[ron]" (73), freeze up before their enemies' attacks. Their death means for Crispulo the loss of every hope to earn some money, since they were his best cocks. The cocks' failure in the pit, translates for Crispulo into a failure of his own with ample repercussions. Crispulo's risky occupation becomes a failed project of affirmation of his own masculinity, questioning any possibility of attaining the status of the ideal productive *chambaculero* masculinity. His brothers are in an equal and total economic rut: Máximo is imprisoned, and "Medialuna" is injured. Only José Raquel gains financial stability by joining the ranks of the same police that persecute them.

The inefficacy of Crispulo's fighting cocks symbolizes *chambaculero* masculinity as the locus of an inept subjectivity unable to produce money, safety, children—as is the case with José Raquel, or political leadership, in the case of Máximo.¹⁵ This general male ineptitude also questions the legitimacy of the status of *chambaculero* men as Colombian citizens, taking into account what Paul Gilroy defines as "the necessary relationship between nationality, citizenship, and masculinity" (*The Black Atlantic* 25).

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This equation establishes that "the integrity of the race [read as the integrity of the black *chambaculero* community] is primarily the integrity of its male heads of household and secondarily the integrity of the families over which they preside" (25). Constituted predominantly by matriarchal units and populated by men who are unable to be productive enough to provide for their family or their community and guarantee their safety, the novel reveals this failure as a direct result of the conditions in which *chambaculero* men are forced to exist because of their racial identity. Taken as a paradigm of black masculinity as it can be represented in the 1950s in the Northern coast, Zapata Olivella offers a bleak picture that highlights a subjugated existence with few hopes of subversion.

Máximo, Chambacú's organic intellectual, condemns the violent compartmentalization and marginalization inflicted upon *chambaculeros*, identifies these factors as a result of their African heritage, and situates them in the locus of class:

Solo que a los pobres nos es imposible mantenernos unidos. Es demasiado aspirar a tener una familia. Si apenas nos miran como gentes...somos unos descendientes de esclavos. Yo soy el primero en toda mi generación que ha aprendido a leer. Solo nos dejan el derecho de tener hijos como a las bestias, pero nada más. Ni casa, ni escuela, ni trabajo. Estamos condenados a dispersarnos, a no saber nunca donde moriremos. Esta tierra que pisamos no es nuestra. Mañana nos echarán de aquí aunque todos sepan que la hemos calzado con sudor y mangle. (97-98)

Chambaculero men, marginal subjects without juridical representation or recognition, are seen as a threat to the process of nation consolidation in view of their inassimilable status and bouts of resistance. Consequently they are punished for it. And, what better punishment than feminizing them?

The failure of Crispulo's cocks to respond to the attacks of their rivals mirrors Crispulo's own powerlessness before the challenges he faces daily, and that he struggles not to vow to. Crispulo's nephew, Dominguito, who becomes Crispulo's apprentice in this ritual of manhood, cannot avoid a brush with death, when he is wounded by his cock's poisoned spur, and faces the possible loss of one of his legs or death. Dominguito's experience also projects the inherent fragility of the rituals that are supposed to guarantee induction into a continuum of masculinity.

Boxing: The "real" fight for survival

The function of cockfighting in the novel and its interpretive potential regarding representations of masculinity remains highly symbolic, one because linguistic innuendos do most of the work, particularly in English, and two because trained roosters do the fighting. Boxing, on the other hand, is a form of "real fighting" that involves men and engages their bodies. For black boxers, the scene of boxing lends itself to examine the performance of masculinity marked by ethnicity. Much like cockfighting, in its most basic terms, pugilism is projected in the novel as a means to earn money to acquire food. As an occupation central to the economic base of the novel's space,¹⁶ boxing is further underlined as a black man's profession. As a spectacle, boxing puts on display the fighters' marginality, the hunger they suffer, their fighting ability and ultimate impotence when faced with their failure to change their circumstances. The insuperable conditions that *chambaculero* boxers face stand in stark contrast against the stereotypical physical superiority assigned to the bodies of black boxers. In due course, the novel utilizes boxing as a way to contest the rationale for war, and questions the central government's decision to send a battalion, composed mainly of black men from Chambacú, to the Korean War.¹⁷

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The inclusion of boxing by Zapata Olivella in *Chambacú* is full of intent. Boxing, more so than cockfighting, has been a popular sport among Cartagena's black poor males for decades. Pambelé,¹⁸ a boxer from Palenque de San Basilio, a community of descendants of *cimarrones* located near Cartagena, placed Palenque's and Cartagena's name on the international boxing map. However, allusions to boxing do not abound in *costeño* literature. David Sánchez Juliao's play *El flechas* is perhaps the best testimony of the role of boxing in the region and merits further analysis, particularly because it addresses the ideology of *machismo* and prevalent notions of masculinity in the Northern coast of Colombia. The author's choice of a *mestizo* protagonist distances the text from the issue of ethnicity. The abundance of writing both scholarly and in specialized sports venues in North America and Europe about boxing stands in sharp contrast against the scarcity of studies and representations of the sport in Latin America, a region that has offered so many famous boxers.¹⁹ My study aims to begin a more substantial discussion on boxing and its representations in Latin American literature and culture.

Manuel Zapata Olivella's inclusion of boxing in *Chambacú* opens the door to examine the role of the sport in the *chambaculeros'* fight for survival as well as the dynamics of gender performance it proposes in the space of the novel and beyond. In spite of the high risks it carries, boxing, as an occupation, is a source of subsistence for *chambaculero* men, who harbor aspirations of getting out of Chambacú, "tierra de muerte" (23). In reality, the potential income that boxing may provide the pugilists is but a dream, since "[I]o que pagan los promotores es tan poco que ni siquiera alcanza para curarse las heridas" (25). The boxers' physical strength is recognized in the novel, above all, and is established as a force derived from the need of *chambaculeros* to defend themselves. During police evictions, boxers who aspire to national and international titles, "aprend[en] a utilizar sus puños. El movimiento de cabeza, de piernas y brazos. El cuerpo ágil para esquivar los golpes y los yataganes" (24). Boxing is also a way for *chambaculero* men to reclaim their manhood by publicly displaying their strength, subverting in this manner the powerlessness imposed on them. The names of boxers in the novel, "Medialuna," "Kid Centeno," "Firpito Bogotano," "Cartagenita Kid," "El Zurdo," and "Charolito," evoke actual legends in *costeño* boxing historiography. Their bodies are offered as a sign of endurance, human suffering and pleasure, all elements that intersect at a very particular juncture and dynamic in the text.

Zapata Olivella's novel underlines a dimension of boxing mentioned in one of the most important studies on the sport, Carol Joyce Oates' *On Boxing*: hunger and lack. Oates' definition of boxing recognizes the sport as "work" to ensure the economic survival of underprivileged boxers, in order to fulfill their basic needs. But Oates also sees boxing as a metaphor for the resentment and alienation felt by boxers who exist at the margins of society. For Oates, "boxers as a class are angry...For the most part, they constitute the disenfranchised of our affluent [US] society, they are the sons of impoverished ghetto neighborhoods in which anger, if not fury, is appropriate" (63). As members of the underclass, says Oates, most prominent boxers in the US are black, Hispanic or Mexican—separating the two latter categories—(66). Furthermore, Oates equates the history of the black man in North America with the history of boxing/fighting, and argues that the triumph of black men in the boxing ring, in early 20th century, sparked fears of public humiliation of white men (97).²⁰ It can be said then that boxers fight for both money and historical revenge, both factors cleared represented in Chambacú. *Chambaculero* men are "[n]egros" (42), hungry, and full of rage: "En el ring se despeaban. Murallas, negros. El "Zurdo" combatía a nombre de un pasado" (40). And in the name of a present, the intent on ensuring their disappearance

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from the national landscape becomes reason why approximately five hundred *chambaculero* men were sent to the Korean War forcefully.²¹

Julie Sheridan digs deeper into Oates arguments and states that the latter sees boxing as a sport that has a "unique capacity to evoke collective disempowerment even as it celebrates the physical prowess of individual men" (495). While Oates deals with the individual and collective dimension of boxing, Sheridan feels that Oates addresses the racial dimension of pugilism in scant terms (496). I disagree somewhat with Sheridan's argument, but do take note of the fact the Oates choice not to focus on race more intently is odd, given the testimony of Mohammed Ali's legacy,²² and the lives of the many other black fighters Oates discusses in her essay: Larry Holmes, Joe Louis, Sonny Liston, Harry Wils "The Black Menace," among others.

In the novel, there is no question as to the determinacy that exists between being hungry, poor and black, factors that cannot be accurately ranked nor extricated from each other. Hunger, and not only the desire for fame and money, overwhelms *chambaculero* boxers, who ultimately are vanquished by the clamor of their empty stomachs, more so than by the punches received from their rivals: "El hambre. La tempestad del estómago como si realmente se hubiese indigestado con la pesca ilusoria" (27). The fighters imagine aromas and meals impossible to attain while *chambaculero* men are on the run or in jail. Nourished by the mussels harvested from the canal contaminated with feces, boxers enter the blood stained canvas, with the hope of making a name for themselves and earning some money to eat. Marked by the stereotype of physical might assigned to black men, "Medialuna's " strength is enough to overpower his hunger and reaffirm the black man's legendary force. "La pujanza siempre fue minada por el hambre. Ahora él lo sentía. No bastaba con ser negro. Las piernas bailaban. El cansancio. El calambre" (40). For the pugilists, triumph, either economic or physical, is elusive. The impotence of *chambaculero* boxers before their inability to earn enough money to feed themselves and their families is a quick reminder of the impossibility to overcome their circumstances. At the same time, however, any public visibility attained by the fighters translates into visibility for their community and for their ethnic difference, always maintaining clear in their minds, as "Medialuna" does, that "[s]i ganaba, aplausos y palabritas de satisfacción. Pero ninguno iría hasta el camerino si desfallecía" (42). Triumph for these black boxers would mean, says Victoria A. Elmwood when discussing masculinity and nationality in the *Rocky* films, "being able to envision himself [the boxer] as distinct from the local, marginally employed men" (55), a requirement of "the figurative implications of th[e] match up for the status of citizenship and national membership" (55). And this is a fight that *chambaculero* boxers lose by a knockout.

Hidden amidst multiple layers of meaning surrounding the scene of boxing in Zapata Olivella's novel, the sport can also be seen, according to Frank Ardolino, as a source of renewal and "as a symbol of liberation" (17). Ardolino's assessment of boxing is based on the rise of boxing in Europe and the US in early XX century and fits Chambacú's reality to a limited extent, but it is helpful, in so far as his analysis is contained within conditions derived by war. As a spectacle closely related to the scene of a battle, boxing comprises aggression, fight—in this case fraternal—, attack, blood and, many times, even death. Elmwood offers another possible scenario that can be applied to the cultural milieu of Zapata Olivella's novel, since she addresses the effects of the Vietnam War. Elmwood states that *Rocky* combines a "male masochism that both reinvigorates the American man's virility and mitigates the perceived compromise of American manhood resulting from the then-recent military withdrawal from Vietnam" (50). War times, we all know, create a delicate social balance that needs to be maintained. To preserve a status quo in peril, David Bathrick assesses, when referring to the Weimar Period in

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Germany in early 20th century, that boxing can offer a type of "athletic renewal, and with the help of sport, ...the rejuvenation of culture as a whole" (15), promoting as well a culture of physicality in which the boxer's naked body is a sign of liberation and "boxing is an attitude" (18).

In the universe of Zapata Olivella's novel, the Korean War heightens the persecution of *chambaculero* men and the possibility of being forcefully drafted raises the consciousness of *chambaculeros*. "Medialuna" exhibits a lucid attitude towards boxing that establishes an unambiguous distinction between what it means for him to participate in the Korean War and what it means to box:

Eso de que lo embarquen a uno para llevarlo a otras tierras a matar gente sin tener ganas de pelear. ¿A son de qué? Otra cosa es el boxeo. Se lucha por afición, por ganar un título... Alegra la victoria ante un público que aplaude y entusiasma. Hay veces en que se mata, pero no es la intención. (24-25)

For "Medialuna," the pain and the potential death one can face on the platform are invested with meaning and purpose, and can be elements of self-definition and athletic capability. The risks taken while boxing are also worthwhile, for the act of boxing gratifies the desire of the boxer's community for recognition and validation. Even while unattainable, boxers not only fight to motivate personal aspirations, but also to achieve for their community and to represent their collectivity. The spectators' screams, "—¡Chambacú!—Arriba Chambacú! (40), urge the pugilists to fight "por el título nacional" (42), lend visibility to their place of origin.

Alternatively, war is a vehicle to rid Chambacú of its men and the threat they represent to ongoing plans for urban development in Cartagena. A "menless" Chambacú is portrayed as a vulnerable and conquerable space, easier to eradicate, as it was: "Chambacú sin sus hombres" (Zapata Olivella 23). And, as a manless-existing place, Chambacú's women have as their only alternative "venderse" (28), or become "prostitutes" as do the Rudesindas sisters. Circumscribed to the "corral"—the pig's pen—where they are forced to coexist with rats, dogs and other animals amidst sewer water and the residues of the city, *chambaculeros* become fully aware of the extent of their marginality and vulnerability. In Crispulo's words: "Libertad. Patria. Democracia. Son [v]ainas que nunca hemos conocido...Para mí no hay sino Chambacú. Ni siquiera Cartagena" (37).

The dramatic portrayal of their existence in the text conveys how *chambaculero* boxers' feat in the ring "mirrors life" (Max Schmeling cited in Ardolino 19). Referring to various contemporary boxing figures, Ardolino emphasizes commonly held views about the sport in postwar Europe. The artist Fritz Kortner commented to Max Schmeling, a prominent boxer of the 1920s, says Ardolino, that boxing "is not just theatre... it is really life and death. Your blood is not the product of make-up...boxing is not a sport! It is the fight for life, condensed into a dozen rounds" (19). As such, boxing functions in the novel as a trope for the "real" conditions of contemporary life, ravaged by the effects of a dual war: the Korean War and the war waged upon Chambacú and its inhabitants. Consequently, alienation, marginality, poverty and persecution are added to the tensions created by the push for Modernity and the Colombian government's decision to participate in the Korean War.²³

Zapata Olivella's text ascertains an unmistakable difference between fighting in the ring and fighting in the battlefield. Boxers patch up and go on after fighting: "Después del combate nos abrazamos y bajamos del ring sin rencores" (Zapata Olivella 25). "Medialuna" is convinced that soldiers are not able to do the same upon exiting the battlefield, and asks: "¿Pero tú crees que se puede regresar de la guerra sin remordimiento de conciencia? Si es que el muerto es otro, se debe sentir sus pasos, sus

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gritos, su mueca en el momento de enterrarle la bayoneta en la barriga" (25). "Medialuna" plainly articulates the conditions that would lead him to fight outside the ring in the following:

Ese papel no lo haría yo, aunque me lo mandaran los superiores. Otra cosa sería que vinieran los soldados extranjeros a Chambacú a pisotear nuestras mujeres, a quemar nuestras casas y a querer convertirnos en esclavos. ¡Ah! Entonces sí pelearía con gusto. Mataría gente. Estaría defendiendo mi casa, mi familia. (25)

Sound ethics envelop "Medialuna's" words. For him, and for his fellow fighters, boxing operates within comprehensible boundaries of behavior, not at all figurative.

From another angle, boxing is defined in the novel as a way to challenge high (modern) culture, book-learned white collar skills inaccessible to *chambaculeros*,²⁴ and defiantly puts on display black men and their bodies. As indicated by Frank Andolino, these are not Greek-like, statuesque athletic bodies, similar to those of many European and North American boxers. On the contrary, they are starved, yet powerful, male bodies marked by ethnic difference and stereotypically considered physically dangerous. "The indelible marks of race" (Steinberg cited in Sheridan 499) defines *chambaculero* boxers. They become powerful, "Se hicieron poderosos" (24), while fighting the police; their strength becomes their demise, when the military apprehends the boxers to send them off to Korea. Captain Quirós commands his soldiers to capture the pugilists: "Primero los boxeadores. Son gente que saben de pelea" (42). Although "fit" enough to fight for the nation's interest in building a strong alliance with the United States, *chambaculero* boxers do not fulfill the necessary requirements to be part of the "body" of the nation.

In conclusion, the power embodied in the figure of the black *chambaculero* boxer in Manuel Zapata Olivella's fictional work does not translate into a powerful subject that can overturn and transcend his disadvantaged societal circumstance. "While boxing projects a culturally idealized image of powerful male embodiment, it has been argued that power within the public sphere is controlled primarily by the disembodied, 'universal' subject (which is implicitly white and male)" (Sheridan 503). In other words, says Sheridan, "bodily superiority is offset by social and ethnic/racial inferiority" (504). Hindered by hunger, malnutrition and victims of police brutality, *chambaculero* men experience the impossibility of self-definition in the flesh and painfully succumb to their fate. "Medialuna" ends his days "[t]rastornado de la cabeza" (106) as a result of a knockout caused by lack of strength from hunger. *Chambaculero* boxers are then physically knocked out of their fight for citizenship.

Ultimately, neither boxers nor cockers are able to attain a space within the local and national spheres, situating the *chambaculeros* as subjects beyond the prospect of inserting themselves as part of the national continuum. The novel suggests that the national interest is to erase Chambacú from the cartographic landscape of Cartagena in order to allow the national consolidation process of gentrification to evolve. Such a process implies the feminization of Chambacú: to rid this political geography of its men, by forcefully recruiting and sending them off to the Korean War, an almost certain death, by incarcerating and torturing them, and by assassinating them. And no strategy, "real" or symbolic, can overpower the mechanisms and institutions at work in the novel to keep black men in their place. The result of such a nationalistic effort is to eradicate from community the masculinist tropes (boxers and "cock"-fighters) engendering a space inhabited primarily by females. Hence, this space is reconfigured into a representation of the socially engineered symbolic representation of the female: weak, vulnerable, and pillageable. This is a powerful assertion made by a novel set in the Cartagena of the 1950s and written by an Afrodescendant author in the 1960s, when

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Latin American authors as a whole were faced with the pressures of a symbolic market that insisted on equating modern literary experimentation with a push for the abstract and universal disguised within a mystified local realm. Yet, *Chambacú, corral de negros* is even more significant now when new efforts to recognize the African and indigenous roots of the Colombian nation abound.

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NOTES

¹A portion of this paper was presented at the VI International and Interdisciplinary Conference of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association ALARA 2006 August 8-12, Veracruz, Mexico. The section on cockfighting is part of Chapter I of my doctoral dissertation "Violencia, raza, mito e historia en la literatura del Caribe colombiano."

²See Homi K. Bhabha's *Nation and Narration*, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness and Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*; Alfonso Múnera's *El fracaso de la nación* and *Fronteras imaginadas*.

³In this essay, I deploy the term *race* to refer to ethnic difference. While I acknowledge the constructivist nature of the term as it has been historically used by the hegemonic culture throughout the Americas to *other* people of African heritage, I believe it is important to utilize it when speaking of discrimination to convey the powerful effect of racist and separatist ideologies. For current arguments on ethnicity and race in Colombia see Antonio Tillis' *Manuel Zapata Olivella and The Darkening of Latin American Literature*; Ligia Aldana's "Policing Culture: The Champeta Movement Under the New Colombian Constitution" and "Memorias/ritmos diaspóricos: La champeta desde donde sea;" Elisabeth Cunin's "El Caribe visto desde el interior del país: estereotipos raciales y sexuales;" Joe Streicker's "Policing boundaries: race, class, and gender in Cartagena, Colombia;" John W. Green's "Left Liberalism and Race in the Evolution of Colombian Popular National Identity;" Peter Wade's "Understanding 'Africa' and 'blackness' in Colombia: music and the politics of culture," "Working Culture: Making Cultural Identities in Cali, Colombia," "Music, blackness and national identity: three moments in Colombian history."

⁴See Kiran Asher's "text in context: Afro-Colombian Women's Activism in the Pacific Lowlands of Colombia for an overview of various grassroots women organizations in the Pacific coast.

⁵See Peter Wade's "Understanding 'Africa' and 'blackness' in Colombia: Music and the Politics of Culture," "Working Culture: Making Cultural Identities in Cali, Colombia," and "Music, Blackness and National Identity: Three Moments in Colombian History;" Lisa Waxer's "Salsa, Champeta, and Rap: Black Sounds and Black Identities in Afro Colombia;" Claudia Mosquera and Marion Provansal's "Construcción de la identidad caribeña popular en Cartagena de Indias, a través de la música y el baile de champeta," and Elisabeth Cunin's "El Caribe visto desde el interior del país: estereotipos raciales y sexuales."

⁶All quotes and references correspond to Zapata Olivella's *Chambacú, corral de negros*. Spanish edition published by Bolsilibros Bedout in 1967. For an excellent translation of this novel see Jonathan Tittler's *Chambacú, Black Slum*.

⁷When using the term "subjugated," I refer to the lack of equal access to social, economic and political rights and the status of Afrodescendants as second-rate citizens. In no way I am establishing acceptance and resignation to this status on their part which would adhere to the concept of the subaltern that circulates in postcolonial studies, for Afrodescendants have always "put up a fight" against oppression and marginality. I do however emphasize the persistent marginalization imposed upon Afrodescendants in Colombia.

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⁸See Antonio Tillis' *Manuel Zapata Olivella and the Darkening of Latin American Literature* for an incisive analysis of Zapata Olivella's insertion of race onto the Latin American literary production. Numerous contributions by Laurence Prescott and Marvin Lewis, pioneers in the field of Afro Latin American research and writing, have helped shape current focus on race and identity in Latin America.

⁹Research conducted in the summer of 2000 in the Archivo de Cartagena de Indias housed at Palacio de la Inquisición, Cartagena, Colombia.

¹⁰Alan Dundes' remarkable anthology *The Cockfight: A Casebook* gathers a substantial number of essays, including Clifford Geertz pioneering work on cockfighting, and begins with a piece by St. Augustine that discusses fourth century barnyard cockfights. In his anthology, Dundes offers a most complete list of works on cockfighting.

¹¹My grandfather, Pedro Hernández Vergara, was a cockfighter, though he did not fight nor train his own cocks. At the tender age of 10, access to the cockfighting ring in the outskirts of my native El Carmen de Bolívar, a dangerous and isolated area, meant to me entrance into a forbidden male world that I could not quite comprehend. I was given my own cock then, which must have been very good, because it was stolen shortly after his first fight from my grandparents' backyard, right outside my bedroom window. I am only now deconstructing the meanings contained in this experience and, although I do not have the guts anymore to witness a cockfight, a boxing match or a bullfight, as I was able to do with my grandfather in my teen years, I am still fascinated by the system of beliefs that sustain these practices, as well as their economic dimension.

¹²In continental US, Zora Neale Hurston's account of her brief visit to the cockfighting ring in North Florida in her ethnographic studies inserts this practice in the cultural African American landscape alive and well in the twentieth century. Zora Neale Hurston also offers a rare insight into the presence of women in the space of cockfighting, but offers no further analysis of it.

¹³Treatment of cockfighting has been acknowledged in Gabriel García Márquez' *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* and Juan Rulfo's short story "El gallo de oro." Both texts underscore the significance of cockfighting as a means for economic survival while they also highlight the personal attachment owners exhibit towards their cocks, as if they were family members. It is at this juncture where more work is needed to compare the very familial connection portrayed in Rulfo's, García Márquez' and Zapata Olivella's texts, to name the ones with which I am better acquainted. Rulfo's text seems to raise more questions surrounding Dionisio's belief that his cock possesses a particular ability to give him access to power and love.

¹⁴Máximo's reaction to Dominguito's accident denounces his own contradictions when he insists on having him taken to a hospital. Cotena, Dominguito's grandmother, decides to take him to the community's *curandero*, who is able to read the signs of a condition that is a product of a particular cultural and economic practice, in spite of the self-legitimization of hegemonic knowledge. Dominguito survives and his leg is saved, an instance in the novel that attests to the tensions created by a desired modern condition. Dominguito's experience also projects the inherent fragility of the rituals that are supposed to guarantee induction into a continuum of masculinity. Forthcoming work of mine will examine this very complex and significant dynamics more closely.

¹⁵Máximo's continuous attempts to organize the community against plans by the local police and political class to expel them from their homes are foiled once he is incarcerated, tortured and ultimately shot during a demonstration. Inge, José Raquel's wife, a white European woman and self-proclaimed *chambaculera*, takes up Máximo's role and is more effectively able to negotiate with the local authorities who refrain from causing her any harm. This dimension of the novel opens countless possibilities of interpretation, not fully explored in this analysis that merits attention.

¹⁶MZO's inclusion of boxing, I believe, inscribes the historical importance of this sport in Chambacú and in El Palenque de San Basilio, the birth place of Pabelé, among others. In his testimonio, *Chambacú, a la tiña, puño y patá*, the *chambaculero* writer, Juan Gutiérrez Magallanes, confirms the relevance of boxing in Chambacú and mentions some of the area's best known pugilists: Dinamita Pum, Pelúo Arnedo, and Juana Maza's *giant* sons, el Milagro y Andresito. Gutiérrez Magallanes states that these local athletes fought Paye Atómico, Kid Bogotá, and many others, at the Espíritu Santo Coliseum and the Theatre Circus (68-69).

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¹⁷The UN Decree dated June 27, 1950 and drafted by the UN's Security Council: 27 de junio de 1950 states: "The Security Council, HAVING DETERMINED that the armed attack upon the Republic of Korea by forces from North Korea constitutes a breach of the peace, HAVING CALLED FOR an immediate cessation of hostilities, and HAVING CALLED UPON the authorities of North Korea to withdraw forthwith their armed forces to the 38th parallel, and HAVING NOTED from the report of the United Nations Commission for Korea that the authorities in North Korea have neither ceased hostilities nor withdrawn their armed forces to the 38th parallel and that urgent military measures are required to restore international peace and security, and HAVING NOTED the appeal from the Republic of Korea to the United Nations for immediate and effective steps to secure peace and security, RECOMMENDS that the Members of the United Nations furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security in the area" (source). As a member of the UN and due to the prominent role of the United States in the organization, Colombia sees an opportunity to fall in good terms with the US: "[e]ra posible y benéfico buscar un acercamiento con los Estados Unidos, cuya política tanto se había criticado. La apertura y las ventajas al capital foráneo eran un gaje, la participación en una guerra lejana la mejor prueba de buena voluntad" (Tirado Mejía 90-91).

¹⁸Born in Palenque de San Basilio, Antonio Cervantes Reyes in 1945, Kid Pambelé, was the first Colombian boxer to win a world title in the light welterweight. He still lives on a farm near Palenque, continuing his fight against drug addiction and alcoholism, the legacy of triumph and excess money. He is an icon adored by Colombians and immortalized in song, "Pambe" by Carlos Vives, and in the popular lore.

¹⁹Other prominent Latin American fighters include Oscar De La Hoya.

²⁰Oates makes reference to the outcome of Jack Johnson's triumph over Jim Jeffries "White Hope" when race riots and lynchings followed.

²¹See Alberto Ruiz Novoa's *El Batallón Colombia en Korea, 1951-1954*.

²²Muhammad Ali's autobiography *The Greatest: My Own Story* written with Richard Durham was published in 1976 and could have helped Oates explore in more detail the challenges experienced by one of the most famous pugilists in the world as a direct result of his ethnicity. The controversy that began with Ali's position in regards to the Vietnam War and his refusal to go to war could have lent Oates substantial material for the parallel she offers in her essay between war and boxing. A reason for the lack of extensive discussion on Ali's boxing career maybe because "his background was not one of desperate poverty" (86), a factor, Oates indicates, that probably determined his "early boundless confidence" (86). It is apparent that Oates is interested in examining the lives of those pugilists for whom boxing mean change, power, and money.

²³Julie Sheridan's and Frank Ardolino's articles allude to the part war plays in the scene of boxing. Interestingly enough, Sheridan's analysis of Carol Joyce Oates' novel *What I Lived For* highlights the experience of the protagonist, boxer, and Union City native Tim Corcoran "Corky" in the Korean War. In his examination of the life of German boxer Max Schmeling and the geopolitical dynamics of postwar Europe and the US in early twentieth century, Frank Ardolino appraises how sports, and boxing in particular, were seen as instrumental in "the rejuvenation of culture as a whole" (15). *Chambacú* delineates the connection between pugilism and war more directly. It would be worthwhile to pursue this correlation further, across geographical borders, as Ardolino does, to emphasize its relevance in the contemporary global stage.

²⁴Frank Ardolino points to Bertold Brecht's consideration "of boxing and mass culture as powerful metaphorical antidotes to the effect modernism" (20) was inflicting upon artists of the time.

Undressing *Cecilia Valdés* from Exile: Reinaldo Arenas's *La Loma del Ángel*
By Patricia Catoira

In 1987, Cuban exile Reinaldo Arenas (1943–1990) wrote *La Loma del Ángel*, the latest of several revisitations of Cuba's grand narrative, Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1882).¹ In *La Loma del Ángel*, clothing becomes a trope in which Arenas reworks the identities of Villaverde's characters through hyperbole, parody, and inversion, as he imposes a carnivalesque atmosphere. Many critics have seen the carnival (the festival) and the idea of the carnivalesque (transgressive folkloric forms) as intrinsic to the Caribbean. The subversiveness of the carnival(esque) lies in its celebration of the destruction of the old and the temporary inversion of power relations. Linguistic and cultural distortions serve to parody, undermine, and contest the system. The representation of the grotesque, the humorous, the sexual, and the violent allow Caribbean writers like Arenas to articulate discourses of resistance. His carnivalization of *Cecilia Valdés* in *La Loma del Ángel* reinscribes a new context of oppression in revolutionary Cuba.

Both Mikhail Bakhtin and Antonio Benítez-Rojo's theories on parody and the carnivalesque offer a useful theoretical framework to analyze Arenas's parodic project in this short novel. The Russian critic proposed parody as means to debunk false social constructions and generate new ones: "It is necessary to destroy and rebuild the entire false picture of the world, to sunder the false hierarchical links between objects and ideas, to abolish the divisive ideational strata. It is necessary to liberate all these objects and permit them to enter in to the free unions that are organic to them, no matter how monstrous these unions might seem from the point of view of ordinary, traditional associations" (169). The human body becomes the microcosm of the state of the world in the Bakhtinian analysis. Death is not the end but the beginning of a new life (173). Life and history do not move forward but cyclically. It is in this "folkloric time" that those organic matrices can occur because they escape the imposition of time and social hierarchies (209-10).

Similarly, Benítez-Rojo views the history of the Caribbean as chaotic, turbulent, and defying teleological frameworks. What characterizes the region according to him is its productive and cyclical nature. The most recurrent element, the Cuban critic contends, is the carnival, which becomes a gauge of the sociocultural tensions of the time ("Caribbean" 203). The celebration is neither positive nor negative, but paradoxical and, above all, extremely productive culturally: "through it the groups in power channel the violence of the subjugated groups in order to maintain yesterday's order, while the latter channel the former's violence so that it will not recur tomorrow" ("Caribbean" 211). Both theorists see the transformation of language and cultural representation—as expressed in parody—as regenerative and as means to inscribe and subvert dominant discourses.

Benítez-Rojo argues that postmodernism shares the same tenets that characterize the Caribbean and, consequently, can also provide a useful framework for analyzing the region ("Caribbean" 204). Emerging in the last decades of the twentieth century, the postmodern movement has reacted against the totalizing and universalizing discourses and frameworks of Western "master narratives." Postmodern authors have sought to challenge the ideology and form of canonical works by revisiting them and offering alternative ways of addressing them. Critics of postmodernism such as Fredric Jameson have charged that postmodern literary strategies often hinder a work's accessibility to readers. This esoteric tendency can dampen the effectiveness of parody. It could be argued that most readers miss Arenas's desired effect in *La Loma de Ángel*. The novel's parodic intertextuality with *Cecilia Valdés* could be easily overlooked

because the original text is relatively unknown outside Cuba and especially for the American readership.² Critics also complain that postmodernist works lack political consciousness. Linda Hutcheon, a prominent theorist of postmodernism, acknowledges the obstacles to establishing a postmodern dialogue with a wider audience, but she sees the inaccessibility of postmodern texts as part of the politics of postmodern representation. For her, the practices of inscribing and undermining universalist discourses carries paramount political importance in contemporary cultural life. Hutcheon points out that postmodernism eludes offering solutions or ideological frameworks to its art: the process of questioning and revisiting itself suffices as a political statement. It does not strive for truth but addresses different truths and questions the conditions under which they emerge. Raymond L. Williams agrees with Hutcheon and effectively argues that politics and contestation have been part of the entire tradition of the Latin American novel (17). He contends that even the authors of the well-known Latin American *boom* never followed completely the elitist and apolitical modernist project of the First World in its search for order, "but insisted on bringing to bear their own political agenda and their interest in historical truth" (7). Williams shares with Hutcheon a positive view of postmodernist techniques such as paradox, contradiction, fragmentation, self-reflection, metafiction, multiperspectivism, and parody. He lauds the use of these techniques in Latin American texts for bringing attention to the processes by which *truths*, not one truth, are created (12-13).

The rewriting of history and canonical texts could also be considered another recurrent trope in the Caribbean, as some have noted (Paravisini-Gebert 215). This endeavor has been taken up to contest Eurocentric or totalizing perspectives. Arenas's *La Loma del Ángel* revisits as well as challenges the discourse of Villaverde's original text. The novel establishes a dialogue with Villaverde's nineteenth century and Arenas's present. By parodying one of Cuba's canonical works, Arenas inscribes the colonial system while challenging its hierarchical and racial conventions. He also challenges the objectivism of the realist movement to which Villaverde ascribed and through which the nineteenth-century writer intended to offer an accurate, detailed account of society. At the same time, the 1987 text—especially through the postmodern intrusions of the author in the action—inscribes another repressive system of Cuban history: Castro's persecution of homosexuals and dissidents.

The original novel is set in the 1810s and 1820s against the backdrop of slavery. The plot centers on the ill-fated love affair between Cecilia, a young mulatto girl who could pass as white, and Leonardo, a rich white young man. Leonardo is the son of a slaveholding landowner, Don Cándido, who also turns out to be the girl's illegitimate father. Arenas skirts the antislavery issue of the original novel and instead revives peripheral scenes and characters, which he uses to parody and invert the realist precision of Villaverde's accounts. Arenas opens up *Cecilia Valdés* to a world of excess, hyperbole, and absurdity where marginal beings can find a place in society. Arenas carnivalizes his characters through their clothing and through overt displays of forbidden sexualities. The public performance of wearing *monstrous*—in the Bakhtinian sense—clothes and displaying sexual behavior reproduces the subversive rituals of the Caribbean carnival.

Villaverde provides ample descriptions of his characters' clothes and dedicates a great deal of attention to fashion styles, their country of origin, and social significance. Following a realist aesthetic, Villaverde presents clothes and their outward performance as denoting the inner nature of the person. Villaverde presents mulattoes and whites consuming the same fashions, the same vision of Cubanness (in his view a hybrid of African and European cultures).³ Sharing and performing this sartorial culture in public stood as a metaphor of a potential Cuban nation. Blacks were left out of Villaverde's national project. Anne McClintock's view of nationalism as a politics of spectacle

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departs from Benedict Anderson's argument that nationalism emerged from the daily consumption of print media and a commonly experienced sense of simultaneity. These positions can, nevertheless, complement each other. Texts are one space among many where the spectacle of the nation is reenacted. Writers describe the performance of rituals in their pages and readers consume them as if they were witnessing the event in person. As Benitez-Rojo proposes, "literature is one of the most exhibitionistic expressions in the world" (*The Repeating Island* 22–23).

For the most part, *Cecilia Valdés's* white characters dress well and adopt fashions best suiting their station in society. Their costumes reflect the characters' level of affluence and sense of style. In *La Loma del Ángel*, whites' attire becomes an object of mockery. After all, laughter, Bakhtin contends, is one of the most efficient ways to destroy false, unnatural connections in society (237). The narrator makes fun of social positions, professions, and moral qualities that Villaverde valued so highly in his novel. In *La Loma del Ángel*, humor desacralizes and trivializes Villaverde's careful characterization of the Countess of Merlin (María de las Mercedes de Santa Cruz y Montalvo), a well-known Cuban writer who resided in Paris:

Perhaps because the skirt the countess was wearing was of such gigantic proportions, no one rode in the coach with her. In addition to her voluminous skirt, which would often cover both the driver and the horse when the wind lifted it, the distinguished lady wore shining boots of gold-studded felt, a tailored jacket whose sleeves were immensely wide at the wrist, as well as long, violet, blue, and red ribbons that hung from her collar and spread in all directions. The glitter and color of several necklaces emphasized the whiteness of her still-firm breasts, which were practically bare because of the huge shawl the clever countess had gracefully let slip. She wore a colossal hat with an extremely high crown and an even more disproportionately wide brim. But if her figure, her costume, and her jewels were impressive, even more fascinating was her huge mane of black hair that cascaded out of her hat over her shoulders and covered the rear of the carriage. At the center of this extraordinary hair there glittered and extraordinary comb set with diamonds.

Finally, on her lap, bowing thousands of times, there was a young female monkey from southern Madagascar, dressed in French costume, a silver bell around its neck, and a gold chain the countess held in her finely gloved hand as she gracefully waved her monumental peacock-feather fan. And on they went, the countess always smiling but without looking at anyone, and the elegant monkey greeting everyone. (51)

Having the countess and the monkey dressed and behaving alike inundates this scene with a carnivalesque and grotesque atmosphere. In addition, the excess in the countess's dress mocks her prestigious standing and, more importantly, Arenas uses the gigantic costume as a metaphor for her distance from the people around her. The countess avoids eye contact with the crowd, even as she waves at them, while her outfit provides a physical obstacle preventing any human contact.

Arenas finds the lack of desire for human contact closely related to incest. The author affirms in his prologue that incestual desire among *Cecilia Valdés's* characters constitutes the most attractive element of the original novel and the one he is particularly drawn to explore in his rewriting:

What makes this text enigmatic and immortal is that when Villaverde presents us with a series of incestuous entanglements—consummated or suggested—he is really showing us a unique vision of the eternal human tragedy—man's solitude his incommunication, his intransferable disquiet, his quest for an ideal lover who, because he or she is ideal, can only be a mirror or reflection of that solitary seeker. (1)

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In *La Loma del Ángel*, the sexuality of the unclothed white body attracts other whites, but exclusively as a form of incest. A case in point is Doña Rosa's fixation with her son Leonardo as he lies naked while sleeping. The mother's own awareness of social mores and Leonardo's lack of interest constrains her. Similar cases are the unconsummated incestuous desire between Leonardo and his sister Adela and between Isabel and her father Don Pedro. Outside of incestuous desire, the novel prevents whites from being attracted to each other. This inability of whites to love can be interpreted as a consequence of society's norms; whites, Arenas suggests, have repressed their instincts and desires in favor of an orderly but unnatural society. This discourse inescapably alludes to the official repression of homosexual desires in Arenas's Cuba.

Arenas's portrayal of two new characters he introduces in his novel, bishops Espada and Echerre, confronts the link between morality and dress. First, their position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy dictates that they wear a habit, an outward symbol of the moral code and chaste life they are bound to live and preach. The bishops disguise themselves as the angel of the church in order to impregnate women of all races. The bishops thus substitute the religious habit with a yet purer representation of holy morality. Arenas inverts the meaning of the celestial outfit, making the corrupt bishops even more cynical. Bishop Espada explains to his successor that in order to garner donations for the church and make it popular again, he tricked devoted women into believing the legend of the existence of an angel guarding the church by performing the role of the angel himself:

I dressed up as an angel and nightly wandered the towers and balconies of the nave. The ladies went into raptures at my presence. [. . .] The angel got so famous he couldn't limit himself to the holy nave. Wearing my splendid robes, I would venture out into the city almost every night and appear on the balconies of the most devout, most beautiful, and richest ladies. I don't suppose I have to tell you about the obedience and devotion with which a beautiful woman attends an angel who enters her boudoir at midnight. Yes, brother, I have angelically possessed practically every woman in this city and—oh, I wouldn't dare confess it if I weren't going to expire at any moment—many, many illustrious and highly respectable men who also didn't want to be deprived of that consolation. [. . .] I am not exaggerating, my dear brother, when I tell you that most of the citizens of this city, despite their skepticism and antireligious sentiments, have an angel for a father. Now you can see that my apostolic labors have been praiseworthy: Not only have I propagated the faith but I have populated the city with little angels as well. (16–17)

This conversation undoubtedly intends to shock the reader and to offend the moral voice at the heart of *Cecilia Valdés*. Here we see a bishop disguising himself as an angel, having sex with women as well as men, for the sake of collecting money and gaining prestige. Arenas's insertion of the bishops into the narrative as objects of a vehemently anticlerical discourse doubly disrupts the original text. On the one hand, Villaverde did not include any religious characters in his novel; on the other hand, the actions of the bishops provide a provocative discourse whether in the nineteenth or the twentieth century. The angel costume allows both bishops to inhabit a netherworld, the penumbra of social norms that carnival embodies where they carry out sexual activity but most importantly their sexual desires.

The most carnivalized character of Arenas's novel is Isabel de Ilincheta, Leonardo's bride-to-be. Villaverde praises Isabel for her benevolence towards her slaves, her kindness, and her keen business acumen shown on her family's coffee plantation. According to Villaverde's narrator, her charm lies in her deeds and good manners. The only positive aspect Villaverde denies the young Ilincheta is radiant beauty; instead, he

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chooses to portray her with a touch of masculinity. The narrator in *Cecilia Valdés* notes:

Isabel had not a trace of feminine softness, or, naturally of voluptuousness in her bodily contours, as we have already indicated. And the reason was obvious: horseback riding, her favorite diversion in the country; frequent swimming [...]; walks almost everyday [...]; her frequent exposures to the elements for pleasure and as a consequence of her active life had strengthened and developed her physique to the point of causing her to lose the softly rounded contours of a young lady of her age and station. To complete the description of the virile and resolute air of her person, we must add that a shadow was cast upon her expressive mouth by the dark and silky down on her upper lip, which needed only frequent trimming to become a black and bushy mustache. (145)

Arenas exaggerates Isabel's manliness and inverts all her positive attributes. His rewritten *señorita* is tyrannical, cruel, and coldly materialistic:

Isabel llincheta was a tall young lady, robust but awkward, yellow both of hair and skin, with long arms and extremely long fingers she fluttered in all directions as she inventoried every object that came into her field of vision. [. . .] She had small eyes, virtually no eyebrows, and the feminine down just above the lips she usually kept tightly shut was actually a bushy mustache. (44-45)

In *La Loma del Ángel*, Isabel's outfits and accessories enhance her inverted attributes. She hangs an absurdly large clock around her neck in order to adhere to the strict schedule of her business dealings. On one occasion, she intones:

My dear [Doña Rosa] we shall be with you only twenty-four hours, twenty-five minutes, and one second. I have calculated, exactly as I think, that by spending just that amount of time here, we shall be able to arrive at the coffee plantation just in time to oversee the inventory of dry coffee beans. As you know, they have to be counted individually several times, because those blacks are perfectly capable of hiding them, even under their tongues, and then selling our property. (46)

Isabel also wears ridiculous dresses designed to increase the efficiency of her actions: "Isabel's white dress, lace sleeves and trailing bows, sweeps the path with its long train. It was a chore Isabel assigned herself when she saw how full of trash those lanes were. Even as I stroll I do some useful work, thought the young lady" (84). This functional white dress contrasts dramatically with the only aesthetically feminine dress Isabel wears in the novel, which happens to be her white wedding dress. The pristine nature of the event and the color of the dress exist in harmony until Pimienta stabs Leonardo at the altar, and Isabel forces her moribund groom to impregnate her in order to be able to collect his fortune. The dress ends up covered in the blood from her husband's wound. Arenas grotesquely lampoons the custom in some cultures to display blood on the sheets from the wedding night as proof of conjugal consummation. Arenas demystifies Villaverde's good-natured Isabel. Instead of becoming a model of the modern Cuban woman Villaverde offered in his novel, in *La Loma del Ángel*, Arenas has transformed Isabel into a calculating, greedy, and brutal she-male. Arenas points to marriage as a social construction devoid of love and sexual fulfillment. Marital sex is violent and materialistic.

Leonardo's surprising relationship with the mulatto tailor Rafael de Paula Uribe in *Cecilia Valdés* disappears in *La Loma del Ángel*. In the original novel, Uribe is the most coveted tailor in Havana. He dresses whites as well as well-to-do mulattos like himself. His success lies in his ability to create unique designs that escape the standard

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French or English fashions. Villaverde's Leonardo loves the tailor's work precisely because of that uniqueness that could be interpreted as a rejection of foreign influences and an adhesion to a nascent Cuban culture. In *La Loma del Ángel*, Uribe is hardly mentioned and Leonardo's taste in clothing ignored; Leonardo is still stylish but there is no discussion of his love for Uribe's particularly Cuban designs. In fact, the novel only specifies once that Leonardo is wearing an elegant French-style suit created by Uribe. Arenas does, however, address Leonardo's potential as a character in one of the chapters of the series "Del Amor." In that chapter, Leonardo's stream of consciousness refers to Villaverde and Arenas, his creators outside the text:

I am an educated man, I'll have you understand, even if the imbecile who is writing this novel depicts me as an idle, lazy fool and a bad student. [. . .] Above all, I really know what love is because I'm alive and young and healthy and strong. There is absolutely no connection between me and the escapades that syphilitic degenerate who thinks he's Goya himself (I mean Arenas, of course) ascribes to me or those other pranks the other old idiot, who also was just as incapable of accurately depicting my character or anything else. (121)

Leonardo's soliloquy represents the culmination of Arenas's portrayal of white Cubans and the colonial system. His white characters, as we see through their attire, are stiff, amoral, greedy, unsympathetic, and vain. They inhabit roles bound by norms and regulations that maintain order by limiting individual freedom. Leonardo wants to break free from those social—and authorial—impositions. By incorporating himself into the action of his novel, Arenas becomes at once dominant (as author) and marginal ("degenerate"/gay). Arenas suggests an identification with Leonardo's plight: a desire to lead a full life outside the categorizations of dominant discourses.

In *Cecilia Valdés*, Villaverde represented mulattoes as potentially dangerous liminal characters who could pass as whites in some instances but who always ran the risk of slipping into degenerative blackness. In *La Loma del Ángel*, the opposite is true—mulatto attempts to whiten are harmful; but when their blackness surfaces, they experience liberation. Significantly, Arenas's novel inverts Cecilia's position. In *Cecilia Valdés*, the narrator emphasized the obnoxious, ill-mannered noise her sandals made as they dragged along the cobblestones. In *La Loma del Ángel*, the noise raises the mulatto girl's awareness of her position in society and proudly disrupts the established order:

But Cecilia's passion was not yet Leonardo but the streets. It was as if she were incapable of stopping anywhere. In the midday heat, when everyone in the city except the slaves was sleeping the siesta, the noise of her sandals resounded aggressively on the pavement, the wooden bridges, and even the clay roof tiles, which she would smash by walking on them at that hour of the day and enrage both the house owners and their slaves—who were ordered to chase after her throughout the city. They could never catch her. [. . .] Other people have brothers, fathers, mothers, someone to hate or love, to resemble or to reject. All Cecilia has is the streets, the city gates, and the daylight. She only has herself and that's how she knows (or intuits) that if she stops making noise she ceases to exist. (8–9)

Arenas portrays attempts to whiten as grotesque. In one instance, Cecilia paints her black great-grandmother white in order to impress and fool Leonardo into thinking she was born to a white family. Arenas mocks the nineteenth-century notion that whitening could bring a person of color closer to a civilized state: "What?, exclaimed the suddenly serious great-granddaughter. That's the limit! I turn you into a human being and that's the thanks I get? Complaints? Do you know how hard it was for me to get this barrel of paint from the Catalonian over on Empedrado street? He charged me two ounces of

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gold. Did you hear me? Two ounces!" (63). Besides Leonardo's disgust with Cecilia's act of whitening, the one-hundred-year-old great-grandmother, Amalia Alarcón, dies as Cecilia cynically makes love to her white lover in order to improve her social standing. The narrator proposes that the death was caused either by the paint or by an unintended hit from the lovers' love-making.

La Loma del Ángel also rescues a secondary mulatto character from *Cecilia Valdés*, Nemesia. In the original text, Nemesia is an ugly duckling to whom nobody pays attention. She accompanies Cecilia everywhere, but the protagonist absorbs all male attention. In *La Loma del Ángel*, Arenas grants Nemesia a voice and a space to demand her share of love and attention, for she is as beautiful and as well dressed as Cecilia:

Sexily dressed, she strolled all around Mercedes Ayala's ballroom, her eyes seeking, demanding a corresponding pair of eyes, but the more she strove to stand out, the greater was the indifference with which she was received. She had submitted completely to that all-too-human situation of being denied what she begged and desiring those who disdained her... A body, a solitary accomplice of a body with which to free herself from solitude, that was love for her, nothing else, but—for that very reason—she could never find it. (33)

Significantly, Nemesia does not feel the need to be white in order to be loved and to be considered. She is proud of her identity. According to the narrator, her love is the purest of all, for she is not looking for a certain type of lover, unlike Cecilia, who is seeking a white suitor. Arenas suggests that those mulatto characters who embrace their hybrid makeup are true to themselves; they are able to love, regardless of the other person's race. Having that self-esteem liberates these individuals. Despite Nemesia's misfortunes in love she is free, while Cecilia is caught in the web of whitening.

Whereas Villaverde refused to grant blacks a significant leadership role in the new nation that he envisioned after independence, Arenas celebrates blackness in *La Loma del Ángel* as a disruptive force in an oppressive, racist society. He celebrates blackness in two ways that would violate racial taboos of nineteenth-century Cuban society—whites of both sexes desire naked black bodies and blacks rebel openly against whites. This is Arenas's highest expression of the carnivalesque in the novel.

Arenas's treatment of the black body contrasts markedly with his treatment of whites. The unclothed or semiclothed black body embodies freedom, self-knowledge, and healthy sexuality. Characters of all races treat the black body as an object of desire. For example, Don Cándido reflects on his and other men's attraction to women of color: "And how could it be otherwise, with those half-naked Negresses who wiggle a thousand times just walking from the kitchen to the dining room? And those bodies, those hips..." (7). This attraction of white men towards women of color appears frequently in nineteenth-century literature. In novels such as *Cecilia Valdés*, miscegenation is portrayed as a forbidden but ubiquitous phenomenon. Attraction to women of color in these nineteenth-century texts was viewed as a weakness that led to corruption of the soul and degradation of the family and social structure. In *La Loma del Ángel*, the body of color is not judged as immoral or savage; Arenas instead celebrates blackness and portrays the Afrocuban body as a truly beautiful entity. His black characters possess an easy-going freedom of self-expression through their level of comfort with their bodies and their sexuality.

In *Cecilia Valdés*, one scene finds the black Tondá and the mulatto Polanco naked in the water by one of the entrances to El Morro fortress in Havana, where they are fighting the so-called "Crocodile duel." In this moment, Don Cándido and Mayor O'Reilly pass by in a carriage. The duel fails to impress these men, and they unceremoniously leave the scene. Villaverde's narrator labels the duel an "immoral spectacle." Arenas expands this small scene and elevates its significance. In *La Loma*

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del Ángel, the three Gamboa sisters, accompanied by Isabel, Leonardo, and the mayor's son, encounter the duel while riding in their carriage:

Below, in the moat, the mulatto Polanco and the black Tondá, completely naked, were engaged in a kicking bout. [. . .] Whether it was to follow the fighting or to see the naked bodies of the athletes, the fact is that the young ladies descended from their coach, a truly unusual sight in those days. Leaning dangerously far over the railing on the bridge, they observed carefully. The gentlemen also joined the crowd, either to guard the ladies or because they, too, were curious. (49)

Arenas turns the white gaze to the bodies of the two men of color. The gaze and the curiosity indicate a desire for nonwhite "others." Later, during the dance at the Philharmonic Society, Tondá returns the gaze of desire to Carmen Gamboa and she accepts it "with great pleasure." The fact that both Tondá and Carmen run away and join a *palenque* (community of runaway slaves) in the mountains in order to escape from society's prohibitions denotes the celebration of love, passion, and freedom. Arenas invests in the black body and miscegenation.

In another instance, Doña Rosa, in a rage of jealousy over Don Cándido's affairs with mulatto women, demands that the house cook, the black slave Dionisios, undress completely. In *Cecilia Valdés* the act of a male slave's undressing before a white master would have been a preamble to a punishment or inspection for selling. In Arenas's novel, the scene's sexuality inverts nineteenth-century notions of proper interracial relations. The lady of the house orders her slave to impregnate her with a black son to avenge her husband's affair with a mulatto woman. Dionisios obeys and Doña Rosa orders him to keep the affair quiet. She feels "satisfied" for "her honor has been restored" (22). The scene powerfully inverts one of the central elements of white racial ideology during the slave era—the absolute prohibition of sexual relations between white women and men of color and the fear of the rape of white women at the hands of rebellious black men.

In *La Loma del Ángel*, clothing also plays an important role in the encounter between the former black slave Dolores Santa Cruz and the Countess of Merlin. As in *Cecilia Valdés*, Dolores Santa Cruz bought her freedom by scraping together the little money she earned working different jobs. She was able to buy real estate but lawyers working for former landowners, through bureaucratic maneuvers, dispossessed her and returned the lands to their original proprietors. Deeply indebted to her own lawyers, she is bound to work for life to repay the debt and as a result she goes insane. Arenas grants Dolores's mental deterioration a subversive twist—she is faking madness in order to be left alone, keep her freedom, and help insurgencies:

In that way, she could pass unnoticed, be free, and plot. [...] The act was that night and day, as she sang those seemingly unbalanced or naïve ditties, she would meet with runaway or seditious blacks, she would burn down stables and houses, poison the masters' food, unleash plagues, poison rivers and ponds, and carry messages back and forth between groups of runaway slaves. Her 'Miss, miss, moose' was often a password, which, depending on how it was pronounced, could transmit an order or serve as a warning. (61)

In *Cecilia Valdés*, people of color denounce the slave system but refrain from violent acts. In *La Loma del Ángel*, violence constitutes an acceptable tool in the fight for emancipation. As we see in the case of Dolores Santa Cruz, the fight for personal freedom is intimately related to the struggle against slavery. When Dolores sees the Countess of Merlin wearing a diamond *peineta* (tiara) and an ostentatious dress, she lunges towards her—"with all the accumulated fury of fifty-six years"—with the

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intention of stealing the *peineta* and exchanging it for English rifles to give to runaway slaves. When she succeeds in the theft and rips out the countess's famous beautiful hair, Dolores feels for the first time "a kind of absolute liberation": "She had humiliated not only the countess but all those people there who tried to imitate her as well" (62). By attacking the countess, Dolores does violence to the white Creole elites who admired "*la francesa*" and who conspired against the former slave's freedom. By undressing the Countess in this public act, Dolores reappropriates the public space for herself and the other rebellious and conspiring slaves. She joins the *palenque* where Tondá, Carmen, Dionisios, and others have taken refuge to fight the slave regime.

As Arenas uncovers *Cecilia Valdés's* black characters, their bodies become the loci of liberation and desire. Clothing is associated with a stifling normative social order imposed by white society. Dolores's public destruction of a white person's clothing and coiffure symbolizes Afro-Cubans' violent answer to the structures of slave society. The reunion of all black characters in the *palenque* denotes their spirit of rebellion and hostility toward the (white) patriarchal and slavocratic system. In blacks—the socially marginal—lies the hope for emancipation but also for the freedoms individuals need to live.

Through the subversive performance of black characters and the parody of whites Arenas deconstructs the unnatural matrices of colonialism as portrayed in *Cecilia Valdés*. The carnivalization of the characters displays the racial and sexual tensions of the nineteenth century and challenges its social conventions. By exalting forbidden sexualities—interracial, incestual, homosexual, adulterous—and rescuing marginalized characters from the original text, *La Loma del Ángel* updates a recurrent Caribbean narrative. The novel, as a space of spectacle, is reenacting the carnival of slaves' resistance to their oppression, but it is also inscribing the marginalization and persecution of gays in Castro's Cuba. The *palenque* provides the organic space of liberation and true human relations for the characters. For the author, the boundless unterritoriality of exile provides the space for his creative and personal freedom.

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NOTES

¹I choose to refer to Arenas's novel by its title in Spanish, for *La Loma del Ángel* is the subtitle of *Cecilia Valdés* and establishes from the outset the intertextuality with Villaverde's novel. The English title, *A Graveyard of Angels*, disengages the reader from the nineteenth-century text.

²According to Ediciones Universal *La Loma del Ángel* sold one thousand copies in the first print-run in 1995 and about two thousand copies in the second reprint six years later.

³In this section, Anne McClintock's idea of consuming nationalism through the performance of the fetish in public places has helped me analyze this text. See her *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1991).

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NEGOCIAÇÃO E CONFLITO NA CONSTRUÇÃO DAS POÉTICAS BRASILEIRAS CONTEMPORÂNEAS

Por Edmilson de Almeida Pereira

O cenário da poesia brasileira, sobretudo no período posterior à vanguarda técnico-formal (Concretismo, Poema Processo), ao engajamento social (*Violão de Rua*, série editada pela Civilização Brasileira, em 1962, e vinculada ao Centro Popular de Cultura da União Nacional dos Estudantes) e à dicção poesia-vida/vida-poesia (Poesia Marginal), vem se constituindo a partir do esgarçamento de tendências dominantes ou, dito de outra maneira, a partir da valorização do esgarçamento como forma de expressão da diversidade de grupos e de individualidades poéticas. Segundo Fábio Lucas (2001: 4), nessa fase da poesia brasileira, “o que se nota é um aspecto mais fragmentário do que na era do culto do ‘eu’, de vez que a crise do paradigma representa a erosão do sistema literário. Deste modo, desligado do cânone e desfeito o sistema da literatura, o poeta se sente numa espécie de aurora da gênese, ou seja, liberto de qualquer regra ou convenção literária.”

Se “a erosão do sistema literário” prenuncia uma crise, esta, por sua vez, se instaura em relação a certa lógica de criação legitimada e institucionalizada. A noção de crise ou de perda de direção, no entanto, não se aplica às vozes que projetam suas ações, intencionalmente, fora do paradigma estabelecido. Poetas e críticos que têm se ocupado desse fenômeno ressaltam não só o espírito de ruptura e diluição que o instituiu mas, além disso, não o situam como mero continuísmo de etapas anteriores. Nesse caso, nem ruptura ou continuísmo se apresentam como categorias suficientes para dar conta das contradições, convergências e divergências que tornam esse período singular na poesia brasileira.

Assim, por um lado, a extrema abertura de fronteiras e a carência de uma partilha crítica entre poetas, analistas e público têm favorecido “a produção de uma poesia de duvidosa qualidade, repleta de ornamentos (uma irreverência atônita, um frívolo orientalismo, um grafismo inócuo, um devaneio sub-filosófico etc.), onde não há um mínimo contato com a visceralidade da existência humana.” (MARTINS, 2004: s/p). Por outro lado, no entanto, é preciso considerar que “essa é a poesia que se mostra, ainda que não seja a que verdadeiramente” (MARTINS, 2004: s/p) responde pela diversidade de demandas estéticas e sociais do país. Daí a possibilidade de verificarmos nos meandros da crise (se nos prendermos à orientação do cânone) ou na dialética das relações sociais (se nos situarmos na perspectiva de reinvenção de linguagens) um princípio de reconfiguração, que transforma as tendências poéticas em mediadoras das complexas experiências da contemporaneidade.

Em face disso, como pondera Marcos Siscar (2005) “é menos exato dizer que a poesia brasileira *perdeu* alguma coisa – formulação que diz respeito muito mais a um julgamento de valor do que a uma proposta analítica – do que dizer que ela se *tornou* outra coisa, tomando sentido específico em um outro momento histórico.” O desafio, portanto, consiste em mapear essa outra configuração da poesia brasileira, menos como retaliação ao cânone e mais como necessidade de gerar novas competências de compreensão para as mudanças estéticas e sociais. Sob esse aspecto, um mapa, dentre outros possíveis, demonstra que “a reflexão sobre os processos da linguagem” na poesia brasileira contemporânea estimulou a releitura de autores “obscuros” ou “herméticos” de uma antitradição, como Lezama Lima, Paul Celan, Francis Ponge e Robert Creeley, numa saga de ampliação do repertório. Do mergulho vertical até o ignorado surgiu uma poemática concisa, elíptica, fragmentária e metafórica que por vezes sobrepõe o som ao sentido, ou antes cria novos sentidos para as palavras da tribo. Essa *ars poetica*, que já

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foi chamada de pós-concreta, parte da crise do verso de Mallarmé, mas procura soluções construtivas diversas de *Noigandres*. No lugar da visualidade, da aplicação de recursos tipográficos e de leiaute que nortearam as técnicas de composição do grupo concreto, o olho-da-forma dessa geração privilegiou a desarticulação sintática e a renovação léxica. (DANIEL, 2002:23-24)

Como se percebe, uma cartografia da poesia brasileira realizada a partir dos anos 70 do século XX até a primeira década do século XXI revela um tráfego intenso de perspectivas estéticas e ideológicas que atribuíram pertinência aos mais variados processos de criação. Por isso, diante da possibilidade de fragmentação do cânone literário brasileiro se estruturaram linhas de atuação, segundo as quais a afinidade entre os poetas não estabeleceu grupos formalizados mas competências para um diálogo que não descartava as divergências. Como observa Marcos Siscar (2005), esse quadro de transição e/ou de reorganização de procedimentos demonstra que “mesmo na ‘aflição’, a poesia permanece um lugar de promessa ou de maturação daquilo que advém.” Foi, portanto, na aflição e na transformação da poesia brasileira em “outra coisa” que a Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira, delineada pelo pensamento e pela obra de determinados autores, se articulou, rasurando o cenário da literatura brasileira contemporânea.

Se a poesia de expressão negra e/ou afro-brasileira teve seus antecedentes em autores como Domingos Caldas Barbosa, Luiz Gama, Cruz e Souza, Lino Guedes, Solano Trindade pode-se dizer, contudo, que foi no final da década de 70 que um viés teórica e ideologicamente orientado contribuiu para sedimentar as bases dessa literatura, tanto na prosa quanto na poesia. Um marco importante nesse processo foi, sem dúvida, a organização de coletivos de escritores e poetas negros, tais como os *Cadernos Negros* (1978) e o grupo Quilombhoje (1980), ambos em São Paulo, e o *Negrícia: Poesia e Arte de Crioulo* (1984-1992), no Rio de Janeiro. Além disso, uma série de atividades desenvolvidas em Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul e Bahia (edições auto-financiadas de livros, “rodas de poemas”, recitais, teatro e literatura infanto-juvenil e circulação fora das grandes editoras) indicam que os autores da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira e os autores da Poesia Marginal partilharam, pelo menos em tese, alguns procedimentos no decorrer dos anos 70 e 80.

No caso de São Paulo, as edições dos *Cadernos Negros* derivaram, posteriormente, para a criação do grupo Quilombhoje que, entre outros objetivos, se dispunha a discutir, analisar e aprofundar a presença dos afro-brasileiros em nossa cena literária.¹ Por sua vez, os participantes do *Negrícia*² – formado por jovens escritores negros provenientes do subúrbio e vinculados não só à literatura, mas também a outros grupos culturais como o Garra Suburbana e o Panela de Pressão – apresentavam propostas similares aos integrantes do Quilombhoje, com quem chegaram a manter contato. Ou seja, dentre outros objetivos do *Negrícia*, se destacavam a intenção de dar visibilidade à literatura produzida por escritores negros (inclusive no interior do próprio Movimento Negro) e a utilização dos recursos da literatura para promover a crítica da opressão imposta aos afrodescendentes.

É interessante notar que o período entre 1978 e 1980 correspondeu, como vimos, a uma fase de ruptura e, ao mesmo tempo, de mistura de fronteiras na poesia brasileira. Diversas tendências poéticas se inscreveram nesse período, ora mergulhando nas experimentações formalistas, ora se enredando nos exercícios de metalinguagem. Se as décadas de 1980 e 1990 viram a exacerbação desse processo, com o acréscimo de novos elementos que, segundo alguns analistas, levaram a uma produção poética sem “contato com a visceralidade da existência humana” (MARTINS, 2004: s/p) ou distanciada das “questões poético-políticas coletivas” (SISCAR, 2005) é, no mínimo, intrigante o desinteresse da crítica e da imprensa cultural brasileira por propostas como

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as do Quilombhoje e do Negrícia, cujas poéticas apostavam, justamente, numa busca visceral do humano através de um projeto poético-político coletivo. Essa aposta pode ser apreendida da argumentação de Estevão Maya-Maya (1987: 108), para quem a ebulição do continente africano, principalmente a luta contra o colonialismo português e o virulento sistema sul-africano, o *Apartheid*, e as notícias, em primeira mão, do que ocorria nos Estados Unidos da América em relação ao negro, através de uns poucos “brasilianistas” afro-americanos que por aqui aportaram, constituíram-se em ingredientes para essa nova literatura que explodia numa trajetória de “volta às Raízes”.

Os argumentos de Maya-Maya aludem ao fato de as ordens dominantes no Brasil não incluírem as culturas negras nos movimentos de construção da “identidade nacional”, bem como ao fato de as correntes políticas de esquerda enfatizarem a luta de classes desconsiderando a interferência das diferenças étnicas nas relações sociais. Nesse sentido, a atuação dos Centros Populares de Cultura (UNE) e do Partido Comunista Brasileiro na década de 60, segundo Abílio Ferreira (1987: 75), “faz crer que a questão racial não existiu” em tal período. Porém, como indicou Maya-Maya, nessa década e nas seguintes recrudesceram, em diversos países, os confrontos entre as populações negras e os regimes que as subjugavam. O que chama a atenção, portanto, é o distanciamento que boa parte da sociedade brasileira manteve em relação às demandas políticas da África moderna e dos afro-brasileiros. Em outros termos, aquilo que os ativistas de esquerda entenderam como visceralmente humano se referia, com justiça, aos dramas decorrentes da repressão militar, embora esse entendimento não tenha alcançado, também, o drama visceral vivido pelos afrodescendentes no país. No plano literário, essa divisão pode ser percebida na dicção de autores como Moacyr Félix, Paulo Mendes Campos e Fernando Mendes Viana ligados à série *Violão de Rua* patrocinada pelo Centro Popular de Cultura. O poema “Dialética”, de Moacyr Félix (1966: 48), organizador dos três volumes da série, entre 1962 e 1963, nos ajuda a compreender esse cenário político-literário:

Com uma laranja/com uma laranja na mão/ com uma laranja
na mão, o negro/do alto do caminhão/ saudava o dia./
E sorria./No sorriso do homem/negro negro negro / (e ele nem
o sabia...)/é que morava a certeza/bela bela bela/do que nele sorria./
do tamanho do mundo/a laranja seria/na sua mão de negro/
como o sol um dia./Como o cachorro e o cavalo/que o olhavam,
também usados;/como Pedro, o meu filho/em cujo porvir se
aclara/ minha sombra de pé sobre a rua/onde ele, o negro, qual
flor do meu povo, passava/ quase apenas um animal/
quase apenas uma criança/ quase apenas uma força/
natural/numa densidade acuada de esperanças,/com uma laranja
na mão, o negro/saudava o dia, saudava todos os dias./

O título do poema alude, de imediato, a alguns norteadores ideológicos dos cepecistas, tais como a necessidade de reconhecer a luta de classes e o compromisso do intelectual com a revolução social. Considerando o primeiro aspecto, no Brasil do início dos anos sessenta, o intelectual não poderia deixar de se defrontar “a fundo com o fato de a posse do poder pela classe dirigente e a conseqüente privação de poder em que se encontra o povo enquanto massa dos governados pelos outros e para os outros.” (HOLLANDA, 1992: 18). No tocante ao segundo aspecto, os artistas do CPC se opunham ao estado das relações sociais vigentes, por isso, “optaram por ser povo, por ser parte integrante do povo, destacamentos de seu exército no *front* cultural.” (HOLLANDA, 1992: 18). A partir dessas orientações os cepecistas, em tese irmanados com as aspirações do povo, terminaram, como salienta Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda

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(1992: 19), “por escamotear as diferenças de classes, homogeneizando conceitualmente uma multiplicidade de contradições e interesses”.

A par disso, é possível notar que a dialética do poema de Moacyr Félix não se realizou como tal, na medida em que diluiu sob a mesma bandeira do povo as diferenças étnicas, sociais e culturais que, a princípio, propiciam o surgimento de múltiplas identidades entre a população brasileira. O poema, escrito na perspectiva dos cantos de celebração de uma fraternidade universal, responsável pela redenção do ser humano convoca a todos, em particular o homem oprimido, para a luta contra a desigualdade. Sob o impacto desse discurso, “o negro, qual flor do meu povo” desfila, saudando o dia novo. Porém, a identificação do poeta com o negro/povo não escapou à tentação do paternalismo, isto é, na visão do intelectual o provável agente da revolução parece não ter ciência de seus desígnios sociais: “No sorriso do homem/ negro negro negro / (e ele nem o sabia...)/ é que morava a certeza/ bela bela bela/ do que nele sorria:/ do tamanho do mundo/ a laranja seria/ na sua mão de negro/ como o sol um dia.”

Se retomarmos e ampliarmos as observações de Abílio Ferreira, podemos dizer que a dialética do CPC contrariou-se a si mesma ao enunciar um conceito reducionista de povo, não obstante os esforços dos cepecistas para relacionarem esse conceito à dinâmica da história e da sociedade. Ainda que atentos aos jogos de interação e conflito inerentes à realidade brasileira, os integrantes dos CPCs não colocaram em sua pauta as diferenças étnicas que atuaram, muitas vezes, como um fator capaz de excluir os afrodescendentes da dimensão de povo politicamente organizado. Ou seja, como herdeiros de um sistema social que os desqualificou como sujeitos, os afrodescendentes, em plena década 60, continuavam a fazer parte da maioria de brasileiros pobres. E dentro dessa maioria de marginalizados permaneciam como os menos respeitados porque, além de pobres, eram negros.

Não obstante a lacuna que se projetou entre o discurso do CPC e a experiência histórico-social dos afrodescendentes – fruto, em parte, do adestramento cepecista “à sintaxe das massas” que deixou “patente as diferenças de classe e de linguagem que separavam intelectual e povo” (HOLLANDA, 1992: 190) – há momentos em que foi possível vislumbrar uma redução dessa distância. Os protagonistas desse momentos foram os poetas Moacyr Félix (que incluiu no livro *Invenção de crença e descrença* [1960-1966] uma homenagem ao líder congolês Patrice Lumumba) e Éle Semog (que publicou no final dos anos 80 o artigo “A intervenção dos poetas e ficcionistas negros no processo de participação política”).

Como vimos, na medida em que o discurso cepecista celebrou a fraternidade dos homens em luta pela liberdade restringiu o espaço para que os afrodescendentes apresentassem suas demandas específicas, por exemplo: como ser sujeito da história, se a história dos afro-brasileiros ainda não fora devidamente reconhecida? como ser igual a todos os homens se o *status quo* lhes negava, até então, o respeito próprio dos homens? como ser homem no sentido geral da espécie se as vozes das mulheres negras permaneciam amordaçadas? Em meio ao canto para todos os homens, Moacyr Félix descortinou a necessidade de se tecer um outro canto para apreender os embates do homem negro contra o racismo e o neocolonialismo. Assim, o pensamento dialético se exprime de maneira mais contundente no poema “Sons para Lumumba”, líder político congolês assassinado em 1961 (FÉLIX, 1966: 50):

Meu nome é índio, Lumumba:/ Desde o berço até a tumba/ me chamarei
Moacyr./Félix me quer a Europa/de Roma e todas as opas/que me
ensinaram trair/com posturas de savant/meu ser tamoio ou tupi:/
filho de peixe das águas/que levam sumo ao caqui./filho da dor andeja/

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insatisfeitos com o *status quo* político e literário poderia ter sido percebida como um ponto de interseção entre os afrodescendentes e as forças de esquerda, e entre os autores afrodescendentes e as tendências literárias vigentes, tais como a Poesia Práxis (cuja intenção de participação social se associava às conquistas formais da vanguarda para denunciar a desumanização do campesinato e do proletariado) e o *Violão de Rua* (que, entre outros objetivos, incentivava a participação do poeta nos processos históricos).³

No entanto, o que se verificou foi a continuidade do descompasso entre “a produção artística e cultural negra” e “as estéticas que costumam dar o tom das épocas”, segundo Abílio Ferreira (1987: 74). Assim, na medida em que as questões relacionadas aos afrodescendentes não permearam as poéticas dominantes nas décadas de 60, 70 e 80 no Brasil, reforçou-se o fato de elas serem tratadas como “questões prementes” de interesse quase exclusivo de escritores e artistas negros (FERREIRA, 1987: 75). Esse processo, sobretudo a partir do final da década de 60 resultou numa cisão da retórica engajada já que, de um lado, sustentou-se a herança de uma poética imersa nas questões da luta de classes (Práxis, *Violão de Rua*) e, de outro, uma poética imersa nessas mesmas questões, porém vinculada pela questão específica do combate ao racismo (Poesia Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira sintetizada em grupos como Quilombhoje e Negrícia). Considerando o alargamento dessa cisão, motivado pela autocrítica dos poetas de esquerda (que reconheceram a inviabilidade de algumas práticas do CPC, tendo inclusive mudado os rumos de sua poética) e pela atuação de indivíduos e grupos de militância negros (que, ao contrário, investiram no discurso engajado e politizado para abordar a questão identitária dos afrodescendentes), é possível rastrear a constituição de um *corpus* poético e teórico cujos agentes, dentre outras tarefas, têm se encarregado de elaborar um paideuma para a Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira.

Considerando o embate entre as vozes que defendem a especificidade da segunda e as vozes que a rejeitam, mapeamos os argumentos de alguns agentes de criação e de crítica que têm se ocupado desse tema. A partir disso, será possível notar de que modo poetas e críticos se empenham na explicitação de seus projetos estéticos e teóricos, cuja aceitação ou recusa da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira estão vinculadas às diferentes maneiras como apreendem as relações estabelecidas entre literatura, história e memória. A essas alturas, não é difícil concluir que a questão pungente não consiste em nomear os fatos estéticos relacionados aos afrodescendentes (pois, com ou sem consenso, termos como Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira se tornaram instrumentos de uso corrente em certos setores da crítica acadêmica)⁴, mas sobretudo, em compreender as estratégias de formação e de transformação desses fatos. Não obstante o apelo dessa perspectiva (que valoriza a mobilidade do sujeito num mundo de transições como foco da produção de sentido), no que tange ao aproveitamento das heranças afrodescendentes, boa parte da dicção poética realizada no Brasil ainda se mostra vinculada por um friso histórica e ideologicamente reconhecido. Ou seja, o estético se exprime em função do engajamento social e este, por sua vez, se define como um compromisso com os grupos étnicos afrodescendentes.

Por conta disso, dentro e fora dos círculos acadêmicos, e mesmo entre poetas e editores, subsiste uma contenda que, embora não seja explicitada publicamente, desloca para um lado os defensores do sentido social da literatura, e para o outro, os signatários da autonomia da criação poética. Se os primeiros alegam que os segundos carecem de sensibilidade política no trato dos problemas que afetam as populações afrodescendentes, os segundos, por sua vez, afirmam que o discurso poético, dotado de regras próprias de constituição, perde seu apelo artístico se reduzido a uma ação comunicativa imediata.

Além disso, as discussões acerca da qualidade estética da obra produzida por afrodescendentes e do contato destes com os experimentos das vanguardas e pós-

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vanguardas transformaram-se numa espécie de afronta à autenticidade da mensagem engajada. Essa situação inibe a elaboração de uma crítica isenta de amarras, disposta a reconhecer a eficácia social da obra poética sem, no entanto, deixar de questionar a sua eficácia estética. A esse propósito, é oportuno dialogar com aportes teóricos como os da ensaísta norte-americana Marjorie Perloff, que observa:

Toda forma de afirmação artística tem algo de político. Acredito haver uma relação próxima entre arte e política, mas isso não significa que essa relação deva pautar a arte. O multiculturalismo produziu efeitos terríveis em nossa poesia. Se não se pode criticar um poeta afro-americano ou latino, tampouco se pode criticar um poeta branco, e isso elimina a possibilidade de um debate consistente. (13)

Essas reflexões são particularmente instigantes quando consideramos o cenário da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira permeado, muitas vezes, pelas relações entre a arte e a atuação política. Essa vinculação, em certos momentos, parece constringer a liberdade da reflexão crítica, na medida em que esta funciona não como mediadora entre a obra e o público, mas como uma tradução da ideologia da obra poética. Por isso, não raro, o conhecimento dos recursos da língua e da fala, a história da literatura e as relações dialéticas entre estilos e tendências literárias são preteridos, ou pouco mencionados, já que a *práxis* da escrita, em sendo realizada por um afrodescendente, se configura por si só como *leitmotiv* para a construção da análise. Ou, como observa Domicio Proença Filho (1997: 175), essa postura, escudada no argumento da "releitura cultural" substitui "na apreciação, qualidade literária por oportunidade histórica."

Porém, justamente no momento em que os estudos culturais, em sua feição inovadora, nos ajudaram a entender que os discursos de centro e periferia se ignoram menos, é preciso levar em conta também que os modos de expressar os vínculos entre a literatura e a sociedade se tornaram mais complexos. Por isso, espera-se que os autores (afrodescendentes ou não), os críticos e o público não limitem sua atenção à superfície dos fatos ou das obras. A literatura, em particular, respira nessa atmosfera em que os entrecruzamentos, as fissuras e os estranhamentos estéticos e culturais são índices de relações que, por serem sociais e, portanto, ideologicamente tecidas, não se resolvem de maneira satisfatória com a aparente facilitação do discurso. Nesse contexto, ao contrário, um discurso "simples" decorre não da recusa ao enfrentamento das complexas relações estéticas e sociais, mas da capacidade de reelaborá-las através de figuras poéticas provocadoras da sensibilidade e da inteligência.

Esse preâmbulo é pertinente, pois, no que se refere à inserção de signos afrodescendentes na Literatura Brasileira, vale ressaltar o esforço de poetas, analistas e pesquisadores, cuja preocupação em abordar criticamente o tema ampliou o leque de questões estéticas contempladas em nobres currículos de Letras e estreitou os diálogos com pesquisadores estrangeiros interessados nos processos de construção das identidades afrodescendentes. De modo particular, a atuação de vários pesquisadores, alguns dos quais incluídos na presente obra, tem contribuído para a formulação de livros didáticos utilizados no ensino médio e fundamental de nossa rede escolar pública e particular. Trata-se, portanto, de investigações que sugerem a alteração das fronteiras do cânone literário brasileiro, ao mesmo tempo em que chamam a atenção para a responsabilidade social das pesquisas desenvolvidas no meio acadêmico brasileiro.⁵ Esse quadro demonstra o desencadeamento de uma ação conjunta das produções poética e crítica no sentido de denunciar os mecanismos de exclusão dos afrodescendentes. Mas, é importante destacar, embora essa ação se resolva de modo pertinente no domínio sociológico, não logra dar conta de um legado mais amplo de extração afrodescendente, no qual a afirmação da identidade étnica e o engajamento

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ideologicamente demarcado, por exemplo, não constituem temas centrais de sua elaboração.

Esse argumento, somado a outros, acirra de tal maneira os debates sobre a aceitação ou a recusa da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira que nos leva a pensar, não por acaso, nos momentos decisivos de ascensão e transformação da Negritude, cuja concepção como corrente “comenzó en Paris en 1934, cuando un grupo de estudiantes fundó la revista ‘L’Etudiant Noir’” (JAHN, 1971: 286). Desencadeada por Léopold Sédar Senghor, Léon Damas e Aimé Césaire – no rastro da revista *Légitime Défense*, fundada por Etienne Léro, René Ménil e Jules Monnerot (JAHN, 1971: 286) – a Negritude tem sido, historicamente, tal como a Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-Brasileira, “exaltada e defendida, ou recuperada, contestada, quando não mesmo renegada” (SOW, 1977: 14).

Diante das várias acepções atribuídas à Negritude relacionadas ao “caráter biológico ou racial”, ao “conceito sócio-cultural de classe” e/ou ao “caráter psicológico” (MUNANGA, 1986: 50), optamos por enfatizar aquela relacionada à sua “definição cultural”. Segundo Kabengele Munanga (1986: 53), essa definição consiste na “afirmação do negro pela valorização de sua cultura, a começar pela poesia e outros.” Ao ratificar esse aspecto, Alpha I. Sow (1977: 15) observa que a Negritude, “enquanto manifesto cultural e político mobilizador, transformou a identidade sócio-cultural dos povos negros numa arma de emancipação e num projecto de renascimento”. Esses propósitos, guardadas as devidas diferenças de momento histórico, podem ser cotejados com alguns pontos norteadores da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira implementada, sobretudo, a partir do final da década de 70, particularmente no discurso de grupos como o Quilombhoje, de São Paulo, e o Negrícia, do Rio de Janeiro.

No que concerne aos defensores da Negritude literária e da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira, a construção de um “manifesto cultural e político mobilizador”, ao orientar o processo criativo dos autores, gerou um outro paradigma estético e ideológico, que alterou as relações do cânone literário ocidental com as culturas africanas e afrodescendentes. Ou seja, a noção de relativismo valorizada na experiência dos contatos culturais, e subentendida em ambos os movimentos, obrigou os indivíduos a demonstrarem maior interesse pelas diversidades uns dos outros. Desse modo, renascimento e afirmação se tornaram eixos de uma ação que, sob a tutela de alguns poetas da Negritude e de outros tantos da poesia Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira, conduziu ao reconhecimento da importância das heranças culturais africanas em seu próprio território e na diáspora. Em face das tensões que marcaram as sociedades coloniais e pós-coloniais na África e no Brasil, essa pluralização dos paradigmas tem sido exaltada como um dos maiores ganhos da Negritude e da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira. Talvez, por isso, aquilo que Benedita Gouveia Damasceno afirmou a respeito da primeira possa ser tomado como válido também para a segunda, ou seja, “[todos] os jovens poetas negros posteriores, de qualquer língua, devem à Negritude esse legado de independência política, lingüística e espiritual já que agora podem descrever seu mundo e sua cultura em línguas européias sem necessidade de ir apregoando sua cor.” (34)

Não obstante isso, outras vozes articularam um discurso dissonante em relação à Negritude literária, algo similar ao que se observa no percurso da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira. No que tange à primeira, Janheinz Jahn (1976: 307) cita a crítica de David Rubadiri, do Malawi, que afirmou: “Yo creo que la ‘Négritude’ es peligrosa porque conduce finalmente a la opresión del espíritu creador, a manietarlo de tal modo que la obra de arte llega a carecer de sentido.” Contrapondo-se a tal argumento, Jahn (1976: 306) valoriza a autonomia do poeta que mesmo empenhado na defesa de determinados princípios políticos não abre mão de seu processo de criação. Para tanto,

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recorda que Aimé Césaire, embora filiado ao partido comunista, “no fue capaz de producir poesía política de partido”. Como se percebe, o debate em causa evidenciava a oposição entre a liberdade de criação e o engajamento político, reiterando as divergências entre as duas perspectivas e restringindo um provável diálogo entre elas.

No caso da Negritude, críticas à ênfase que o movimento atribuiu ao engajamento social aumentaram as suspeitas sobre a possibilidade de se relacionar, na mesma medida, a liberdade de criação e o apelo social da literatura. Para acirrar os ânimos, as mudanças em curso nas sociedades africanas no decorrer do período pós-colonial contribuíram para a diluição do papel mobilizador da Negritude. No dizer de Alpha I. Sow, o modo como foram constituídas algumas alianças políticas minou as linhas de força do próprio movimento. Assim,

[ao] triunfarem sobre o colonialismo primitivo, as lutas de libertação nacional permitiram que certos pioneiros, teóricos e dirigentes do movimento viessem a exercer um importante poder político, por eles orientado numa direcção favorável ao neocolonialismo. Assim desqualificados no seu papel de dirigentes dos movimentos nacionalistas, bem depressa vieram a tornar-se no seu alvo predilecto. (16)

O quadro acima, indicador do esgarçamento da Negritude em seus aspectos político e literário, favoreceu a difusão de críticas que atingiram o cerne de algumas de suas proposições. Ezekiel Mphahlele, por exemplo, em sua obra *The African image* (Londres, 1952), rechaçou “la afirmación de Senghor de que la emoción era ‘negra’”, ao mesmo tempo em que advogou em causa de “un realismo poético que debiera apoyarse en la experiencia personal del poeta.” (JAHN, 1971: 306). A abordagem de Mphahlele questionava a contradição, nem sempre explicitada, dos argumentos que afirmavam a especificidade do negro. Ou seja, se por um lado tais argumentos confrontavam o discurso que o colonizador engendrara sobre o negro, por outro, se impunham como um novo, porém restritivo, modelo de percepção do próprio negro. Em outros termos, o argumento que livrava o negro das cadeias do discurso colonial podia se constituir, em certa medida, em uma nova forma de essencialismo, vincada pela idealização de traços como a beleza, a emotividade e a imaginação.

Atento a esse processo, cujo risco consistia em desprender a revalorização estética e cultural do negro dos enredos histórico-sociais que o circundavam, Stanislas Adotevi formulou uma das críticas mais contundentes à Negritude. Para tanto, chamou a atenção para ao fato de que a imagem de um sujeito negro absoluto não poderia encontrar ressonância nas práticas sociais que, através de suas relações de negociação e conflito, contribuíram para a configuração do continente africano. Diante disso, ao questionar a separação entre a imagem ideal e a realidade histórico-social dos negros, Adotevi (1998:16) indagou: “Mais ce Nègre à qui on propose la romance est-il un être de chair et de sang: ce dur regard dans la dure obscurité?”⁶ Tal perquirição demonstrou que a afirmação horizontal do discurso da Negritude deixaria margens para que o movimento, em instâncias particulares como a literatura, se inclinasse para a contemplação de si mesmo, moldando-se como um estilo utópico para a dicção da especificidade do sujeito negro. Diante desse posicionamento narcísico revelado em algumas proposições da Negritude, Adotevi (1998:16) argumentou:

Dans le choc des mots, dans leurs rondes précises et organisées, on découvre exactement, [...], cette intention qui fait de la négritude non une exigence (ce qu'elle était au départ), mais une pensée furieusement onirique et par conséquent dirimante dans les luttes que mène l'Afrique à cette heure de la décolonisation. Il importe de ne pas perdre de vue cette déviation.⁷

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Se, por um lado, as críticas de Adotevi denunciaram a influência do pensamento único, que transformou a Negritude na tradução de uma autenticidade negra, por outro, impôs aos sujeitos africanos e afrodescendentes a necessidade de se pensarem como diversidade em face uns dos outros, bem como em relação às demais sociedades do período pós-colonial. Em outros termos, enquanto movimento político e social, com desdobramentos estéticos, a Negritude inseriu-se na história como um corpo ideológico, cuja função foi desarticular as tramas da antiga ordem colonial. Porém, uma vez entretecido, esse corpo ideológico passou a exibir suas próprias feridas. Isto é, em razão de suas contradições, a Negritude foi, simultaneamente, saudada e refutada, embora não pudesse mais ser ignorada no contexto pós-colonial. Nesses casos, é importante reconhecer as forças de mediação que permeiam os movimentos sociais, revigorando-lhes as bases transformadoras ou apontando-lhes a ausência de porosidade e de autocrítica. Em relação à Negritude, Wole Soyinka foi uma das vozes a perceber a relevância dessas forças. Em 1964, durante uma conferência proferida em Berlim, o escritor e dramaturgo Jahn explicou o sentido da expressão "tigridade" empregada por ele, dois anos antes, num debate em que se realizava a crise da Negritude:

Mis palabras fueron: 'Un tigre no anuncia su tigritud; salta'. Con otras palabras: un tigre no está en la selva y dice: 'Yo soy un tigre'. Al pasar junto al lugar donde está el tigre y ver el esqueleto de la gacela es cuando se sabe que allí há rebosado tigritud. Por tanto, la diferencia que yo quise señalar en aquella conferencia (en Kampala, Uganda, en 1962) era puramente literária. Quise distinguir entre propaganda y auténtica creación poética. Dije, con otras palabras, que una cualidad poética que se espera de la poesía es la propia cualidad poética, y no la mera acción de anteponerle un nombre. (310)

Através da metáfora da tigridade, Soyinka insinua que o sentido social da obra não é dado tanto pela menção ao seu caráter engajado mas, sobretudo, pela condição que ela oferece para verificarmos nela mesma a sua "fiereza felina" (JAHN 310). De outro modo, esse aspecto não é senão o que garante à obra uma autonomia de constituição e, portanto, uma liberdade de exploração de significados que podem interessar a determinados indivíduos ou grupos sociais. A metáfora da tigridade privilegia a abordagem dialética das questões levantadas pela Negritude, pois não fecha os olhos à repressão colonial imposta aos povos africanos, mas também não alega que a proposição de um sujeito africano ideal possa responder às demandas dos diferentes grupos sociais do continente. Nesse lugar de passagem, forjado pela urgência do engajamento social e pela defesa da liberdade criadora, são elaborados os discursos que, através da mediação, não abandonam o sujeito à sanha dos opressores nem sucateiam a autonomia da obra literária. Discursos que, à maneira do tigre de Soyinka, se dão a ver menos pela propaganda que fazem de si e mais pela ação renovadora que desempenham na floresta de signos.

Consideradas as devidas diferenças de condições históricas e sociais entre a deflagração da Negritude e da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira, pode-se observar que traços da primeira foram realocados para estruturar alguns dos aspectos da segunda. Assim, a denúncia da violência contra os afro-brasileiros, a afirmação da especificidade de seus valores culturais e a legitimação do poeta como porta-voz de sua coletividade são aspectos que, à maneira da Negritude, desarticularam o discurso sobre a harmonia da sociedade brasileira e impuseram a face de um sujeito afrodescendente reconfigurado na obra literária. A par disso, como veremos, poetas e críticos têm assumido diferentes posicionamentos diante do fato estético e social que para alguns se instaurou como Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira, mas que, para outros, não se apresenta como um tema central de criação ou debate.

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Conforme observamos em outra oportunidade, esse processo é marcado pela ambivalência, “já que, por um lado, reconhece-se a necessidade de afirmar a identidade de um segmento étnico e social (os afrodescendentes) e, por outro, a preocupação em não restringir a criação literária a um só *leitmotiv*, ou seja, os assuntos relativos aos afrodescendentes” (PEREIRA, 2007: 185). Relacionadas à primeira vertente, destacam-se as proposições que realçam o critério de afirmação da identidade negra e/ou afro-brasileira, embora não a afastem de outras referências ideológicas que perpassam a sociedade brasileira. Nessa direção, só a título de amostragem, consideraremos as argumentações de Zilá Bernd, Eduardo de Assis Duarte e Florentina Souza. Em suas abordagens, Bernd e Duarte alertam para a necessidade de se incluir nos debates acerca da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira temas como a desnaturalização dos vínculos entre cor e identidade, e a revisão do conceito de identidade nacional, respectivamente:

[...] é preciso sublinhar que o conceito de literatura negra não se atrela nem à cor da pele do autor nem apenas à temática por ele utilizada, mas emerge da própria evidência textual cuja consistência é dada pelo surgimento de um *eu* enunciador que se quer negro. (BERND, 1988: 22)

A conformação teórica da literatura “negra”, “afro-brasileira” ou “afro-descendente” passa, necessariamente, pelo abalo da noção de uma identidade nacional una e coesa. E, também, pela descrença na infalibilidade dos critérios de consagração crítica, presentes nos manuais que nos guiam pela história das letras aqui produzidas. (DUARTE, 2005: 113)

As reflexões de Bernd e Duarte apontam para uma articulação teórica da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira com outras referências ideológicas e, acrescentaríamos também, estéticas. Num primeiro momento, essa perspectiva reconhece na criação literária uma espécie de viagem ao redor do próprio umbigo, na medida em que através dela o autor elege e legitima um modelo identitário. Contudo, tal viagem não se sustenta fora de um sistema de relações, que imprime na criação literária uma marca dialógica. Isso equivale a dizer, em termos sociais, que uma identidade afrodescendente não se estrutura como uma ilha mas, ao contrário, se realiza a partir das negociações e conflitos decorrentes dos contatos com outros projetos identitários. Eis o que sugere, por sua vez, Florentina Souza:

A produção literária afro-brasileira, jogando com as palavras e recompondo sentidos, põe em discussão os modelos de relações interétnicas no País, visto ainda por muitos sob uma ótica idealizada como exemplo singular de harmonia no trato com a diversidade étnico-cultural de sua população. (9)

Segundo a argumentação acima, a Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira tem no caráter relacional e na recomposição de sentidos um eixo dinâmico, que valoriza, potencialmente, a experimentação e a abertura de horizontes estéticos durante o processo criativo. Ou seja, essa produção literária se expõe “como espaço para, entre outros propósitos, interferir nas várias instâncias de poder e de representação”, além de “encadear e explorar as possibilidades de forjar significados e conexões, resgatar histórias e tradições de origem africana, ou seja apoderar-se também do sistema de produção de imagens e significados.” (SOUZA, 9)

Como se pode inferir das proposições teóricas de Zilá Bernd, Eduardo de Assis Duarte e Florentina Souza, o modelo da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira não constitui uma camisa-de-força costurada unicamente com a abordagem de aspectos referentes ao sujeito negro. Ao contrário, essa literatura apresenta pontos de interseção com outros acervos literários, tais como, a percepção do texto (“evidência textual”)

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como lugar crítico e autocrítico, a rejeição moderna aos valores absolutos (“abalo da noção de uma identidade nacional una e coesa”) e, por fim, a prática da literatura como um *work in progress* alimentado pelas possibilidades “de forjar significados e conexões”. Essas interseções demonstram que a Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira, para além do centramento étnico-social e da aderência a um circuito marcado de temas, é dotada de plasticidade suficiente para interagir com outras tendências ideológicas e outros esquemas literários.

Todavia, uma mirada sobre a Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira mostra que essa capacidade dialógica tende a ser superada em prol de uma dicção que privilegia os temas de ordem étnica, social, política e econômica. É fato que esse repertório se destaca, por si só, pela sua largueza e profundidade, embora a maneira de tratá-lo aponte, muitas vezes, para uma certa uniformidade discursiva. Ou seja, a eleição da história do negro – entendida como um esquema de imposição da violência, de luta contra esta violência e de revelação da especificidade da alma e da cultura negras – evidencia que o fator ideológico se impõe como um *a priori* da criação literária. Insinua-se, nesse caso, um reducionismo temático e ideológico que transforma a prática literária em território etnicamente demarcado, no qual a escrita dos afrodescendentes reencena a história para os seus semelhantes. Paralelamente ao reconhecimento dessa perspectiva, desenvolve-se outra percepção crítica que problematiza esse modo de apresentação da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira. Eis o que observa, por exemplo, Domício Proença Filho:

Em sentido restrito, considera-se *negra* uma literatura feita por negros ou por descendentes assumidos de negros e, como tal, reveladora de visões de mundo, de ideologias e de modos de realização que, por força de condições atávicas, sociais, e históricas condicionadoras, caracteriza-se por uma certa especificidade, ligada a um intuito claro de singularidade cultural. *Lato sensu*, será *negra* a arte literária feita por quem quer que seja, desde que centrada em dimensões peculiares aos negros ou aos descendentes de negros. A designação, tal como vem sendo utilizada no Brasil e em outros países da América, vincula-se ao significado restrito e emerge no bojo de uma situação histórica dada, configuradora da reivindicação pelos negros de determinados valores caracterizadores de uma identidade própria. (174)

A ênfase no sentido restrito da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira se nutre do empenho do sujeito em promover “uma autovalorização da condição negra por emulação, equivalência ou oposição à condição branca” (PROENÇA FILHO, 1997: 175). Na medida em que isso é estabelecido como resposta a outra emulação essencialista (a condição branca), não se pode deixar de observar que tal procedimento, embora realce a especificidade do negro, o faz ainda na esfera discursiva dos agentes que o excluíram da vida social. Para visualizar essa contradição, basta notar que no aspecto formal a Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira, deliberadamente engajada, reitera preceitos do Realismo, cujo projeto de transformação social resultou, muitas vezes, em uma dicção reformista da ordem social do século XIX. Isso porque, apesar de denunciar as contradições da realidade, essa corrente literária se deparou com suas próprias restrições, evidenciando-se como um instrumento que isoladamente não levaria à efetivação da revolução social. Não obstante isso, a Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira sustenta uma linha programática, que circunscreve a pauta de criação, enredando o poeta numa trama na qual ele se vê obrigado a oferecer respostas imediatas às demandas extraliterárias. Nesse caso, a liberdade de experimentação soa como esteticismo alienante, ao invés de se apresentar como recurso para a formulação de novas configurações e interpretações do real.

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Além disso, a restrição do sentido de Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira reitera o já desgastado embate entre duas visões essencialistas da experiência poética. Na primeira, o essencialismo advém da percepção da poesia como fruto da realidade, o que significa dizer que fora da história a *práxis* poética não encontra meios para a sua instauração. Conforme essa ótica, uma obra como *Elegias de Duino*, de Rilke, estaria fadada ao ostracismo, uma vez que seu sentido brota, dentre outras possibilidades, de uma indagação metafísica, não necessariamente historicizada, sobre o destino do homem. A segunda visão, no entanto, pressupõe que na poesia não há lugar para os conflitos e as contradições da história ou, de outro modo, que a magia inaugural do verbo e o sopro da inspiração não tangenciam a precariedade das ações e dos desejos humanos. A julgar por isso, o livro *Mensagem*, de Fernando Pessoa, seria relegado ao limbo, já que, entre outros aspectos, o poeta captura nas cenas históricas os personagens a serem transfigurados em heróis, apesar das dúvidas e hesitações que os perturbam.

O sentido restrito de Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira fortalece a primeira visão, na medida em que o recorte ideológico (a necessidade de reescrever a história) elege *a priori* os referenciais poéticos (a trajetória específica dos afrodescendentes). Essa moldura, compartilhada por uma coletividade, se sustenta a partir do discurso de autores que “denominando-se ‘escritores negros de literatura negra’, consagram o termo e geram a publicação de livros e teses e a realização de encontros, conferências, simpósios de âmbito nacional e internacional.” (ALVES, 2002: 224). Esse entendimento do fenômeno poético se opõe à outra visão (afirmada como tradição no circuito literário ocidental, em geral, e no brasileiro, em particular), segundo a qual a poesia

não serve a nada e a ninguém, senão a si mesma, à expressão dos conhecimentos memoriais e imemoriais do poeta no passado, no presente e no futuro. Não suja suas sandálias nem em nosso hedonismo nem em nossas necessidades históricas. Seus caminhos se encontram para lá da história, no território ctônico do ser. Ela não trata do conhecimento lógico e conceitual, e só existe na verdade mera e limpa do conhecimento mágico, intuitivo, que não profere conceitos, até porque todo conceito é sempre um pré-conceito. (MOURÃO *Apud* MELLO, 2007: s/p)⁸

Insistir nesse confronto, num período em que o campo poético brasileiro se caracteriza pela pluralidade de tendências e estilos, significa aceitar não apenas a cristalização de modelos dualistas, pouco abertos ao diálogo, mas também a censura ao direito de experimentação de novas linguagens e métodos de criação. Além disso, a “tradição” que se desenhou em torno dessas duas visões essencialistas da poesia demonstrou o quanto elas se tocam e se influenciam, mutuamente, não obstante as polêmicas alimentadas por quem deseja separá-las a ferro e fogo. É justamente nesse cenário que, de nossa parte, detectamos um dilema da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira, que se articula como poética de ação política ao mesmo tempo em que reclama para si as características do texto criativo, dentre as quais se destacam a livre associação de idéias e a busca de novas formas de expressão.

Ao tratarmos desse assunto, assim como outros estudiosos, julgamos que o diálogo entre a poesia e a história estabelece e justifica o engajamento político como uma forma de visibilização da trajetória dos afrodescendentes no Brasil. Assim, o sentido político do engajamento confere pertinência a essa literatura que representa “um momento de afirmação da especificidade afro-brasileira (em termos étnicos, psicológicos, históricos e sociais)” (PEREIRA, 2007: 188). No entanto, a elevação dessa postura a um grau essencialista, segundo as lições da história, não nos isenta da responsabilidade pela emergência de referências estéticas autocentradas, passíveis de serem utilizadas como mídias de regimes políticos de exceção. Um antídoto contra essa possibilidade consiste

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em reconhecer no relativismo das práticas literárias um modo de inserir nas poéticas forjadoras de identidades outras solicitações estéticas e sociais, além de sua própria auto-afirmação.

Em se tratando da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira, a sua abertura para as problemáticas da Literatura Brasileira, em particular, e de outras literaturas, em geral, quando ocorre, reforça a constituição de um discurso metacrítico, que analisa não só os temas da escrita, mas, também, as contradições da própria escrita. Nessa direção, vale considerar as questões do projeto ideológico e do dilema identitário da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira como pontes para um diálogo mais denso com a Literatura Brasileira. No que diz respeito à primeira questão, a necessidade de definir temas e atitudes que tivessem as práticas do brasileiro e do afro-brasileiro, respectivamente, como referências conferiu à Literatura Brasileira e à Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira um caráter de fundação. Esse caráter, engendrado historicamente, criou condições para essas literaturas se organizarem como respostas a circunstâncias específicas, em geral, marcadas pela afirmação da nacionalidade e das identidades coletivas. A Literatura Brasileira e a Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira se encarregaram, cada uma por seu turno, de exibir ora uma imagem idealizada da nação brasileira, ora de uma nação afro-brasileira, contra-imagem daquela, porém, não menos idealizada.

Porém, a brasilidade e a afro-brasilidade, imaginadas como raízes da literatura de fundação, não se livraram do embate decorrente da lógica da “tradição fraturada”. Ou seja, a utopia da brasilidade relativiza-se mediante a constatação de que os “primeiros autores que pensaram e escreveram sobre o Brasil possuíam formação européia; e mesmo aqueles que se esforçaram por exprimir uma visão de mundo a partir de experiências locais tiveram de fazê-lo na língua herdada do colonizador.” Em função disso, a “marca de nossa identidade literária pode estar no reconhecimento dessa fratura, que nos coloca no intervalo entre a aproximação e o distanciamento das heranças da colonização.” (PEREIRA, 2007: 187-188). Por sua vez, a afro-brasilidade sofreu uma dupla relativização: primeiro, porque através de teorias como as da mestiçagem, por exemplo, foi matizada em prol de um concerto de identidades supostamente isento de conflitos; segundo, porque as circunstâncias históricas e as vivências estéticas apontam não apenas confluências entre as culturas africanas e as culturas afrodescendentes, mas também diferenças e contrastes.

No que se refere à segunda questão, os argumentos acima, obviamente, não solucionam o dilema de uma *práxis* literária como a Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira, que ao afirmar-se não recusa certo procedimento essencialista e ao tornar-se dialógica, mais do que expor suas contradições, se inclina para figurar como literatura sem demarcações de gênero ou etnia. Nas palavras de Maria Nazareth Soares Fonseca (2006: 13), o embate entre essas vertentes, que exige cada vez mais o alargamento de nossos horizontes críticos, está em curso, pois

[mesmo] entre os escritores que se assumem como negros, alguns deles muito sensíveis à exclusão dos descendentes de escravos na sociedade brasileira, existe resistência quanto ao uso de expressões como “escritor negro”, “literatura negra” ou “literatura afro-brasileira”. Para eles, essas expressões particularizadoras acabam por rotular e aprisionar a sua produção literária. Outros, ao contrário, consideram que essas expressões permitem destacar sentidos ocultados pela generalização do termo “literatura”. E tais sentidos dizem respeito aos valores de um segmento social que luta contra a exclusão imposta pela sociedade.

Na floresta de signos da Literatura Brasileira, o tigre (ou, se preferirmos, o discurso poético) ora expõe o seu compromisso com as causas políticas e sociais, ora se esquivava criticamente dessa tendência. Ou, ainda, ora sugere uma terceira margem, diferente

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daquelas oferecidas pelo engajamento ou pela recusa do engajamento. Sob essa perspectiva, o tigre se empenha na multiplicação dos sentidos teóricos e práticos da poesia e, portanto, das provocações a quem deseja apreender-lhe os movimentos. Diante disso, vale dizer o conjunto de textos críticos produzidos, até agora, a respeito dessa vertente literária pode ser considerado como uma tentativa de rastrear os movimentos do tigre. Dito de outro modo, através da leitura desses textos é possível arrolar argumentações que legitimam e/ou relativizam a existência da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira, bem como análises que procuram estabelecer vias alternativas a essas duas posturas críticas.

Embora algumas abordagens críticas ratifiquem o perfil da Literatura Negra e/ou Afro-brasileira, outras, no entanto, relativizam ou rechaçam essa identificação. Como se poderá notar, vez por outra, esses posicionamentos se insinuam dentro de um mesmo texto de crítica ou de criação, motivo pelo qual os debates sobre esse tema não devem ser entendidos nem como compartimentos estanques. Ao contrário, o aspecto deslizando do texto crítico e do texto criativo aponta para um processo estético e social complexo, que em decorrência de suas restrições e inovações se insere, de maneira inequívoca, na configuração da sociedade e da literatura brasileiras. Como frisamos, este bre artigo não pretende selar nenhum pacto ou consenso. Por um lado, isso significa admitir as contradições que o perpassam e que, ao mesmo tempo, justificam a sua escrita. Por outro lado, significa afirmar que o diálogo entre público, autores e críticos e o respeito à diversidade sócio-cultural propiciam um estado salutar para a emergência da vida literária. Em decorrência disso, a floresta de signos se apresenta não só como o *locus* de experiências estéticas mas, também, como o vasto território do humano, no qual a identidade é uma utopia, dentre outras, que as linguagens poéticas projetam sob a forma de desafio à nossa sensibilidade.

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NOTAS

¹Para mais detalhes sobre a relação entre os *Cadernos Negros* e o Quilombhoje ver a entrevista de Luís Silva (Cutí) em (PEREIRA, 2007: 292) e, também, o site <http://www.quilombhoje.com.br>

²Em de 2004, a Fundação Cultural Palmares patrocinou o documentário “Negricia/ Poesiação”, que registrou a trajetória do grupo Negricia, do Rio de Janeiro. Entre os entrevistados estão os poetas Éle Semog, Conceição Evaristo e Salgado Maranhão. Ver os sites http://www.palmares.gov.br/005/00502001.jsp?ttCD_CHAVE=242 e <http://www.poesianarede.com.br/Negricia1.htm>

³Outro momento de provável diálogo entre as dicções do CPC, dos poetas marginais e dos poetas afrodescendentes pode ser ilustrado pelo terceiro poema do livro *Flash crioulo sobre o sangue e o sonho*, publicado por Cutí, em 1987. Neste texto, os desafios enfrentados pelo sujeito fazem contraponto com acontecimentos políticos e sociais no Brasil e no exterior, entre as décadas de 60 e 80. A ênfase na denúncia da opressão e o estabelecimento do vínculo entre vida e poesia nos permitem colocar o poema em diálogo com alguns aspectos do CPC e da Poesia Marginal, respectivamente.

⁴Sobre as discussões em torno das expressões “literatura negra” e “literatura afro-brasileira” ver Zilá Bernd (1988: 20) e Maria Nazareth Soares Fonseca (2006: 11).

⁵Dentre as obras didáticas resultantes de pesquisas acadêmicas podemos citar: *Literatura Afro-brasileira*, de Florentina Souza e Maria Nazaré Lima, Salvador, 2006; *África e Brasil africano*, de Marina de Mello e Souza, São Paulo, 2006.

⁶Tradução nossa: “Mas este Negro a quem propõe-se romance é um ser de carne e de sangue: este duro olhar dura na obscuridade?” (ADOTEVI, 1998: 16)

⁷Tradução nossa: “Nos choques das palavras, em suas circunvoluções precisas e organizadas, descobre-se exatamente, [...], esta intenção que faz da negritude não uma exigência (como era no

seu início), mas um pensamento furiosamente onírico e por conseguinte imobilizador nas lutas que a África trava nesta hora da descolonização. É importante não perder de vista este desvio.” (ADOTEVI, 1998: 16)

⁸Este noção de poesia, sintetizada por Gerardo Mello Mourão a partir das reflexões de Benedetto Croce, está citada na quarta capa do livro *A infância do centauro*, do poeta alagoano José Inácio Vieira de Melo, São Paulo, 2007.

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**WORD VS. IMAGE IN AFRO-HISPANIC PEDAGOGY: AMBIGUITY AND
THE RACIAL IDENTITY OF THE *MAYORAL* IN TOMÁS GUTIÉRREZ
ALEA'S *LA ÚLTIMA CENA***

By Rudyard Alcocer

In Raymond Carver's classic short story from 1981, "What We Talk about When We Talk about Love," the characters engage in lively banter on the nature of love and relationships: a conversation that gradually disintegrates to a point at which it becomes unclear *what* the topic of their conversation was all along, or if any of the characters actually experienced the emotion or condition they purported to know and also critique. In the final analysis, the characters fail to arrive at a consensus regarding the nature of love. "Race," not unlike love, is one of those concepts that seems to slip through our hands the more we try to grasp it; it is, as Stuart Hall put it in 1996 at a famous lecture at London's Goldsmiths College, a "floating" signifier. According to him, such floating signifiers

gain their meaning not because of what they contain in their essence but in the shifting relations of difference which they establish with other concepts and ideas in a signifying field. Their meaning, because it is relational and not essential, can never be fully fixed, but is subject to the constant process of redefinition and appropriation. (Hall; see bibliography)

As much as one may hope to stabilize a meaning for the concept of race, such a meaning remains elusive. Roland Mitchell and Jerry Rosiek agree with Hall's contention: "...the signifiers of race have 'floated' free of any transcendental reality which might stabilize their meaning. In more concrete terms, it meant that although the signifiers of race are most often found on the body, there is nothing in the body that gives those signifiers meaning" (395). Granted, from a mainstream scientific standpoint (as opposed to fringe pseudoscientific theorists and commentators that continue to produce works like *The Bell Curve*), "race" as an observable and measurable way of categorizing people has long been discredited. Nevertheless, as Maureen Reddy and Bonnie TuSmith attest in *Race in the College Classroom*, "while scientists have concluded that humans constitute one race, in the United States people think and act as if we were made up of different and incompatible races" (5). Most colleges and universities, for example, structure their curriculum based on paradigms that can be linked – even if indirectly – to outdated racial categorizations. As the sciences and social sciences in their various divisions (including biology, genetics, and medical anthropology) have moved in one direction with respect to the authority once given to racial categories, in recent decades the academic curriculum has expanded to include what might be generally labeled "ethnic studies." This growing field (or, perhaps better stated, set of fields) includes – among others – Asian Studies, Latino Studies, and African-American studies, and constitutes a response (during the 1960s and 1970s) by often marginalized ethnic groups to a largely Eurocentric, conservative academic curriculum. The students who belonged to or were sympathetic to these communities wanted to learn about their people and their traditions instead of (or at the very least in addition to) the traditional Eurocentric curriculum reigning at the time. Interestingly, many of these new fields of study¹ engage with and in many ways constitute a direct response to racializing and sometimes racist ideologies. Nonetheless, as ethnic studies developed, it is important to underline that they did so not by upholding the old scientific categories of race, but rather by affirming the cultural pride of a community in all its complexity and in terms of its complicated interactions with other communities over time.

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My purpose in this essay is not to trace the origins and growth of ethnic studies as a whole or of any one of its branches in particular. Instead, I would like to explore some of the implications derived from a very specific case study involving one of my areas of teaching and research, namely Afro-Hispanic Studies, whose rise in recent years has coincided with the growing number of students in North American universities who to one degree or another and with a plurality of motives identify themselves as Afro-Hispanic. This case study, in my current manner of framing it, is of a pedagogical nature and pertains to the simple (or not so simple) matter of how to talk about race in the Afro-Hispanic literature classroom, particularly when referring to fictional characters whose racial identities can be significant not only within the contexts of their respective fictional tales, but also to the students who are attempting to interact in sophisticated ways with these tales. Simply put, as students in Afro-Hispanic classrooms attempt to arrive at productive engagements with the works in question, they are often eager to assess fictional characters' identity formations, including their claims on any particular racial identity. This eagerness on the part of students, I might add, is understandable, particularly in relation to the subject matter of Afro-Hispanic Studies classes as well as with respect to the students' motives for undertaking this course of study. Although such motives inevitably vary, they are almost always underpinned by an interest in attempting to understand the Afro-Hispanic world (or worlds) and its interactions with the accompanying cultural production. Consequently, the ways characters identify themselves – or are identified by others, including other characters as well as readers/viewers – seems of no small significance. Indeed, oftentimes an individual's engagement with and ways of responding to a given text can hinge greatly on how he/she reads a character's racial identity.

As a prefatory counterexample, I will be referring in my analysis at first to the novel *Tiempo muerto*, written by the Dominican Avelino Stanley and published in 1998. The heart of my argument, however, rests on my comments on the film "La última cena," released in 1976 and directed by the late Cuban filmmaker, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. My goal in the remainder of this essay is to outline some of the practical issues I have encountered when discussing race in the classroom in light of the aforementioned works, both of which – it must be stated – mount a challenge to oppressive racializing discourses just as both can be taught under the rubric of Afro-Hispanic Studies. My hope in doing so is to foster productive dialogue and debate that might lead to more nuanced ways of describing, particularly insofar as a classroom is involved – what is happening in the works in question, not to mention the theoretical implications that hinge on how we describe what is happening and who the characters are.

One of the first questions that can be asked is: can we in fact talk about race in the classroom? When, for example, we see (or design) courses on Afro-Hispanic literature and culture, don't they presuppose the existence of their object of study? In other words, are there not, out in the world, such things as Afro-Hispanic culture or cultures with their related literary and cultural production? The slipperiness of racial discourses notwithstanding, students want to know what makes one community or cultural product Afro-Hispanic and others not. In responding to these questions, one could go further by asserting that this diverse group of cultures and cultural products are not only "out in the world," but that they have also embodied such traits as political resistance, cultural pride, and a unity based – among other factors – on a shared African heritage and a common residence in Spanish America. But do these descriptors constitute race? No they do not, especially insofar as modern science is concerned; students, even if they arrive in an Afro-Hispanic classroom with firmly entrenched preconceptions involving the materiality and stability of "race" are quick to comprehend this important distinction. These descriptors might instead be best construed as being at least partially

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associated with an African phenotype that is shared in varying degrees by members of the Afro-Hispanic community; this community could also include those who identify themselves with it culturally and politically to a significant degree, genotypes or phenotypes notwithstanding. Similarly, when we talk about race in the Afro-Hispanic classroom, we might instead be intending to appeal to cultural traditions that have an African derivation or that are often associated with African peoples (polyrhythm and call and response choruses, to give but two examples). Consequently, then, the questions of whether or not we can, but also whether or not we should talk about race, seem to have answers, although ones that are not straightforward: yes, something should be talked about, but so long as it does not reify the concept of race in a way that suggests we are espousing any scientific accuracy or validity of the concept, an accuracy and validity that have long been discredited. One could, for example, explain the ways subtle race distinctions were affirmed by the Spanish colonial regime, and the social and cultural implications of these affirmations (there are, as we shall see, numerous studies on this matter). Other related, but no less important questions involve the often complex and sometimes very subtle ethnic dynamics of the classroom itself: is the instructor, for instance, a member of the ethnic group in question? What proportion of the students are members? What constitutes membership? Who can validate it? Similarly, are there competing, contradictory, and mutually exclusive ways of understanding membership?

I do not pretend to know the answers to the preceding questions, but I do know that issues surrounding these questions and answers often linger just below the surface of the conversation that takes place in a given course. Far from being a scientific, objective discourse, a classroom conversation in a course involving – either directly or indirectly – ethnicity can sometimes hinge on who is sitting in the classroom. To this end, Hall argues that

a great deal of what is said by [liberal] groups amongst themselves is predicated precisely on some such assumption, i.e., that some social, political, or cultural phenomenon, like the rightness of a political line or the merits of literary and musical production or the correctness of an attitude or belief can be traced to and explained by – and especially fixed and guaranteed in its truth by – the racial character of the person involved. (Hall)

Meanwhile, according to Reddy and TuSmith, the authority to teach African American studies, for instance, moves “in descending order from visibly black male to black female, then visibly white female to white male” (6). This hierarchy notwithstanding, Mitchell and Rosiek counter that “the meaning of a professor’s race is neither stable nor an unqualified source of credibility to students of the same race. That meaning changes depending on the context, the student, and the subject matter being discussed” (406). They provide by way of example the case of an African-American professor of African-American studies who had to walk the uneasy line of on the one hand providing a theoretical contextualization to racial dynamics within the hip-hop industry while on the other hand being sympathetic to a student who challenged him with the following question: “So are you telling us, as a black man who’s grown up in America, that race isn’t the central issue here?” According to Mitchell and Rosiek, the student’s question drew “a blanket of silence over the room. All eyes [were] on” the professor (401).

In light of this commentary, what I would like to describe is one of the challenges I have encountered when attempting to use language that is not rooted in racialist paradigms, particularly when this involves working with fiction that itself seems to hinge on collective differences in phenotype or the outward manifestation of hereditary, genetic markers. There are, I believe, important differences between talking

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about racial or ethnic differences as described in a written text and doing the same with respect to visual images. Unlike many written works of fiction that are used in the field of Afro-Hispanic studies, films (which are generally invaluable pedagogical tools as well as highly popular among students) often expect or rely on their viewers (who possess varying degrees of cultural literacy with respect to the text in question) to make assumptions about characters' racial identities (which can be *shown* without verbal commentary), even when such identities seem central to the story or the society and historical era they are depicting.

We can now turn briefly to Avelino Stanley's *Tiempo muerto* as the example² of written indicators of racial signification. This novel (whose title refers on one level to the "dead time" agricultural workers must contend with before the harvest and on a different level suggests a broader commentary on the social conditions it represents), both documents and denounces – through a variety of narrative strategies – the negative treatment historically given to *Cocolos* (i.e., migrants from the British West Indies) in the Dominican Republic; Stanley, in fact, is himself a Dominican descendant of migrants from the West Indies to that island.

We do not have to look far in the novel to encounter references to race and racial identification: The opening sentence of the novel asserts that "La historia de un negro no le interesa a nadie" (7); ["The story of a Black man interests no one"; translations are my own]. This, in point of fact, is the basis for main title of the only published critical study of the novel (see Webster in bibliography). The opening sequences of the novel recount the voyage of the narrator from his home island of St. Kitts to the Dominican Republic. This narrator, interestingly, is nameless, but not colorless, as he explains that "a un negro que llega en busca de mejorar su destino únicamente lo espera el trabajo" (8) ["the Black man who arrives looking to improve his destiny is met only with work"]. Furthermore, he likens his voyage to the infamous Middle Passage that his African ancestors endured: "Era el mismo sistema que nos acongojaba desde hacía más de cuatro siglos y sobre el mismo mar Caribe. Con los años sólo había cambiado la forma de cargar a los negros" (8) ["It was the same system that afflicted us for over four centuries and over the same Caribbean sea. With the years only the manner of carrying the Blacks had changed"]. Later, upon arriving in San Pedro de Macoris in the Dominican Republic, the narrator witnesses an exchange between two middlemen in charge of processing the transaction involving the West Indian, Cocolo laborers. These middlemen were fundamentally the same in the eyes of the narrator, "con la diferencia de que uno era blanco y el otro era negro" (12), ["the difference being that one was white and the other black"]. Shortly thereafter, he heard himself referred to by one of the middlemen: "Por el tono deduje que no era agradable. Yo sólo entendí la palabra cocolo" (13) ["By the tone I gathered that it was not a pleasant [reference]. I heard only the word *cocolo*"].

I taught *Tiempo muerto* a couple of years ago in a graduate seminar on the plantation and the legacy of slavery in the Hispanic Caribbean. Students responded favorably to the novel's accessible style and to its poignant descriptions of the injustices of the neo-colonial plantation system in the Hispanic Caribbean. While on one level, the preceding passages offer plenty to comment on in terms of their historical and cultural contexts, on another level, signifiers of race are – as a matter of speaking – spoon fed to the reader. One could counter in productive ways that the blackness the narrator asserts cannot be a monolithic concept, i.e., his way of identifying himself as a Black man may or may not be identical to other ways of making a similar identification. In other words, being Black for him is not necessarily equal to other ways of being Black in different historical, cultural, or personal contexts. After all, never before had the narrator been so aware of his color and ethnicity as when he disembarked in the Dominican Republic.

Furthermore, one also needs to take into account the added dimension suggested by Stanley's mission in writing this account of his ancestors, a mission informed by ideologically-sophisticated tools of ethnic solidarity, narrative craftsmanship, and historical analysis. The nameless narrator becomes, through this prism, the nameless narrator in the fiction Stanley has crafted: a fiction that in large part serves to describe and denounce the fate of the Cocolos in the Dominican Republic. More importantly, however, particularly in terms of the interest of this essay, he is – at least with respect to his self identification – a Black nameless narrator. He says so himself repeatedly throughout the novel, and other characters in the novel are identified with similar precision or conviction. While readers of *Tiempo muerto* (and students discussing it in class) may approach racial significations in the novel on a variety of levels, they know (or can read in the narrative) that certain characters are described as Black and others not. While teachers may take the discussion in a number of directions by offering, for instance, that, “yes, the narrator identifies himself as Black...now let's examine what this self identification means in this novel and what this means in terms of the context of the story, or in terms of the author's agendas,” students are invited in *Tiempo muerto* to structure their readings of the novel in light of these descriptors of race.

In some ways, *Tiempo muerto* may be unique in Afro-Hispanic³ letters with respect to its relative lack of ambiguity about “race” and skin color. Indeed, many writings associated with this tradition – whether primary or secondary – register the profound ambiguities surrounding social negotiations involving race. On the one hand, racial discourse was paramount in the Caribbean during the colonial era; Claudette Williams uses the term “pigmentocracy” to describe the prevailing social structure in the region (17). Without using the same term, Verena Martinez-Alier makes a parallel observation about nineteenth-century Cuba, which for her was “a class society whose mechanisms of socio-political reproduction were informed by an ideological conflation of heredity and inheritance, that is, of the genetic transmission of racial purity and the legal and economic perpetuation of social privilege and rank” (xiii). On the other hand, despite its crucial role in Hispanic Caribbean societies, race was by no means a rigid concept and instead approximated ambiguities akin to Hall's concept of race as a floating signifier. These ambiguities, in turn, register neuroses (especially but not exclusively) on the part of the dominant strata of Hispanic Caribbean society with regard to racial purity. Eric Williams, for example, cites the saying that a Spaniard could do anything in Cuba except have a Spanish son. The children, according to Williams, were “creoles, with a presumption – frequently not unwarranted – of mixed blood” (57). In this regard, Antonio Tillis has argued that the

caste system in Latin America created a false sense of identity linked exclusively to pigmentation...Although the ethnic background of the parents was the determining factor for social classification, skin color allowed one to maneuver between classes. Caste and class became synonymous in that the caste classification determined one's class standing, thus motivating many to deny African roots if their 'coloring' allowed them to do so...if a mulatto is phenotypically more 'Spanish-looking' than African, then that component of his or her racial composition is celebrated at the expense of the other. (105)

In contradistinction with the prevailing strategies of racial formation and identification in Stanley's novel, “race” in the Afro-Hispanic world appears to be and to have been anything but stable. Instead, it seems – based on the scholarship cited above – to have been characterized by constant presumptions and speculations about others' racial identities and backgrounds.

The plot, meanwhile, thickens: Vera Kutzinski signals the extent to which racial ambiguities in colonial Cuba also involved questions of gender and sexuality:

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...to speak of *black* female sexuality...is somewhat redundant since the body of the dark-complexioned woman appears to be the only available site of female sexuality in nineteenth-century Cuban literature. White women, that is, those of *known* 'purity of blood' and hence of social standing, were, almost by definition, exempt from such sexualization.
(30)

"Purity of blood," which Kutzinski places in quotation marks, preceded by her italicized "known," were fragile, unstable concepts in and of themselves; together, they amounted to a highly precarious couplet. Not only did the colonial masters need to ensure the purity of blood of their legitimate offspring, but they also needed to ensure that the knowledge of this purity be safeguarded and transmitted through official channels for posterity. Although written texts often reveal this often traumatic sense of racial fluidity and ambiguity,⁴ what is worth keeping in mind is that these texts, in their written expression, often specify a given person's or character's racial identity, as unstable and provisional as it may be.

Films, meanwhile, present a different challenge, and in some ways may more closely resemble than written texts the racial ambiguities at play in nineteenth-century Cuban society. I have used, for instance, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *La última cena* in several classes at a variety of levels. This film is a popular one in classes on the Hispanic Caribbean and/or Afro-Hispanic Studies for several reasons: it was directed by Gutiérrez Alea, perhaps the most important Cuban filmmaker ever, and is, as a possible result, widely known and commented. It is also a semi-fictional representation (that is, based on true events and supported by ample historical research) of conditions in the notorious *ingenios* or sugar plantations during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, that is, during the height of the plantation system in the Caribbean: a system that relied heavily for labor on slaves of African origin. Lastly, because it is a film, it can serve as a visual counterpoint to written texts that treat similar topics. *La última cena* is, ironically in light of this discussion, Gutiérrez Alea's first film shot in color, and is often grouped together or associated with a cycle of films made in the mid seventies by the Cuban Sergio Giral, all of which explore the African legacy in Cuba.

The film tells the story of a powerful and ruthless – but ultimately foolish – plantation owner, el Conde (based on the actual Conde de Casa Bayona), intent on teaching his slaves about the all-merciful and all-loving Jesus Christ. His pedagogical method is, to say the least, unorthodox and unprecedented within the fragile and volatile political environment of the plantation system: in order to teach his slaves about Christ's passion and self-sacrifice for the sake of humanity, el Conde organizes a reenactment of the last supper (thus the title), with himself as Christ at the head of the table and his slaves at his side as disciples. The delineations the film makes between the master class and the slaves are easy to follow: the latter, particularly the field slaves, are often wearing rags and have to pass through regular inspections and obey curfews, etc., in addition to performing the strenuous and dangerous tasks demanded of them as manual laborers in the cultivation of sugar. One character, however, is not so readily identifiable, and it is to him that I will now turn my attention. This character, Don Manuel, is the *mayoral* on the plantation, a position known in English as slave driver, or more euphemistically, overseer. For the purposes of this discussion, it should be noted that when I teach this film, I do not do so by foregrounding the figure of Don Manuel, let alone his racial identity. Instead, what often happens is that the discussion in class tends to gravitate toward him, perhaps on account of the slipperiness and indeterminacy of this identity.

In an effort to better understand Don Manuel and to sharpen my ability to lead classroom conversations that involve him, I studied some of the relevant historical material. It is worth noting, for example, that the famous Cuban historian Manuel

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Moreno Friginals served as historical consultant during the making of the film. It is to him that we can give credit for the film's historical authenticity and its many references to life on a plantation and the complex processes involved in sugar production. In his study, *The Sugarmill*, Moreno Friginals states the following about overseers like Don Manuel:

Overseers were always white, but there were black second overseers and rear overseers (*contramayorales*). The countryside is full of stories about blacks, but these men who managed slaves of their own blood are an especially long-standing tradition. Without trying to penetrate his psychological traumas, we may assert that the black assistant overseer must have been moved by deep ancestral fears. Above all, there was the fear of returning to the slave crew, fear of the overseer and the white master. Whipping others was insurance against being whipped himself... (152)

La última cena, however, makes no explicit distinctions with regard to possible ranks of overseers: Don Manuel is, quite simply, *el mayoral*. Given Moreno Friginals's involvement in the film, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that Don Manuel is white, especially if the film purports to authentically "document" plantation society and if we can take the character of Don Manuel at face value, i.e., that he was THE *mayoral* on the plantation.

There is, in the historical record, ample additional support for a reading of the film premised on a white *mayoral*. As early as the 1830's for instance, the British traveler James Edward Alexander observed that on the Cuban *ingenios* "overseers [were] unprincipled Canary-men..." and as such would have been easily distinguishable from their Black laborers (373). Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus argue in a similar vein (although within the context of Saint-Domingue) that "on the plantations themselves, the imbalance between the enslaved and the white masters and overseers was extreme" (13). Once again, the overseers seem to have been white. A comment by Ned Sublette, however, complicates matters: with similar reference to Saint Domingue, he observes that in this society, before the revolution that overthrew the plantation system, "masters rarely did the whipping themselves, of course. There was a black overseer for that. Masters *watched*" (140). Granted, Sublette makes no distinctions between overseers and assistant overseers, and the present effort to liken Cuban slavery with the variety that reigned in Saint Domingue could be problematic; nevertheless, it is telling that *La última cena* does draw historically compelling connections between the plantation system in Cuba during the late eighteenth century and the one in the French colony, many of whose skilled participants fled to Cuba after the slave uprising, taking with them ideas on how to organize a plantation (Monsieur Duclé, the sugarmaster in *La última cena*, being one such character).

Meanwhile, with direct reference to *La última cena* itself as well as *El otro Francisco*, a film by Giral produced in the same year, John Mraz concurs with the earlier descriptions of a white *mayoral* class: "The characterizations of the social roles of the rulers in these films are in accord with what is generally accepted in written history. The owners were usually absent, the *mayorales* were commonly white and sadistic, and the *contramayorales* were black" (118).

Franklin Knight adds precision to this distinction in the ranks of *mayorales* and *contramayorales* by stating that "some black men became *contramayorales* or assistants to the whites, an extremely prestigious position for any slave, and one which carried some authority with it" (71).

The problem with this reading, however, is that on the one hand, once again, there is no indication made in the film to suggest that Don Manuel was a *contramayoral*, as opposed to a *mayoral*. On the other hand, there are also compelling reasons to read Don

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Manuel as a mulatto character. In terms of the written record, for instance, it was not unheard of for some slave drivers to be the offspring of master and slave, as a possible (or probable) result of rapes. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's Sab is one such case. In a footnote within her eponymous novel, Gómez de Avellaneda offers the following explanation: "Mayoral se llama al director o capataz que manda y preside el trabajo de los esclavos. Rarísima vez se confiere a otro esclavo semejante cargo: cuando acontece, lo reputa éste como el mayor honor que puede dispensársele" (44) ["*Mayoral* is the name given to the director who directs and presides over the work of the slaves. Very seldom is this responsibility conferred upon a slave: when this happens, it is considered the highest honor"]. One could argue, based on this explanation, that Sab is meant to be taken as an isolated figure meant, on account of his extraordinary qualities, to be the exception that proves the rule of a white *mayoral* class. In an adjacent footnote, for instance, Catherine Davies (who edited this edition of the novel and who relied for her observation on José Servera's earlier edition) observes that "the overseer was usually white, and brutal. The 'contramayoral,' his assistant, was often a slave who administered the floggings and other punishments" (44). This comment reinforces the claim by Knight cited above.

Sab and other *mayorales* with a dual biological heritage would have been at least in part descendants of slaves, but the notion common in Spanish colonies of *pureza de sangre* (purity of blood) prevented their entry into the master class. As such, these *mayorales* (or Moreno Fraginall's *contramayorales*) would have – whether Black or mulatto – occupied an intermediate position between the two sides; they took instruction from the masters and then did whatever it took – often consisting in atrocities – to ensure that the master's will was obeyed by the slaves. Significantly, in *La última cena*, Don Manuel is also a Christ-like figure: during the climactic Good Friday slave uprising, he is made to suffer the punishments he had previously inflicted on the slaves: after being pilloried (his version of the cross), he is killed by the rioters. Gutiérrez Alea makes certain that we do not miss the symbolism by having el Conde affirm (with confirmation from the plantation's priest) that Don Manuel died at the very hour ("a esta misma hora") as Christ.

How do viewers – whether professional critics or students – respond to the figure of Don Manuel? This is where the discussion can get tricky. Part of the challenge of teaching this film is that the filmmaker allows – intentionally or not – some space for viewers to interpret Don Manuel (whether as *mayoral* or *contramayoral*; this distinction seems not to matter with this particular text) as being a mulatto. Reading Don Manuel as mulatto makes some sense with respect to possible interpretive avenues on the film, and other viewers (perhaps without conducting an in-depth historical study on the figure of *mayorales* within the Cuban plantation system) have read the film accordingly. Don Manuel as mulatto, for example, could be productively linked to the film's Christian symbolism: El Conde and the other survivors of the slave uprising, for instance, pledge to rebuild the burned-down church and dedicate it to the memory of Don Manuel. As such, one could argue that Don Manuel's mixed racial heritage as a mulatto can be linked to Christ's intermediate (or dual) position between humanity and divinity, and quite possibly that the figure of Don Manuel serves to allegorize the ethnically diverse and colorblind society Cuba would aspire to during the twentieth century in general and following the Castro revolution in particular, the latter being the epoch during which the film was produced. It is possible, moreover, to enlist the descriptions of other critics in the preceding assumption of Don Manuel's status as a mulatto. In a perceptive review Karen Jaehne writes, for example, that in *La última cena*,

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a runaway slave is sought, and the mulatto slave-drivers [including Don Manuel] invade the barracks with whips lashing and dogs barking...The slave master Don Manuel is the fulcrum between master and slave and is responsible for maintaining a balance of power...He is a menial in relation to the proprietor, a subjugator of slaves; portrayed as a plausible apostle of the Count, but not worthy of an invitation to supper. As a *mulatto*, he is inherently a Judas, and his duty is to carry out the inhumane acts weighing on the Count's conscience, yet to act as a buffer between the apparent savagery of the slaves and the psychic savagery of the count. (emphasis added, 48)

It is one matter to perceive, know, guess, or intuit that Don Manuel is mulatto and quite another to produce relevant evidence and thereby convince students (or other scholars) of the viability of this reading or any other reading of his racial identity. It is difficult, for instance, to make any meaningful statements about Don Manuel in terms of the actor who played him (Luis Alberto García). This would require extensive (if not impossible) research, and could be even more difficult in terms of the context of post-revolution Cuba, a society whose government programs have gone to great lengths (some would say very unsuccessfully) to diminish the importance of skin color. Giral has stated, for example, that "the Revolution makes it impossible for us [Cubans] to conceive of the question [of national identity] in those [race-based] categories. We have to retain the concept of race as an historical, social category, as a kind of individual manifestation like any other. But for example when a population census is taken in Cuba, there are no racial designations" (269). Elsewhere, Michael Chanan has argued that some Cuban actors, with specific mention of Luis Alberto García, display "a chameleon-like capacity, often aided by the cinematography, to become more Black or more Hispanic in their gestures and looks according to the character's needs" (365).

In many ways, in fact, *La última cena* offers a veiled critique on the racial hierarchies that characterized pre-revolutionary Cuba in general: a society in which white Cubans enjoyed greater opportunities than Cubans of African ancestry. Gutiérrez Alea's agenda in making *La última cena*, then, can be understood within the context of him being a filmmaker who received significant support from and access to Castro's regime. Nonetheless, my experience teaching this film in university settings has at times been eye opening, in ways that recall the breakdown at the end of Carver's story. Despite the historical ambiguity with regard to his racial identity in particular and that of the *mayoral* class in general, as well as the numerous clues suggestive of the possibility that Don Manuel is a mulatto, students are not always persuaded. Some see him as a mulatto, but many see him as a white Cuban, not unlike el Conde. Interestingly, however, sometimes when I describe Moreno Fraginals's observations on the whiteness of plantation overseers, some wonder why they cast a "non-white" (i.e., García) as Don Manuel. Surprisingly, a few students who were trying to comprehend the events the film depicts saw Don Manuel as Black. One student, for example, wanted to know why the slaves would turn on one of their own (i.e., in killing Don Manuel). I explained to this student the historical ambiguity surrounding the racial identity of *mayorales* while discussing them in general in terms of their position within the colonial plantation society in the Caribbean. Ultimately, however, racial categories that characters like Don Manuel may or may not belong to have seemed to be – at least in terms of some visual representations of Hispanic Caribbean society offered in contemporary North American university classrooms – a floating signifier that is remarkably difficult to pin down, to the point that one could best characterize it by its unwieldiness or ambiguity. In sharp opposition to Stanley's written racial descriptors in his novel *Tiempo muerto*, such descriptors or signifiers in *La última cena* were – in large part due to the filmic medium but also on account of ambiguities involving historical accounts of the plantation labor structure – very difficult to use with students. Ironically, it was difficult to talk about

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race in a film that purports to represent and critique racial dynamics in colonial Cuba. In a class on the Afro-Hispanic experience, it was possible to talk about these dynamics just as it was possible to talk about the film, but attempting to do both at the same time proved challenging.

This does not mean, however, that the film should be shelved and that any ambiguity surrounding the visual representation of race should be avoided. On the contrary, Gutiérrez Alea's film stands as a fascinating cultural document in its own right, both in its depiction of late-eighteenth-century Cuba and as a barometer of the cultural dynamics in the Cuba of the mid 1970's; furthermore, students enjoy it and engage with it productively, issues of racial ambiguity notwithstanding (or possibly *because* of these ambiguities). In terms, however, of the ways it addresses these issues of racial ambiguity with precision, in the best case scenario it can produce instructive conversations centering on the very same ambiguity (and, perhaps, on the ambiguous nature of racial discourses in general), while in the worst case it can lead to confusion on the part of students. This is all the more so the case in terms of comparisons between this film and other texts (i.e., *Tiempo muerto*) that draw sharper racial delineations.

To conclude, we have seen that various media or genres can have unique and profound implications for the Afro-Hispanic classroom, particularly with respect to popular student demands that characters be tagged with discrete markers of "race." A contextual consideration of the *mayoral* in Gutiérrez Alea's *La última cena* reveals that arriving with any precision at such markers is can be easier said than done. Interestingly, however, scholarship in the fields of Afro-Hispanic and Hispanic Caribbean Studies indicates that such racial ambiguities are more common than what students in North American classrooms might initially suspect. Although potentially an unwieldy instrument, a film like *La última cena* should in fact be used in the classroom insofar as it (purposefully or not) registers and underscores the racial ambiguity that has historically characterized the Afro-Hispanic world. Unlike Carver's characters, who finish their evening in a drunken stupor after failing to gain an understanding of love, the Afro-Hispanic classroom should revel in the racial ambiguities of films like *La última cena*.

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NOTES

¹Not all: one can point to counterexamples like Women's Studies and Gay Studies. This does not mean, of course, that these fields are somehow removed from any consideration of racial discourses.

²Although I did not select *Tiempo muerto* randomly and it is, in fact, a powerful and important novel, for the purposes of the contrast I am delineating between written and visual texts other texts could have taken its place. That stated, Stanley's novel is remarkable in the conviction with which it designates racial demarcations.

³It could be argued that Stanley's novel, insofar as it treats the fortune in the Dominican Republic of immigrants from the English-speaking West Indies, stretches (or broadens) the category "Afro-Hispanic."

⁴Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía de un esclavo* (1849) comes to mind, in which he describes his passage from being a pampered domestic servant too dark in skin color to being a field slave who – because he is mulatto – is lighter than (and rejected by) his fellow slaves. Similar ambiguities pervade Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841) and Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1882).

PARATEXTES ET PRÉ-TEXTES: TRADUCTION DE LA LITTÉRATURE FRANCOPHONE ANTILLAISE EN ANGLAIS

Par Nadège Veldwachter

Si nous examinons le processus de 'compréhension' des êtres et des idées dans la perspective de la pensée occidentale, nous retrouverons à son principe l'exigence de cette transparence. Pour pouvoir te 'comprendre' et donc t'accepter, il me faut ramener ton épaisseur à ce barème idéal qui me fournit motif à comparaisons et peut-être à jugements. Il me faut réduire. Accepter les différences, c'est bien sûr bouleverser la hiérarchie du barème. Je 'comprends' ta différence, c'est-à-dire que je la mets en rapport, sans hiérarchiser, avec ma norme. Je t'admets à existence, dans mon système. Je te crée une nouvelle fois. Mais peut être nous faut-il en finir avec l'idée même du barème. Commuer toute réduction.

Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la relation*.

Du fait de sa présence simultanée dans la culture nationale française portant encore à ce jour les stigmas d'un lourd passé colonial, et de son intégration au processus de la mondialisation par le truchement d'opérations de traduction, l'on peut avancer que la question de la réception de la littérature francophone antillaise ne relève pas de la simple critique littéraire, mais procède tout autant d'une pensée politique. En effet, les modalités selon lesquelles des agents littéraires aussi divers que les éditeurs, critiques académiques et journalistiques participent à la promotion et circulation du livre franco-antillais, déterminant ainsi sa réception, sont devenues depuis quelques années un sujet d'intérêt croissant dans la recherche postcoloniale. Les travaux de Françoise Lionnet et Shu-mei Shih (2005), Emily Apter (2005), ou encore Sandra Bermann (2005), portant sur la mondialisation comme facteur décisif dans la reconfiguration du monde littéraire ont pour résultante l'observation critique du développement constant d'un marché favorisant la circulation à rebours des biens littéraires de la « périphérie » vers le « centre » par un processus de translation dont la mission est de « représenter » cette génération de textes. Dans le cas présent, il sera question d'analyser les corollaires de la formation de nouvelles communautés imaginaires, pour reprendre le terme de Benedict Anderson, autour des romans de Maryse Condé, Simone Schwarz-Bart et Raphaël Confiant, entre autres, grâce à leur traduction du français à l'anglais. Ce contexte « traductif » servira de matrice au discours paratextuel littéraire, hérité de Gérard Genette, que je propose de circonvier afin d'analyser les techniques de recontextualisation du roman franco-antillais dans le système littéraire anglo-américain. Je considérerai le paratexte et l'épitéxte suivant les classifications qu'en donne Gérard Genette dans *Seuils* (1987). Le paratexte, composé de préfaces allographes – écrites par quelqu'un d'autre que l'auteur – viendra principalement des œuvres en traduction anglaise, et l'épitéxte constitué de comptes-rendus sera pris de revues académiques ou journalistiques selon le besoin. Les circonstances étudiées sont celles de l'instabilité et des glissements sémantiques qui accompagnent la traduction du français à l'anglais des œuvres des auteurs antillais mentionnés ci-dessus. Il ne s'agit pas d'un travail sur la justesse de ces traductions, mais sur l'interprétation et la réception de ces auteurs telles qu'elles sont articulées dans les préfaces et comptes-rendus qui, à leur tour, prennent appui sur la médiation linguistique qu'est la traduction. Ainsi, en adoptant les logiques discursives qui ont servi à définir un savoir à propos de la littérature francophone antillaise, je ferai ressortir les problématiques qui découlent d'une lecture du roman antillais qui le positionne au sein des institutions littéraires, tant francophones qu'anglophones, comme vitrine testimoniale d'une réalité substituée à l'imaginaire antillais. La progression de cette étude se fera suivant un parallélisme qui montrera les

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modalités selon lesquelles les schémas du discours paratextuel constituent un appendice double: l'un de représentation et de recommandation dans la mise en relief de la capacité du récit à marquer des rencontres intertextuelles; l'autre, de nature empiriste, tendant à vouloir fusionner les deux entendements politique et symbolique du terme représentation.

L'entrée des livres francophones caribéens dans la sphère académique anglophone requiert, la plupart du temps, la médiation d'une traduction. Les textes choisis pour notre étude proviennent d'écrivains antillais connus pour leur popularité non seulement auprès des éditeurs de littérature française mais aussi pour faire partie de ce qui prend de plus en plus la forme d'un canon alternatif de textes tiers-mondistes dans les universités américaines, parmi lesquels on retrouve des auteurs tels Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, ou Wole Soyinka. Le problème qu'amène le transfert linguistique du français à l'anglais dans le cas présent, est l'effacement total ou partiel du travail que font les auteurs minoritaires lorsque, s'inspirant librement de mouvements venus d'ici et d'ailleurs ils laissent dans leurs créations les traces vivantes de ce qu' Homi Bhabha nomme le « tiers espace culturel, » et procèdent ainsi à l'élaboration de systèmes littéraires témoins d'une hybridité féconde. Loin de se cantonner à une manœuvre simplement stylistique, ce travail de dénaturalisation d'une esthétique imposée remontant à l'époque coloniale s'accompagne de résonances politiques qui influent grandement sur les formations identitaires tant au niveau personnel que collectif. Dans le cas des écritures francophones, on retrouve ce travail *de* et *dans* la langue française chez la plupart des auteurs africains, maghrébins et antillais. Relever le jeu des techniques de cette démarche lors de l'étude de ces écrits en traduction devient alors essentiel car, comme nous le verrons, lors de la déterritorialisation de ces textes, la transmission de cette manœuvre est passible d'un effacement par le traducteur que ce soit dû à des carences linguistiques, voire même, à un refus de faire passer cette étrangeté originale du texte source dans la culture d'accueil. En partant d'une perspective purement linguistique, il résulte de ces modifications une compréhension partielle et biaisée pour des lecteurs n'ayant pas accès à la version originale, et pour qui un texte autre a été inventé. Parmi ces lecteurs l'on peut compter les critiques journalistiques et universitaires qui servent de seconds intermédiaires entre le texte traduit et les lecteurs de sa nouvelle terre d'accueil.

L'aperçu des différentes méthodes de traduction et les interventions idéologiques avouées de certains traducteurs est un préambule non négligeable afin de comprendre les négociations qui ont lieu lors des transferts de langues qui se trouvent en amont de toute critique préfacielle ou de compte-rendu. Nous pouvons citer d'ouverture Maryse Condé qui entretient un rapport paradoxal avec la traduction de ses propres œuvres et avoue lors d'une rencontre avec Emily Apter:

I recognize that my works have to be translated, but they are really not me. Only the original really counts for me. Some people say that translation adds to the original. For me it is another work, perhaps an interesting one, but very distant from the original...When knowledge of the context is insufficient, translators must be counted as enemies. (Apter 91)

Et Condé de continuer en décrivant comment les éditeurs américains « tend to see everything in black and white... my books are concerned less with race and much more with the complexities of overlapping cultures, with conditions of diaspora, and with cross-racial, cross-generational encounters » (93). En effet, dans une étude panoramique des œuvres de Condé, Leah Lewitt relève que la force de l'auteur tient en sa capacité à mettre en scène les polémiques entre pays et cultures à travers des aventures individuelles. L'écrivain s'intéresse à la manière dont les Antilles et le reste

du monde se définissent mutuellement tout en gardant leur spécificité. Ce nouveau cosmopolitisme comparatif et parfois conflictuel permet à l'auteur d'éviter les « politiques de l'identité » (45) et les problèmes d'un universalisme périmé. La position de Condé par rapport au processus de traduction est d'autant plus surprenante car ses romans bénéficient, pour la plupart, des soins particuliers d'un traducteur qui se trouve être son époux, Richard Philcox. Afin d'élargir autant que se peut le lectorat américain de Maryse Condé, Philcox ne cache pas les choix idéologiques qui guident son travail. Ses explications méritent d'être citées dans leur totalité:

D'une certaine façon c'est la recréation d'un texte. Quand je traduis j'ai en plus, à l'esprit le lecteur. Je sais qu'il y a beaucoup de gens qui ne sont pas d'accord avec cette approche. Mais je suis pour la transparence. Je suis un peu 'market-driven' pour les romans de Maryse [...] je trouve justement que ses oeuvres ne sont pas toujours très transparentes en français. A mon avis il y a beaucoup de choses chez Maryse qui sont très ésotériques, des références culturelles, des noms en créole. Elle dirait qu'il n'est pas mauvais de faire travailler le lecteur[...] Si j'étais sûr que je m'adressais à un public averti, des universitaires ou des professeurs, peut-être que je resterais beaucoup plus fidèle à cette opacité. Mais comme je voudrais élargir le lectorat, j'essaie de rendre le texte plus transparent sans déformer le texte. J'essaie simplement de clarifier les choses. (Kadish 751)

Poursuivant cette même logique de « transparence », la critique Françoise Massardier-Kenney relève des modifications d'ordre structurel dans de multiples traductions de Condé qui ont un impact beaucoup plus profond sur la lecture de ses textes. La critique explique comment Victoria Reiter, traductrice de *La vie scélérate* en 1992, réécrit avec beaucoup de liberté un grand nombre de passages. Les simplifications qui coupent les phrases complexes en tronçons plus courts et plus simples, les changements d'ordre de phrases et les restructurations de paragraphes, contribuent à un ensemble axiomatisé qui affecte non seulement la construction de la langue mais aussi l'agencement même du manuscrit lorsque les notes de bas de pages sont effacées. Pour Massardier-Kenney ces altérations concourent à produire l'image d'un écrivain multiple, « marqué d'un côté comme un auteur étranger qui exige un certain travail, de l'autre marqué par un exotisme familier » (253). L'hégémonie de la langue et de la culture remise en question par les jeux de niveaux de langue et l'utilisation des notes de bas de pages dans la version française, est réinstaurée dans la version américaine où, au lieu d'être confronté à une langue qu'il ne connaît pas, le lecteur a accès à une parole normalisée.

Si, ainsi que le prône Carolyn Perkes, nous suivons l'exemple de Henri Mitterand et considérons la préface comme « document sur la théorie romanesque » et « réceptacle naturel de l'idéologie » simultanément, l'étude de ce texte préliminaire nous éclairera sur les techniques de re-contextualisation du roman antillais dans le système linguistique anglo-américain.¹ Première instance de naturalisation d'une œuvre étrangère dans un nouveau contexte d'accueil, la préface a pour but principal de garantir à un auteur une réception précédée de recommandations élogieuses. Cependant, en tant qu'introduction et commentaire critique inaugural, la problématique du discours préfaciel peut aussi se formuler à partir de son pouvoir à orienter la lecture du texte et à s'instaurer en lieu stratégique où l'intention interprétative du préfacier peut être conçue comme un accessoire communicatif anesthésiant le jugement critique du lecteur ne serait-ce que de manière provisoire. En ce qui concerne l'étude de la préface des textes francophones, les recherches d'André Patient Bokiba (1991) et de Richard Watts (1998-2005) sur les auteurs africains durant les périodes coloniales et des indépendances ont fait date. Chacun à sa manière, Bokiba et Watts retracent les modes d'interprétation et de réception dont jouissent l'auteur africain et son texte dans un

contexte français métropolitain. A travers une approche Bourdieusienne, André Patient Bokiba argumente de manière fort éloquente la manière dont la légitimation du texte principal grâce au texte liminaire est d'autant plus fructueuse que la réputation du préfacier est grande. Et ceci à tel point que, « certains éditeurs font une subtile exploitation publicitaire qui consiste dans une sorte de régime co-auctorial, à inscrire sur la couverture du livre, à côté du nom de l'auteur, celui de son préfacier... Le lecteur n'entre dans le jeu préfaciel que proportionnellement à la position qu'occupe le préfacier dans la culture littéraire personnelle » (Bokiba 78). Nous en avons pour exemple la mention en couverture de *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, le nom d'Angela Davis, l'une des plus grandes activistes féministes de droits sociaux des années 60 aux Etats-Unis en introduction au livre de Condé, à une époque où l'auteur construisait encore son lectorat anglophone.

En partant de Roland Lebel et René Maunier, en passant par les célèbres préfaces de Breton, Gide, Sartre, à celles de Senghor et Djébar, Richard Watts, quant à lui, fait une généalogie de la forme et du contenu de ces 'petits textes à prétention idéologique.' La question principale guidant Watts pourrait être résumée de la manière suivante: comment appréhender une différence culturelle lorsque celle-ci a été instaurée par un système de valeurs qui postule cette différence comme incommensurable? Pour les auteurs africains qu'étudie Watts, la clé d'ouverture à un lectorat européen repose sur le « parrainage » que procurent des écrivains français ayant déjà établi leur renommée dans l'hexagone. La question que je poserai à mon tour est sous quelle égide une nouvelle forme de « parrainage » de la littérature postcoloniale est-elle possible dans le circuit d'un marché du livre en traduction publié dans le monde anglophone? Mais encore, si la préface se présente effectivement dans une économie du don et est une forme de maîtrise du préfacier sur son lectorat, comment concevoir les répercussions des traductions multiples d'un même auteur, les méthodes cachées ou avouées des traducteurs réinventant le texte original dans un esprit de transparence? Et enfin, quelle est la portée du porte-à-faux dans lequel se trouve la littérature caribéenne au carrefour d'une théorie de la créolité prônant la localité comme matrice de l'imaginaire et le besoin de s'exporter pour survivre dans un monde de conglomerats de l'édition?²

Passons maintenant à l'étude des diverses instances où les critiques utilisent à contre-emploi le texte préfaciel, si l'on tient celui-ci comme seuil d'un rapport dialogique à la parole de l'Autre. Je m'intéresserai tout d'abord à une critique qui se dédouane d'une certaine forme de suspension volontaire d'incrédulité, en ce qu'elle cherche à faire correspondre ordres mimétique et diégétique dans les structures narratives mises à l'étude.

Ecrit par Simone Schwarz-Bart et lauréat du prix littéraire du magazine *Elle*, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée miracle* (1972) est l'autobiographie fictive d'une vieille Guadeloupéenne, Télumée. Debout dans son jardin, goûtant à ses derniers jours, la protagoniste entreprend de partager avec le lecteur une remontée généalogique matrifocale de la famille Lougandor, savamment mise en parallèle avec les changements de la société antillaise depuis la fin de l'esclavage en 1848 jusqu'à la Guadeloupe moderne et départementale des années 1960. Schwarz-Bart brosse le portrait d'un personnage féminin qui fait montre d'une politique de survie résiliente face aux aléas de l'histoire et de la société post-coloniale en puisant dans l'apport culturel et magico-religieux de sa grand-mère profondément ancré dans les croyances Africaines et l'environnement naturel local. Voici, en ses propres termes, la description que fait l'auteur de son héroïne :

Télumée Miracle est un hommage à une femme de Goyave (commune de la Guadeloupe)... Je l'ai connue pendant mon enfance... J'étais constamment chez cette

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femme. J'ai décidé de faire un roman du jour où elle a disparu... Elle se sentait incomprise par la jeunesse sans dons qui n'avait pas d'oreille pour les vieux... Je sentais qu'elle se demandait comment cela serait après elle... Sa vie résumait toute une fresque, toute une tranche de la vie des Antilles... en réalité ce n'est pas sa vie, mais une collecte de moments privilégiés, de moments de son enfance ; c'est une espèce de mémoire que j'ai voulu restituer... (Toumson 14-15)

Bien que Schwarz-Bart révèle dans cet entretien l'origine de son personnage, dans l'introduction à la traduction de l'œuvre par Barbara Bray en 1982, Bridget Jones ne peut s'empêcher d'effectuer un mouvement essentialiste dans sa critique préfacière, malgré l'intention compli-menteuse :

She takes the character of an old woman who could merely be seen and taken for granted, an old woman offering peanuts for sale by a country church. Her novel makes that woman exist for us as a unique and irreplaceable person. For a writer who is herself highly sophisticated and much traveled, it is an achievement to have thought herself into the experience of an old woman peasant who has spent her life in a remote district of Guadeloupe, and to have found a style in which to tell the story from inside, as a first-person narrative. (Jones iv)

Le fait qu'un écrivain aussi cosmopolite que Simone Schwarz-Bart ait pu se mettre dans la peau d'une vieille Antillaise ainsi que l'on en trouve devant les églises ou les places de marché aux Antilles, semble surprendre et que l'auteur parvienne de surcroît à en esquisser une image qui ne trahit pas l'utilisation de la première personne du singulier « je » paraît un acte digne d'être relevé. En voulant faire communiquer de manière consubstantielle le « je » du narrateur et le « je » de l'auteur, ce qui déroge aux lois les plus élémentaires de l'instance narrative décrite par Genette en dehors de toute prétention autobiographique, la préfacière se donne pour but de souligner le génie de l'écriture de Schwarz-Bart : « It is an achievement to have thought herself into the experience of an old woman peasant. » Ce désir de vouloir faire coïncider dans son ontologie un personnage avec l'auteur du livre rappelle cette sorte d'allégorisation à laquelle Fredric Jameson fait référence dans son célèbre article « Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism. » En effet, en quoi est-ce que Schwarz-Bart mettant en scène un personnage autodiégétique (à la fois narrateur et protagoniste) diffère-t-elle d'un André Gide racontant la vie d'un curé dans la *Symphonie Pastorale* (1919) ou encore d'Albert Camus décrivant un pied-noir désabusé dans *L'Étranger* (1957) et leur choix de techniques de focalisation zéro pour leurs narrations ?

Ce même mouvement d'amalgame entre le 'montrer' et le 'raconter' se retrouve dans un compte-rendu de *Traversée de la Mangrove* (1989) de Maryse Condé. Aux yeux de la critique Marie Naudin,

Le roman souffre un peu de didactisme dans le sens que les aphorismes y abondent et que, la mort de Francis Sancher créant une *catharsis*, les bonnes résolutions des protagonistes y pullulent. La personnalité de Maryse Condé se profile à travers le texte : n'a-t-elle pas des points communs avec ce Sancher ? N'est-elle pas une sorte d'étrangère revenue au pays après de longues années d'absence et beaucoup de voyages ? N'a-t-elle pas cette même sorte de désenchantement que son héros vis-à-vis de certaines méthodes révolutionnaires, cette même tendresse indulgente pour le petit peuple ? Ne voit-elle pas d'un œil critique les atouts et les manques du pays, les réformes destinées à l'améliorer ? (168)

Signalons que *Pluie et vent* et *Traversée* sont considérés les plus « antillais » de la littérature francophone caribéenne aussi bien dans le contenu de l'histoire que dans la

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forme employée. Dans les deux cas les représentations culturelles que donnent les auteurs de leur environnement sont perçues à travers des approches critiques ethnographiques où l'auteur est confondu avec son personnage et vice-versa. Dans ce contexte, l'équation entre la subjectivité de l'écrivain et celles de ses personnages ne laisse plus lieu à la distance fictive de rigueur entre auteur et personnage du genre romanesque, mais au contraire fait place à une métamorphose proche de la transsubstantiation dans le cas de Schwarz-Bart, et à une auto-fiction pour Condé, qui transforment le génie créateur de ces écrivaines en représentation fidèle d'une identité et d'un réel collectifs. A une époque où les politiques d'identité ont été répudiées dans la théorie littéraire, il est surprenant de voir cohabiter dans ces discours liminaires une critique de l'essentialisme aux côtés d'une approche analytique où l'identité sociale, sexuelle, ou encore l'expérience vécue de l'auteur déterminent son statut et rôle dans une littérature mondiale.³ A l'instar des recherches menées par Jana Sequoya-Magdalo sur la littérature amérindienne, il n'y a qu'un pas vers la conclusion selon laquelle,

Rather than recognizing essentialist inscriptions as a strategy to locate the work and to set the terms of its reception, many scholarly interpreters of Native American fiction seem to assume that the writer, however explicitly bicultural, however modern, is nevertheless transparent at some preconscious level, that is, really *is* the narrative position taken up for the sake of participating in the discursive conditions of the genre. (93)

Le glissement de la subjectivité de l'auteur à celle de son personnage a aussi été relevé par Richard Watts chez Patrick Chamoiseau dans *Bibliographie des derniers gestes* (2002). Cependant, loin de comprendre ce mouvement comme la fusion d'une extériorité réelle avec celle d'un personnage fictif, Watts l'interprète comme une stratégie narrative qui permet de mieux rendre compte d'une part, de la prise de conscience chez l'auteur des limites de son art, et d'autre part, de la quasi impossibilité à traduire à travers le langage la complexité de la réalité, ce qu'il résume en ces termes :

The first-person singular of narration passes on several occasions imperceptibly from Chamoiseau to Bibidji, suggesting the shared subjectivity of the writer/ ethnographer and his character/subject. This frequent shifting of perspective and voice is of a piece with the novel's blending of the historical record and authorial invention. (121)

L'on peut dire que Schwarz-Bart, tout comme Condé et Chamoiseau, explore les ramifications de ce que veut dire être écrivain aux Antilles, de faire la collecte des histoires orales et de devoir superposer aussi harmonieusement que se peut la représentation d'une communauté à l'imaginaire de la construction narrative. Ainsi, de manière paradoxale, face à des textes qui déjouent la fonction référentielle du langage, la justesse de la représentation se mesure tout de même trop souvent à l'adéquation de l'écrit romanesque au référent existentiel. C'est donc la problématique de la représentation et de la reconstruction du réel qui se trouve au coeur de l'ensemble du discours préfaciel et épitextuel dans une sphère anglophone que j'étudierai dans cette seconde étape.

Dans la continuation de son commentaire analytique du texte de Schwarz-Bart, Jones fait référence à d'autres critiques qui relèvent une autre problématique qui s'attache à un « lack of militancy, » dans le récit versant dans un exotisme familier :

Simone Schwarz-Bart has also been taxed with lack of militancy, and accused of sharing the passivity of her women characters who accept and even glorify ill-treatment. The text

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has been found too rambling and lacking in dramatic pace and tension to retain the readers' interest, or too prettily 'exotic.' (xv)

Ce manque de résistance marquée, affirme Mireille Rosello dans une analyse très pertinente de *Pluie et Vent*, se retrouve aussi chez les critiques universitaires français qui « reprochent à ce récit un fatalisme peu orthodoxe à une époque où la littérature noire semble se donner pour mission de représenter et d'encourager toutes les formes de révolte possible contre les colonisateurs » (73). En contre-pied à ces commentaires, Ernest Pépin avance la probabilité des critiques ayant questionné le texte « non pas en tant que texte littéraire, mais comme une analyse sociologique, voire comme une thèse politique » (Pépin cité dans Ndiaye 116). Ces divergences d'approches soulèvent la question de la nécessité de la « prise directe » des romans antillais avec la politique ou encore l'historique, ce qui amènerait les auteurs à prôner la révolte ou tout acte de résistance de manière performative comme seule forme valide de démonstration d'appartenance à la littérature antillaise.

A l'instar de Pépin, Rosello montre que loin de considérer le texte comme une apologie de la résignation, de la survie à n'importe quel prix, et de « l'endurance féminine, » Schwarz-Bart propose une double critique et de l'héroïsme et de la soumission. Soutenant que les habitudes idéologiques traditionnelles mé-connaissent les formes originales de résistance négligées par la théorie, Rosello décrit la survie de Télumée comme un art, un combat inachevé dans un contexte où croire que mourir est une forme préférable à la survie. En tirant des exemples de Schwarz-Bart, mais aussi de la tradition noire américaine avec *Sula* (1996) de Toni Morrison, Rosello arrive à démontrer dans quelle mesure transposer des mythes d'héroïsme et de révolte hérités du colonisateur sont des pièges dangereux pour le sujet aliéné. Qu'il s'agisse des personnages *Sula* de Morrison, de Ti Paille ou d'Ambroise de Schwarz-Bart, c'est au prix d'une auto-mutilation ou d'une mort vaine que chacun des personnages espère atteindre sa libération. Rosello demande : « Est-il vraiment présumé que le seul choix digne d'un homme est de choisir son genre de mort, ou d'auto-destruction? N'y a-t-il pas simplification outrancière à supposer que le colonisé n'a d'autre choix que le suicide s'il veut sortir de la bestialité où le confine le colonisateur » (82). Malgré toute la séduction du schéma où en se détruisant l'on fait entrevoir à l'autre ce que l'on pourrait lui faire subir, on se perd dans une pulsion mimétique aux conséquences désastreuses. L'on pense encore à Delgrès et L'Ouverture. Télumée choisit donc de parler, de faire entendre son histoire, qui contrebalance le dérisoire et la fragmentation qui caractérise l'Histoire du colonisé. Cette prise de la parole est non seulement actualisée par l'existence du livre lui-même, mais aussi par une mise en abyme de ce réflexe dans la trame du roman.

Cette tension entre adéquation référentielle et narrative se retrouve également dans la plupart des discours épitextuels sur les romans de Raphaël Confiant. Juris Silenieks, dans son compte rendu de *Mamzelle libellule* (1995) fait remarquer que:

For the French reader Confiant has added notes and explanations for the creole terms that are abundantly used in the text. It is a bit ironic that the French version of this Creole text reads like a translation, without that verve of authenticity that is the hallmark of Confiant's prose in French... sometimes it seems that the shift in language codes has weakened the impact that the text could have exerted. (854)

Un deuxième exemple de la tension au sein de l'adéquation entre texte et hors-texte générée par les critiques, est la réaction de Chris Waters qui cherche à comprendre les motivations de Mano, personnage principal de *La lessive du diable*, par le biais d'une analogie supputée avec l'état d'esprit de Confiant : « Of the many possible reasons for

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Mano's act, the main one may be his exasperation at the 1940 status quo, reinforced one may say, by that of Confiant, born in 1951 but viewing that period with anger» (794).

Il est intéressant de voir que la réception de ces romans se fait sous le sceau de la médiocrité linguistique et du désillusionnement politique car l'intérêt de ce texte se situe bel et bien au niveau linguistique et politique, mais pour des raisons tout autres: le texte *La lessive du diable*, supposé être une traduction de *Jik dèyè do Bondyé* n'en est pas une. Sous couvert d'une « auto-traduction » Confiant profite de cet exercice traductif pour remettre en question ces médiations culturelles et linguistiques tenues pour acquises en créant un texte « nouveau » pour un lectorat franco-français. Ainsi, la fascination qu'engendrent les textes pour les lecteurs bilingues est alors non pas l'adéquation du résultat de la traduction, mais en revanche le processus qui la fait naître. Chez Confiant la présence de plusieurs modes de traduction tantôt rebelles tantôt conformes dans la trame du même texte est particulièrement significative pour comprendre la métaphore spéculaire qui unit ces deux textes à travers deux épistèmes différents. Condensation, amplification, changement de sexe, transpositions diégétiques, néologismes, contribuent à établir une relation de ressemblance dans la différence entre texte-source et texte cible, ceci rendant leur lecture simultanée presque obligatoire sous peine de tomber dans les contre-sens interprétatifs illustrés par Silenicks et Waters.

Contrairement à la critique de *Pluie et vent*, le roman de Maryse Condé *I Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (1992) bénéficie d'un accueil plus que chaleureux de la part de la critique américaine en général et de la part de sa préfacière Angela Y. Davis. Si le premier roman était accusé de ne pas s'engager au regard des luttes de la diaspora noire, *I, Tituba*, est acclamé selon les termes suivants,

This historical novel refuses to be confined within the ideological limits of the era during which it unfolds. Tituba engages in recurring mediations on her relationship – as a black woman- to feminism. In this sense, her voice can be viewed as the voice of a suppressed black feminist tradition, one that women of African descent are presently reconstituting – in fiction, criticism, history, and popular culture. (x)

Cette réception élogieuse s'explique en partie par le fait que Condé construit dans la structure même de son texte, des éléments permettant qu'il soit lu de manière à interpeller la communauté noire américaine et la critique féministe. Reprenant un personnage historique et lui réinventant une histoire narrée de sa propre voix, Condé prend place dans un mouvement qui consiste pour les auteurs colonisés à reprendre des canons européens et d'y introduire une variante qui est celle de la mise en relief de la subjectivité du *subaltern*. On en veut pour exemple *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1992) où la Dominicaine Jean Rhys donne conscience à la Bertha de *Jane Eyre* (1997), le Caliban de Shakespeare, qui prend la parole contre son maître dans *Une tempête* (1974) de Césaire, ou encore quelques années plus tard Condé elle-même qui refait les landes anglaises d'Emily Brontë dans *Wuthering Heights* (1991) à la manière créole où Heathcliff devenu Razyé trouve enfin vengeance. La différence de Tituba ne tient pas du fait de ne pas avoir fait partie de la littérature avant l'intérêt que Condé lui apporte, mais du silence de l'Histoire à propos de son histoire, ce qui est tout aussi parlant. Cette prise de parole, qui est une compensation au manquement de l'Histoire, se prête tout à fait à une réception féministe et revendicatrice de la part du préfacier choisi. Connue pour son militantisme, il n'est pas surprenant qu'Angela Davis établisse des connections entre Tituba et la diaspora féminine noire au nom d'une expérience commune de « cultural kin » :

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As Condé offers to Tituba the possibility of filling the silence and voids with voice and presence, we who are Tituba's cultural kin experience the possibility of our own history. Via an active, constitutive voice, Tituba leaps into history, shattering all the racist and misogynist misconceptions that have defined the place of black women. (x)

A travers le discours de Tituba, c'est l'ensemble de la population noire diasporique qui trouve une place dans un système hégémonique oppressif et ouvre derechef un dialogue de mémoires et de projets interrompus. La traduction du texte de Condé a donné lieu à la formation d'une nouvelle communauté anglophone qui crée ses propres intérêts autour du texte et s'en sert à des fins autres que celles prévues par l'auteur. Selon Condé, « Tituba is not a historical novel. Tituba is just the opposite of a historical novel. I was not interested at all in what her real life could have been. I had few precise documents: her deposition testimony... I really invented Tituba... The result is that she is a sort of mock-epic character » (201). En mettant ces deux citations en parallèle, je ne veux point insinuer que Davis ne tient pas compte du degré de fictionalité du personnage de Condé et le conçoit comme figure historique à part entière, mais cherche plutôt à révéler la communauté interprétative qui s'est créée autour de ce personnage afin de le transformer en réceptacle de croyances et d'idéologies dans le but de défier les modes de penser et standards courants dans l'histoire américaine.

L'un des derniers penseurs en traductologie, Lawrence Venuti, explique ce pouvoir de ralliement autour d'un texte traduit par le fait que « to translate is to invent for the foreign text new readerships who are aware that their interest in the translation is shared by other readers, foreign and domestic—even when these interests are incommensurable: imagined communities » (481). Une communauté imaginaire et imaginée se forme donc autour du texte de Condé avec d'autant plus de légitimité que l'auteur inscrit dans la trame même de son roman un intertexte avec la littérature canonique de la culture d'accueil. En choisissant Hester Prynne, l'héroïne du *Scarlet Letter* (1850) de Nathaniel Hawthorne comme compagne de cellule de Tituba, même de manière anachronique, Condé effectue une manœuvre typique qui consiste à démontrer comment les Antilles et le reste du monde s'entrecroisent à travers des passés partagés qu'ils soient historiques ou purement livresques, ainsi que l'a déjà démontré Lewitt. Le double rapprochement engendré par le changement de langue et un certain (e)ncrage dans la culture d'accueil de manière intrinsèque au récit, concourt à créer une communauté transnationale combinant de multiples niveaux d'intérêts qui deviennent le site de contestation de valeurs et idéologies hégémoniques : la place et le rôle de la femme noire dans la société américaine.

La volonté de faire coïncider le langage du récit à une certaine vraisemblance ou un engagement de la part de l'auteur de sorte que le récit fasse montre d'une référentialité vérifiable, est pour le moins surprenante car, parallèlement à celle-ci, l'on retrouve dans les critiques la mise en valeur de ce qui est appelé « la parole du conteur ». Cette manière d'écrire qui fait sortir de l'oubli les méthodes de transmissions de savoirs et valeurs culturels propres au monde de la plantation à travers l'oralité, est savamment infiltrée dans les méthodes narratives employées par les auteurs. Il serait difficile de faire une liste des critiques faisant l'éloge de l'esprit oral de l'écriture antillaise qui sait allier la grammaire française à la magie de l'oralité créole. L'un des chantres de cette écriture est Patrick Chamoiseau qui, réfutant l'appellation d'écrivain, se nomme « marqueur de parole. » Et de retrouver des comptes-rendus où abondent les exemples de la marque distinctive de l'emprise de la technique du conteur dans la narration scripturale. A titre d'exemple, la critique Ann Skea souligne à propos de Chamoiseau que « his curve of destiny has taken him from an oral tradition to a written style which

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is richly inventive and surprising, and which lacks only the physical presence of the storyteller and ritual vocal responses from the audience... » (Skea 2000).

Il est vrai que dans l'*Eloge de la créolité*, les figures de proue de ce mouvement se sont données pour mission de faire revivre ce monde de la plantation menacé de disparition par la modernisation et l'annexion culturelle menées par la France depuis la départementalisation. « Aucun de nos écrivains n'était armé [...] pour prendre le relais de la créolité renfermée dans l'abysse de notre parole ancestrale [...] Après nos conteurs traditionnels, ce fut donc une manière de silence : la voie morte » (34-35). C'est d'ailleurs le thème tant dans le fond que dans la forme des *Solibo Magnifique* (1988), *Texaco* (1992), *Traversée de la Mangrove* (1989) ou *La lessive du diable* (2000), qui ont connu un grand succès commercial en France, et académique dans les universités américaines. C'est pour avoir prescrit les termes d'une « vraie » littérature antillaise par la localisation de la parole et la diglossie (maintenant implicitement l'omniprésence du conteur) que les élogistes se sont fait accusés de « terrorisme littéraire »⁴. L'introduction de ce personnage sur lequel se greffe une esthétique de la narration différente de la tradition européenne instaure d'emblée une coupure qui laisse sous-entendre au lecteur la nécessité d'un changement d'horizon d'attente : il ne s'agit plus dans l'histoire de narrer des faits, mais plutôt de la « présentation d'une parole, » pour reprendre les termes d'Alexie Tcheuyap. La simulation de la présence du conteur au cœur des méthodes narratives entraîne à sa suite une modification de la participation du lecteur face au texte. Averti par une série de signes jalonnés tout au long du texte, le lecteur d'un Chamoiseau ou d'un Confiant doit garder à l'esprit le manque d'unité intentionnelle, jusque dans une certaine mesure, du monde de la parole du conteur et celui auquel cette parole fait référence. Comme le précise Tcheuyap,

Indeed, like the traditional story teller, the narrator sets in place formulas that mark the beginning of each tale. The effort not only provides for the legitimation of the narrative enterprise and the formalization of the context, but implies the rupture between the real world and the new diegetic universe. The reader is henceforth programmed to integrate a different space than that of the everyday...(46)

Ce n'est pas à dire par-là qu'il y a interruption totale du rapport entre le réel et l'écriture antillaise, mais que bien au contraire l'écrivain se sert du couvert de cette parole afin d'atteindre non pas le réel, mais les instabilités et inconsistances de cette réalité. Edouard Glissant fait remarquer dans son *Discours Antillais* que les contes ne peuvent être compris comme des mythes de l'origine antillaise, mais au contraire comme une forme de réaction face à l'effacement d'origine, une stratégie de résistance à la « digenèse » de cultures précipitées dans la rencontre coloniale. Etant donné ce rapport au réel changé, que les critiques eux-mêmes reconnaissent à l'écriture antillaise, on est alors autorisé à se demander les raisons d'une insistance de leur part sur la nature de « témoignage » ou les motivations « ethnographiques » de certains comptes rendus ou préfaces. En corollaire à la prise de contact direct avec le réel, on peut ajouter une tendance de la critique à voir le texte antillais comme un documentaire instructif de type ethnographique ou anthropologique sur des sociétés que l'on apprend à connaître. Nombreux sont les exemples de critiques à propos des livres de Condé, Chamoiseau et Confiant qui pourraient illustrer l'accueil réservé à ces types de narration:

En fait donc, nous avons avec *Traversée de la mangrove* un bon documentaire sur la Guadeloupe profonde d'autant plus que l'auteur s'efforce au maximum d'écrire avec des tournures, des expressions et des mots créoles facilement décriptables grâce à des notes de bas de page. (Naudin 168-169)

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As a story it's not much... But as an account of the lives and adventures of languages, a depiction of the social laminations and interpretations of discourses in an ex-colonial society, the novel is remarkable. (Szwed 29)

Indeed, the principal value of this new book may well be to inform the reader how cane was formerly grown and harvested, with particular attention to the agricultural calendar and the skills of workers involved. (Arnold 854)

En conséquence, l'on peut affirmer que la problématique que soulève l'approche critique prônant l'adéquation ou le manque de « prise directe » avec la réalité est, qu'utilisant des arguments littéraires, les conclusions émises par les critiques ressortent plus du mode idéologique que de l'analyse littéraire. Il ne s'agit pas d'écarter la notion de témoignage qui tient une grande place dans la littérature post-coloniale, mais, doit-on savoir ce dont on témoigne et comment. Dans notre contexte de passation linguistique et culturelle, saisir la littérarité ou l'intentionnalité du texte antillais devient une mission presque impossible car elles varient nécessairement en fonction de ses multiples traductions et rééditions. Au cœur des rhétoriques de l'encadrement du texte que sont les préfaces et comptes-rendus, l'intérêt que représenterait l'élaboration d'un modèle critique du processus d'écriture subordonné aux modifications subies par le texte en traduction

est indubitable. Dans ces conditions, comprendre le texte par des facteurs extérieurs à l'oeuvre et mettre en correspondance structure littéraire et structures idéologiques et commerciales revient à faire entrer dans une relation d'équivalence symbolique des grammaires s'excluant mutuellement. En conclusion, l'on peut avancer que l'appareil paratextuel fournit une représentation dérivée de cette translation linguistique, non soucieuse de ses fonds culturels, en calquant sur l'oeuvre une scénographie prête à répondre à l'horizon d'attente d'un lectorat attiré par des formes prétendument contestables d'une littérature transnationale.

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NOTES

¹ Consulter l'article de Carolyn Perkes sur la traduction du roman québécois en anglais, « Le pays incertain en traduction anglaise, 1960-1990 : seuils et écueils de l'identité littéraire au Canada », *Etudes Canadiennes*, n.41, 1996, p. 41. L'auteur s'inspire des théories sur la préface développées par Henri Mitterand dans *Le texte romanesque*, (Paris : PUF, 1980).

² Sur ce dernier point voir l'article de Richard Watts, "The 'Wounds of Locality': Living and Writing the Local in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Ecrire en pays dominé*." *French Forum*. 28. 1. (2003): 111.

³ Voir les théories de John Guillory, « Canonical and Non-Canonical: A Critique of the Current Debate », *ELH*, 54. 3. (1987): 483.

⁴ Se référer à l'article de Lucien Taylor, « Créolité bites », *Transition*, 74 (1997):124-161.

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**COSTEÑO, AN AFRO-HISPANIC VARIETY ON THE BRINK OF
EXTINCTION SPOKEN IN THE COSTA CHICA REGION
OF OAXACA IN MEXICO**

by Norma Rosas Mayén

From colonial times to the present, Mexico has been characterized by its linguistic pluralism a result of multiethnic and multicultural encounters that have shaped what is called Mexican Spanish. In this sense, Mexican Spanish may be considered an amalgamation of modalities, with each region of the country exhibiting a different variety. Although dialectal diversity itself is not considered a negative factor, sometimes it generates negative attitudes among speakers toward non-prestige varieties that tend to diminish and marginalize the speech of certain ethnic groups. This is the case of the Afro-Mexicans.

Although the African presence in Mexico is a socio-historical fact, this legacy seems to be dismissed from the written history of Mexico. This situation has been reinforced by the nationalist discourse of *mestizaje*, which has helped to develop a political strategy of camouflage by considering all Afro-Mexicans as *mestizos* of some sort.¹ In contemporary Mexican society, Afro-Mexican communities occupy places at the lowest rank of the socio-economic ladder. Some of them still remain forgotten and isolated from the mainstream and exist in extreme poverty with a lack of basic services.

Currently, Mexico has four Afro-Mexican enclaves. One of them is the small community of *Nacimiento de los negros* situated in Northern Mexico in the state of Coahuila. The other three are located in the Southern part of the country: the Gulf of Mexico region (the southern part of the state of Veracruz and the coastal area of the states of Tabasco and Campeche), the southeastern region of the Yucatan Peninsula (the state of Quintana Roo), and the Costa Chica region (the southern coastal area of the state of Guerrero and the northern coastal area of the state of Oaxaca, both on the Pacific Ocean). The latter is the largest with approximately thirty-seven Afro-Mexican communities.

The present study offers an analysis of the current speech of two Afro-Mexican communities, Collantes and La Boquilla, situated in the Costa Chica region of Oaxaca. Throughout this study, I will refer to this particular Afro-Hispanic variety as Costeño Spanish. By keeping this local term, I want to express my respect of the way the people of this region identify themselves. My analysis is informed by the concept of *rhizome* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), which allows multiple and non-hierarchical data interpretation.

The Rhizomatic Linguistic Model

The concept of the *rhizome*, as developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in the opening passage of their work *A Thousand Plateaus*, is highly relevant to a discussion of a shifting and conflation of language systems. Their first chapter, *Rhizome*, is organized around the distinction between the "arborescent" and "rhizomatic" models of thought. The arbolic metaphor is represented by the tree-like structure of genealogy, vertical and stiff, whose branches continue to subdivide into smaller and lesser categories in a binary or unitary way. In contrast, rhizomatic thinking is radically horizontal, multiplicitous, moving in many directions and connected to many other lines of thinking, acting and being.

Interestingly, the linguistic heterogeneity of the Costeño Spanish obeys the four principles of the Deleuze and Guattari notion of the rhizome:

1. Connection
2. Heterogeneity

3. Multiplicity

4. Cartography

According to Deleuze and Guattari, connection and heterogeneity suggest an ideal network of a maximal connection between points: "any point of the rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:7). In addition, the rhizome is labeled as a "multiplicity," rather than a "multiple," wresting it from any relation to "the One" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:8). And in this sense, the rhizome likewise resists structures of domination, such as the notion of "the mother tongue" in linguistics. Multiplicity, therefore, suggests that the rhizomatic model is comprised of a multiplicity of lines and connections contradicting unitary, binary, and totalizing models. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari (1987:8): "There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines."

Finally, the cartography principle is related to the notion of a map. Deleuze and Guattari draw a distinction between maps and tracings arguing that a rhizome is:

A map and not a tracing...The map is open and connectable in all its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted, to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987:12)

Thus, similar to the rhizomatic model, Costeño Spanish has entered into contact with a great diversity of languages and language varieties including indigenous languages of the area. This fact makes Costeño Spanish heterogeneous with linguistic features in that it can be connected not only to one but rather to various linguistic sources which are subject to change. In other words, Costeño Spanish is not composed of a unique root, but rather it derives from a multiple root, a product of different linguistic encounters where various linguistic features coincide and multiply in a rhizomatic way. Hence, it is possible to establish the following rhizomatic linguistic principles:

Principles of the Linguistic Rhizome

- A language variety is not derived from one unique linguistic root
- There is not a single homogenous linguistic community

These principles contrast with the standard and monolithic linguistic notions that have characterized Western thinking (Mufwene 2001, Glissant 2002) and lead to a better understanding of the nature and evolution of the different Spanish varieties spoken around the world that are connected to each other in a rhizomatic way. In the rhizomatic linguistic model there are not linguistic centripetal forces or linguistic vertical prototypes; each Spanish variety is simply part of an entire linguistic entity, and Costeño Spanish is a remarkable example of a linguistic rhizome.

Speculation on the origins of the Costa Chica's Black population

In general, the Black population of Costa Chica is believed to have originated from slaves brought to work on the region's large cattle ranches, as well as in the cacao and cotton agricultural fields in the 16th century (Aguirre Beltrán 1989b; Motta Sánchez and Machuca Ramírez 1993; Muhammad 1995; Vaughn 2001; Martínez Gracida 2003). There is also evidence that runaway slaves reached the Costa Chica area seeking refuge. These escaped slaves formed small marooned communities along the Pacific coast (Aguirre Beltrán 1989b; Brout 1976; Bilby and N'Diaye 1992; Vaughn 2001, 2004).

Díaz Pérez (1993), on the other hand, maintains that much of the Black population that arrived in Costa Chica were from Congo and Bantú tribes, as well as from other tribal groups along the Atlantic rim of West Africa.

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In addition to historical narratives, there is also a legend among the *Costeño* community members that reaches mythical speculation. In this tale, a ship carrying slaves wrecked along some point of the coast —El Faro, Playa Blanca or Puerto Minizo depending on the version— (Vaughn 2001). According to this story, the survivors of this wreck formed the first coastal communities and with the passing of time they grew in number and are the ancestors of the Afro-Mexicans of Costa Chica.

Accordingly, the different accounts of the possible origins of the Costa Chica's Black population suggest what Martinican scholar Édouard Glissant (2002), referring to the origins of Creole cultures, has called a "prophetic vision of the past." In Glissant's (2002:86) words: "El pasado no ha de ser reconstruido de forma objetiva (o incluso subjetiva) por el historiador, sino que ha de ser imaginado también, de forma profética, por las gentes, las comunidades y las culturas que se han visto privadas del mismo."² Glissant's insight may explain why it is as impossible to confirm the specific origin of the Black population of Costa Chica, as it would be to trace the origin of most of the descendents of the African Diaspora. The circumstances under which slaves were captured, transported, and sold in the region reflect the same story everywhere. Subject to a barbarous genocide, slaves were forced to forget not only their origin but also family, history, religion, and especially their language.

Topographical features of Collantes and La Boquilla

Collantes is a community of approximately 3,000 people located 18 km south of Pinotepa Nacional, Oaxaca. Collantes is the last town on the paved road that leads from Pinotepa Nacional, the Municipality's headquarters, to the coastal lowlands near the once-important Puerto Minizo, located approximately 10 km from Collantes. Across the Arena River the small-sized community (*rancho*) of La Boquilla with approximately 1,500 inhabitants is located. Unlike its neighboring community, La Boquilla belongs to the Municipality of Santa María Huazolotitlán, Oaxaca.

This Afro-Mexican enclave remained isolated until the mid-1960s, when a coastal highway that currently links Acapulco to other towns and villages of the Costa Chica region of Guerrero and Oaxaca was finished. Such a condition of isolation allowed not only the African phenotype to survive in the area but also for the preservation of the Sub-Saharan heritage to the present day in different forms in La Boquilla and Collantes. Evidence of this heritage includes, but is not limited to, carrying heavy loads like buckets of water and *bateas* (punts) of food on one's head (especially by women); funeral practices; local dances like *la danza de los diablos* (the Devils dance); music; wedding traditions; popular medicine; agricultural and fishing techniques; and oral traditions. Food preparation also attests to the communities' African heritage through dishes such as *cangrejos con frijoles* (crab with beans), *salsa de chichatanas* or *chirmole* (ant's sauce), *tamales de tichinda* (clam tamales), *bocadillo de coco y cabio*



(sweet coconut), *muenganos*, and other original foods. With the passing of time, many of these cultural manifestations have resisted assimilation or loss by acquiring certain peculiarities that make the Costa Chica region different when compared with other regions of Mexico.

Although Collantes and La Boquilla are two rural communities of predominantly African heritage, many of the people of the two towns notably show a mixture of Black, Indian and White descent as a product of interethnic marriage and cultural borrowings that define their ethnic characteristics in which the African phenotype is predominant. In this regard, it is important to highlight that since colonial times the Afro-Mexicans of Costa Chica have been in contact with other local indigenous groups, especially the Nahuatl, Chatino, Amuzgo and coastal Mixtec, as well as with Asiatic sailors and slaves, especially from the Philippines, who entered through the Port of Acapulco after 1573. Later on, by the middle of the 19th century, Costa Chica's population was also influenced by Chilean immigrants who spent time on the coast near Pinotepa Nacional on their route to the Sacramento Valley during the era of the California Gold Rush. As a result, these cultural and linguistic contacts have undeniably shaped the life and speech of the Afro-Mexicans of Costa Chica over the years.

Research design and methodology

The present study is based on data collected on-site during the following three phases of study.

Phase 1: Pilot study (July-August 2004)

During this first exploratory trip, I had the opportunity to visit various Afro-Mexican towns and villages of the area³, as well as to accomplish the following goals: 1) select two Afro-Mexican communities for future study; 2) establish personal contacts with local authorities and members of the two selected communities (Collantes and La Boquilla); 3) gather some preparatory linguistic material for preliminary analysis.

Phase 2: First planned study (May-June 2005)

This phase was the most intense and productive, allowing me to become immersed into both Afro-Oaxacan communities, meet more community members, closely interact with all of them, and participate in their daily life activities.

During this sojourn, I had the opportunity to attend a series of social and religious events that included weddings, birthdays, traditional medical practices, funerals, food preparation for feasts, local performances such as dance and music, sporadic demonstrations of oral tradition in daily life, as well as fishing activities like the *cangrejada* (crab catching). These events allowed me to capture spontaneous speech in natural settings and to grasp communicative nuances, as well as to learn about the explicit and tacit aspects of the culture of these two Afro-Oaxacan communities, Collantes and La Boquilla.

Phase 3: Second planned study (July-August 2005)

During this face of the study, the following objectives were accomplished: 1) gather more data; 2) corroborate some previous data collected during the first planned study; 3) clarify some words, ideas and chronologies, in short, to follow up on anything that I did not understand or that seemed doubtful; 4) revisit some members of both communities who become true friends.

A total of 72 subjects, 46 women and 26 men were recorded, ranging in age from 18 to 85 years old. Figure 1 depicts the subjects' age percentage.

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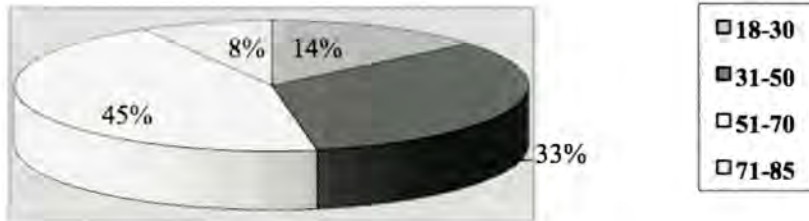


Figure 1. Subjects' age percentage

Figure 1 shows that the age of the majority of the interviewed subjects (45%) ranges between 51 and 70 years old, followed by a second group (33%) whose age ranges between 31 and 50 years old. The younger group (14%) includes those between 18 and 30 years old. Finally, only 8% of the total of subjects form the oldest group ranged in age between 71 and 85 years old.

The educational level of the subjects ranges from illiterate (22 subjects), to incomplete elementary school (44 subjects), and beyond elementary school (6 subjects).

Methodology

The methodological aspect of this present research only utilizes qualitative methodology, insofar as I am not quantifying but rather evaluating, documenting and interpreting linguistic aspects of Costeño speech. I relied on the following methods: participant-observation, open-ended oral interviews, recording and transcription, and fieldnotes.

Theoretical background

In general, the Costa Chica region seems so varied and complex that it has seduced many scholars in the last decades. Most of the current research on this geographical area has focused on historical and anthropological investigations, and only very few works have alluded to the speech of the region. The first study, conducted by Aguirre-Beltrán (1989b), entitled *Cuijla: esbozo etnográfico de un pueblo negro*, and still one of the most influential references, is rich in ethnographic material, history, tradition, folklore, social life, language and ethnic characteristics of the inhabitants of Cuajinicuilapa, an Afro-Mexican community in the state of Guerrero. The second by Diaz-Pérez (1993), entitled *Choco, chirundo y chano: vocabulario afromestizo*, studies the Afro-mixed lexicon of the state of Guerrero. The third study conducted by Althoff (1994), entitled *Afro-Mestizo Speech from Costa Chica, Guerrero: From Cuaji to Cuijla*, is the first fieldwork carried out by a linguist in the area in which the speech of 20 subjects from two Afro-Mexican communities of the state of Guerrero, Cuajinicuilapa and San Nicolás, is analyzed. Finally, the fourth is a valuable anthropological Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Race and Nation: A Study of Blackness in Mexico* carried out by Vaughn (2001) in the Costa Chica region of Oaxaca which briefly refers, in a nonsystematic way, to some features of Costa Chica speech.

Afro-Hispanic linguistic treats in Costeño

Costeño exhibits the following phonological and morphosyntactic characteristics considered typical of Africanized Spanish, although not necessarily since they also occur in other Spanish varieties and speech registers.

Occasional liquid mutation

Liquid mutation in the examples of Table 1 occurs in both directions. That is, the segment /r/ becomes [l] phenomenon known as *lambdacism* in the literature, and conversely the segment /l/ becomes [r] known as *rhotalism*.

Table 1. Liquid mutation in Costeño

	Costeño	
/krin/	[kliŋ]	<i>crin</i> > 'horse hair'
/salsa/	[sár.sa]	<i>salsa</i> 'sauce'

In general, liquid mutation is also found in some areas of Spain (Andalucía, León, Murcia, Cáceres and Badajoz), the Canary Islands, the Caribbean zone, Afro-Hispanic varieties, as well as in vestigial Spanish like Brulé (Holway 1997), Isleño (Lipski 1990) and Traditional New Mexican Spanish (Bills 1997; Bills and Vigil 1999).

Weakness and/or deletion of the segments /d/ and /s/

In Costeño, as in many other Spanish dialects, there is a tendency to delete /d/ in word-final and intervocalic position as shown in the examples in Table 2.

Table 2. Weakness and/or deletion of the segment /d/ in Costeño

Word-final position		
	Costeño	
/enfermedad/	[eŋ.h ^w r.me.ɟá]	<i>enfermedad</i> 'illness'
Intervocalic position		
/arado/	[a.rá.o]	<i>arado</i> 'plow'

Regarding the segment /s/, it tends to be aspirated in syllable-final position word-internally as the following Costeño items show: *fresco* /fresko/ > [fré^h.ko] 'fresh', *respetar* /respe^htar/ > [re^h.pe.ɟá] 'to respect', and so on. The behavior of /s/ in word-final position, in contrast, tends to be more unstable ranging from strong to weak realizations among Costeño speakers, as the examples in Table 3 illustrate.

Table 3. Weakness and/or deletion of the segment /s/ in Costeño

	Costeño	
/los#musikos/	[lo ^h .mú.si.ko]	<i>los músicos</i> 'the musicians'
/en#los#altares/	[en.lo.al.ɟá.re]	<i>en los altares</i> 'on the altars'

Syllabic reductions

Costeño exhibits significant phonological reductions; the following instances in Table 4 display some cases extracted from the corpus.

Table 4. Syllabic reduction in Costeño

	Costeño	
/el#urakan#pawlina/	[fra.káŋ.paw.li.na]	<i>el huracán Paulina</i> 'the hurricane Paulina'
/para#el#desayuno/	[pa.la.yú.no]	<i>para el desayuno</i> 'for breakfast'

Syllable deletion is also commonplace in vestigial Spanish, rural speech and in informal discourse in many dialects.

Epenthesis

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Epenthesis refers to the insertion of a sound(s) into the word. In contrast to the preceding phenomenon, Costeño sometimes exhibits additional segments especially syllabic prothesis, as the following instances show in Table 5.

Table 5. Syllabic prothesis in Costeño

	Costeño	
/torear/	[a.to.ré.ar]	<i>torear</i> 'to fight (bulls)'
/partisipado/	[ɟes.par.ti.si.pá.ɟo]	<i>participado</i> 'participated'

Megenny (1999:84) offers a brief list of prefixes that are used in new prothetic formations like *a-*, *des-*, *en-*, *in-*, etc. This phenomenon is also found in rural speech and in Afro-Hispanic varieties.

Allophonic variation of alveolar trill /r#/ r#/

In Costeño, the alveolar trill /r/ exhibits variable behavior that is difficult to characterize as a pronunciation of the phone [r̄]; in its place, an ample range of allophonic realizations, both voiced and voiceless, occurs in the speech of the Costeño speakers ranging from assibilated [r̄]/[r̄_s], simple vibrant non-lateral [r]/[_sr], and multiple vibrant non-lateral [r̄]/[r̄_s].

Table 6. Allophonic variation of the segment /r#/ in Costeño

	Costeño	
/r̄ebolusion/	[r̄e.βo.lu.syón]	<i>revolución</i> 'revolution'
/prōroga/	[po.ro.ʒa]	<i>prórroga</i> 'extension'

The various allophonic realizations of /r/ along with the fact that in Spanish the non-lateral liquids /r̄/ and /r/ are in a bizarre, almost complementary distribution⁴, have lead scholars to conclude that there is only one non-lateral liquid phoneme in Spanish, with [r̄] being considered an allophonic variant of /r/ (Harris 1983; Núñez Cedeño 1989; Núñez Cedeño and Morales-Front 1999, Hammond 1999, 2001).

Unmarked infinitives

Deletion of final *-r* in infinitives is commonplace in Costeño speech. The following excerpts in (1) illustrate this morphological process:

(1) Unmarked infinitives in Costeño

- a) *Jui* [a] ʒa. r̄.á] *chacalina*.
'I went to get river shrimps.'
- b) *Nosotros vamos a* [tra.β.há].
'We are going to work.'

Notice that in the examples in (1), the last vowel of the unmarked infinitive (the theme vowel) is stressed as a compensation of the deletion of the segment /r/. In this vein, Megenny (1999) argues the following:

...esta estructura nos recuerda el *tipo de construcción que ocurre en los lenguajes criollos afro-hispánicos, los cuales muy a menudo contienen construcciones verbales del tipo infinitivo no inflexionado* (generalmente sin la /r/ final y con el acento tónico sobre la última vocal)...⁵

(Megenny 1999:97 my italics)

Occasional non gender/verb agreement

Although gender usage seems to be generally stable in Costeño, some speakers sporadically assign inappropriate gender to certain words, as seen in the following

instances that show an improper article: *el casamiento* > *la casamiento* 'the wedding', *un vasito* > *una vasito* 'a small glass', *la costumbre* > *el costumbre* 'the custom', and so on. Additionally, some local words exhibit confusion in their morphological gender, as seen in the following examples: *chacalina/chacalín* 'river shrimp', *chandero/chandera* 'dirt', *tirincho/tirincha* 'a big bag', and so on. More generally, gender variation is a morphological process that occurs among Spanish L2 learners, as well as in vestigial Spanish and Afro-Hispanic varieties.

In addition, Costeño speakers at times do not show subject-verb agreement, as illustrated by the following example in (2).

(2) Lack of subject-verb agreement in Costeño

*Aquí encontré otro muchacho que **jueron** papá de mí sijas.*

*(Aquí encontré a otro muchacho que **fue** el papá de mis hijas).*

'In this village, I found another man who was the father of my daughters'

Lack of subject-verb agreement is also attested in other Africanized Spanish varieties (Granda 1977, 1988, 1994; Lipski 1994, 1994b, 1986a, 2005; Meggeney 1999; Schwegler 1991a), in vestigial Spanish varieties (Lipski 1990; Holloway 1997), and also among L2 Spanish learners.

Loss of articles and common prepositions

The deletion of articles and common prepositions also occurs in the Costeño dialect, although not categorically, as we can infer from the following examples in (3).

(3) Deletion of preposition and definite article in Costeño.

a) *Como (en los) tiempos viejos.*

'As (in the) past times.'

b) *Trabajabamo (en el) campo.*

'We worked (in the) field.'

The omission of articles and common prepositions has also been reported in other Afro-Hispanic varieties (Meggeney 1999; Granda 1977, 1988, 1994; Lipski 1986a, 2005), the Leonese and Montañés dialects of Spain⁶, and vestigial Spanish (Lipski 1990, Holloway 1997).

Reduplication of the negative *no*

In the literature of Spanish dialectology, negation-related variation is a phenomenon that has been found in those regions characterized by an African presence during the colonial period, such as in the Palenque de San Basilio (Shwegler 1991b), in the Dominican Republic (Shwegler 1996a; Lipski 1994), in rural eastern Cuba (Ortiz López 1999), the Chocó region of Colombia (Shwegler 1991a; Lipski 1994), in the southern region of the Lake Maracaibo region in Venezuela (Meggeney 1999), in vernacular Caribbean Spanish (Lipski 2000d), and in nineteenth-century Afro-Cuban texts (Lipski 2005). Costeño unexpectedly exhibits sporadic cases of reduplication of the negative *no*, as shown in the examples in (4).

(4) Reduplication of the negative *no* in Costeño.

a) *ya **no** pescamos allí **no***

anymore not fish-2nd.pl. there not

'We do not fish there anymore'

b) ***no** desprecio yo mi saber **no***

not dismiss-1st.sg. I my knowledge not

'I do not dismiss my knowledge'

Loss of copula

Occasional deletion of the copula has been considered a typical trait in Spanish-derived creoles like Palenquero and Papiamentu (Meggeney 1985a; Granda 1988;

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Lipski 2005), *bozal* Spanish (Lipski 1994, 2005; Otheguy 2000), Afro-Hispanic varieties in Latin America (Granda 1977; Megenney 1982, 1999; Lipski 1986a, 1986c, 1994b; Schwegler 1991a), as well as in vestigial speech (Lipski 1994). Interestingly, the Costeño data also account for isolated cases of the deletion of copula as shown in the following excerpts in (5).

(5) Cases of loss of copula in Costeño

a) *La soja de plátano (son) pal tamal de tichinda.*
 'The banana leaves are for the *tichinda* tamale.'

b) *La jollita (son) a quince peso.*
 'The little pots cost fifteen pesos.'

To sum up, in the Afro-Hispanic linguistic arena, the linguistic phenomena previously mentioned (liquid mutation, weakness and/or deletion of the segments /s/ and /d/, syllabic reduction, epenthesis, allophonic variation of the segment /r/, unmarked infinitives, non gender/verb agreement, loss of articles and common prepositions, reduplication of the negative *no*, and loss of copula) have been considered to be an influence of sub-Saharan substrate by various scholars (Granda 1994, 1988, 1977; Megenney 1999, 1989a, 1985a, 1982; Quilis 1995; Schwegler 1991a; Lipski 1986a, 1986c, 1994, 1994b, 1998, 2005). Nevertheless, since these phenomena also take place in other Spanish varieties where no African presence is attested, this fact obviously mitigates against their supposed African origin. This debate is still open in the literature and is more suggestive rather than conclusive.

Costeño labialized [h^w], a genuine West African linguistic remnant

In addition to the aforementioned linguistic phenomena, the segment /f/ exhibits the following allophonic distribution in Costeño speech: If /f/ precedes [+ round] vowels (i.e. /o/ and /u/), it simply undergoes debuccalization (i.e. voiceless glottal fricative [h]); on the other hand, if /f/ precedes [- round] vowels (i.e. /a/, /e/ and /i/), it is realized with an additional vowel-like gesture of the lips exhibiting a labial secondary articulation (i.e. [h^w]).

Table 7. Allophonic distribution of the segment /f/ in Costeño.

/f/ → [h ^w] / ___ V [- round]		
Costeño		
/kafe/	[ka.h ^w é]	<i>café</i> 'coffee'
/ofisyo/	[o.h ^w i.syo]	<i>oficio</i> 'job'
/f/ → [h] / ___ V [+ round]		
Costeño		
/fofo/	[hó.fo]	<i>foto</i> 'picture'
/difunfo/	[di.hún.fo]	<i>difunto</i> 'dead person'

Regarding the allophone [h^w], Althoff (1994) relates this to an earlier voiceless bilabial fricative [ɸ] (Lloyd 1987:223) which is attested in other Spanish dialects (Lipski 1990; Megenney 1999; Hammond 2001). However, I suggest another possible rhizomatic linguistic connection for the Costeño labialized [h^w] via the influx of West African languages.

This argument is based on the following four points. First, the Costeño corpus, including the recordings from the pilot study, does not display any occurrence of the

voiceless bilabial fricative [ɸ] in the speech of the 74 subjects neither from Guerrero (Cuajinicuilapa, El Terrero, El Faro) nor from Oaxaca (Collantes, La Boquilla, El Chivo, El Ciruelo, La Estancia and Morelos). Second, the Oto-Manguean languages (Coastal Mixtec, Amuzgan, and Chatino) which surround and have been in contact, to a certain extent, with Costeño Spanish, do not exhibit labialized consonants in their phonological inventories. Third, some scholars (Hoffman 1963; Hyman 1970; Kenstowicz and Kisseberth 1979; Kenstowicz 1994; Gussenhoven and Jacobs 1998) argue for the existence of labialized consonants in some of the West African trade languages such as Nupe and Margi, among others, in which labialization can represent phonemic contrasts⁷. Fourth, a West African presence in this Afro-Mexican pocket is undeniable during the colonial period (Aguirre Beltrán 1989a; Guzmán Calvo 2003; Vinson III and Vaughn 2004).

Moreover, there is also the possibility to consider that the segment /f/ becomes [h^w] everywhere, and that the labial or round secondary articulation is deleted in contexts where [h^w] is followed by a [+round] vowel, due to the OCP (Obligatory Contour Principle) which states that adjacent identical features are prohibited. Hence a [+round] consonant cannot be followed by a [+round] vowel.

Therefore, I conclude that the labialized phone [h^w] found in the Spanish spoken in the Costa Chica region of Mexico is a phonetic West African remnant. The labialized segment [h^w] has been also attested in other Afro-Hispanic varieties such as in the Province of Esmeraldas in Ecuador, the Chocó region of Colombia, in the Yungas region of Bolivia⁸, and the central coastal area of Peru (Mendoza 1976:87; Erikson 1986; Lipski 1994:323).

The Costeño lexicon

At first glance, the Costeño lexicon exhibits items of autochthonous languages especially Nahuatl and, to a lesser extent, coastal Mixtec and Chatino. Also, as with any other Afro-Hispanic variety, Costeño presents some African lexical remnants, as well as Spanish archaisms which have survived since colonial times. Additionally, Asiatic lexical contributions have left a footprint on Costeño Spanish through Tagalog words which are at times heard among community speakers. These Tagalogisms were probably introduced by Asiatic sailors and slaves who arrived in the area once Acapulco developed as a port (1573) and the first Spanish vessels from Manila, the so-called *naos de China*, began to increase their maritime activity in the area (Aguirre Beltrán 1989a: 41).

Likewise, there is an almost imperceptible Chilean Spanish lexical contribution to its Costeño sibling through Chilean immigrants who spent time on the coast near Pinotepa Nacional on their route to the Sacramento Valley during the epoch of the California Gold Rush (Mid 19th century). According to the oral narrative of one of my subjects (M13), the ship on which these Chilean immigrants traveled had to make a forced stop in Puerto Minizo because the ship was damaged, and they remained in the area for approximately six months. During this time, the Chilean immigrants entered into contact with the inhabitants of Collantes and Pinotepa Nacional, and their presence influenced some aspects of the local culture, among them the lexicon.

In addition, like all Spanish dialects, especially those of the Americas, Costeño also presents in its lexical base items from Arawacan-Taino origin probably spread by the first Spanish colonizers who had spent a certain period of time in the Caribbean zone (The Dominican Republic, Cuba and Puerto Rico) (Arango 1995:17-43). Costeño also exhibits borrowings from Arabic, Basque, Galician and others of unknown origin.

To provide an idea about the Costeño lexicon composition, Table 8 offers a rough estimate of the languages that have contributed to build the current Costeño lexicon. These figures are based on my Costeño lexicon sample (214 words).

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Table 8. Proportional contributions to Costeño Spanish from other lexicons

	Languages	Items	Percentage
Amerindian	Nahuatl	23	11 %
	Mixtec	7	3 %
	Arawakan-Taino	4	2 %
	Chatino	3	1 %
Afro-Asiatic	African:Kimbundu, Yoruba, Kikongo and Moroccan Arabic.	13	6 %
	Asiatic: Tagalog	7	3 %
Other languages	Basque, Galician, other Spanish varieties	45	21 %
Unknown origin		112	53 %

Whereas some of the words still preserve their original form, others have undergone phonological and semantic change and even recreation by speakers.

Conclusion

This study has proposed a model to interpret linguistic data in those geographical areas that have been characterized by the influx and/or coexistence of two or more languages or language varieties. This linguistic model is based on the concept of *rhizome* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) that allows multiple and non-hierarchical data interpretation. The application of the rhizomatic model in sociolinguistics is advantageous, especially in the different subfields of dialectology, language contact and creolistics. For instance, in Spanish dialectology, the rhizomatic model allows a better understanding of the nature and evolution of the different varieties of spoken Spanish worldwide and is abided by the Principles of the Linguistic Rhizome proposed in this study.

The connectable nature of the rhizomatic model also allows us to interpret the linguistic similarities that Costeño has with other Spanish modalities cross-dialectally. In this manner, each Spanish variety becomes a single unit integrated into an entire linguistic entity rather than to have been derived from it.

Additionally, the study of Costeño Spanish is significant for two main reasons. First, Afro-Hispanic linguistic research continues to be severely hampered by the lack of speech samples of Africanized Spanish varieties in *tierra firme*, when compared to the insular Caribbean zone in which robust linguistic research on current Afro-Hispanic speech has been carried out. Although surveys of Latin American Spanish have contributed to a greater understanding of the richness and diversity of American Spanish, they have essentially ignored how the speech of African slaves and their descendents may have influenced the Spanish spoken on the American continent. The study of Afro-Hispanic varieties in *tierra firme*, therefore, may contribute to a better understanding of the evolution of Latin American Spanish.

Secondly, Costeño Spanish, like many other Afro-Hispanic varieties, may vanish within just a few decades. In particular, the Costeño endangerment situation can be attributed to the following external factors: socioeconomic absorption, linguistic forces of standardization, natural disasters in the target area and, consequently, relocation especially by the younger generations. Such a linguistic endangerment situation justifies the need to document current Costeño linguistic features before Costeño suffers language death and becomes extinct.

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It is my hope that this study will contribute to the current research on Afro-Hispanic linguistics. In addition, it also advocates on behalf of the Afro-Mexican communities of the Costa Chica region of Oaxaca, which have been stigmatized and customarily ignored in Mexico's nation-state politics, by giving voice to an Afro-Hispanic language variety that is fast fading.

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NOTES

¹This is one of the reasons why the term *Afromestizo*, introduced by the Mexican scholar Aguirre Beltrán, is avoided in the present study since it derives from the *mestizaje* tradition.

²"The past must not be reconstructed only in an objective way (or even subjectively) by the historian, but it also has to be imagined in a prophetic way by the people, communities, and cultures from which it has derived."

³These include in the state of Guerrero: San Marcos, Copala, Marquelia, Juchitán, Azoyú, El Terrero, and Cuajinicuilapa; and in the state of Oaxaca: El Ciruelo, Estancia Grande, Pinotepa Nacional, Corralero, El Chivo, Collantes, La Boquilla, Morelos, San José del Progreso, Charco Redondo and El Azufre (See Figure 3.4).

⁴(1) Only the phoneme /r̄/ occurs in word-initial environments and syllable-initial position within a word after the consonants /l/, /n/, or /s/. (2) Only the phoneme /r/ is found in final environments and in clusters of two consonants. (3) Both non-lateral liquid phonemes occur in syllable-initial position following a vowel within a word' (Hammond 2001:275).

⁵"...this structure reminds us of the type of construction that is found in Afro-Hispanic creoles, which often exhibit unmarked infinitives (usually with loss of the final /r/ and stress on the last vowel)..."

⁶Lipski, John. The Spanish of Asturias, Leon and Cantabria. (<http://www.personal.psu.edu/users/j/m/jml34/Asturias.pdf>).

⁷Kenstowicz and Kisseberth (1979) cite the following minimal pairs in Nupe and Margi languages. Nupe: [e:g^wa:] 'hand' versus [e:ga:] 'stranger'; [t^wa] 'to trim' versus [ta] 'to tell'. Margi: [pá] 'build' versus [p^wá] 'pour in'; [sá] 'drink' versus [s^wá] 'shut'; [gá] 'and' versus [g^wá] 'enter'.

⁸Lipski, John. El dialecto afroyungueño de Bolivia: en busca de las raíces del habla afrohispanica. (<http://www.personal.psu.edu/jml34/afrobo14.pdf>.)

THE VOICE OF OXUM: *A MULHER NO ESPELHO* (1983)

By Vanessa K. Valdés

In her introduction to the 1994 edition of Ruth Landes's seminal text *The City of Women*, Sally Cole offers the following observation about the relationship between women and *Candomblé*: "Candomblé makes visible women's experience, and offers women well-defined roles, personal access to a multiplicity of spirits who speak to women's needs, and access to extended personal networks and material resources" (xiii). In this article, I argue that Helena Parente Cunha's novel *Mulher no Espelho* (1983) offers the world of *Candomblé* as a means by which to combat patriarchal definitions of womanhood. In the novel, this religious system serves as an instrument that actively encourages the development of female agency. The protagonist moves from a sense of psychic fragmentation to a reconciliation of all aspects of her personality; she does so after she goes into a trance at a *Candomblé* ceremony and learns the identity of her guiding *orixá*, Oxum. *Candomblé* therefore serves as an alternate system of knowledge for the protagonist, a mirror that provides a different set of images and prototypes of womanhood.

The novel is a dialogue between the protagonist, "eu", and her reflection in her mirror, "*a mulher que me escreve*."ⁱ The representation of these two voices underscores the protagonist's crisis of identity: "*a mulher*" rejects all that the woman's first person voice ("eu") has become, an upper middle class housewife whose life is dedicated to her husband and sons. Instead, "*a mulher*" repeatedly urges "eu" to become more interested in herself, her thoughts, emotions, and desires. She slowly does so by reclaiming the African-derived syncretic religion of *Candomblé*. These African elements of Brazilian culture that she was urged to leave behind in her childhood take the split protagonist on a journey from fragmentation to a greater sense of integration. Thereafter, she recovers aspects of her personality that she had previously learned were unseemly, such as the enjoyment she receives from sexual pleasure. Throughout the text the protagonist interacts with the *orixás* Yemanjá, Xangô, Iansã, and Oxum; I will focus on her association with the latter.ⁱⁱ Because of this relationship, she comes to speak in a single, rather than a multiple, voice, with the ability to proclaim at the conclusion of the novel, "sou eu" (175). In choosing to reclaim an African-based consciousness, she effectively navigates herself out of the series of male-dominated relationships to which she had been previously accustomed. She learns that she has an opportunity to live her life anew, as a woman not divided by loyalties to her father or her husband or her sons, but indeed, one who is true to herself, to her own needs and desires.

Similar to her protagonist, Helena Parente Cunha was raised in Salvador in what she calls a "very strong structure within the traditional pattern for Bahia" (Szoka 47)ⁱⁱⁱ. She began publishing in the late 1970s, after the collapse of the military dictatorship in Brazil, and after making her life in the academy as a professor of literary theory at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. Though she has written, and garnered praise for, her poetry and short stories, *Mulher no Espelho* is Parente Cunha's first novel, and the only one in which she utilizes Afro-Brazilian motifs. While this text has garnered significant critical attention (which I discuss below), critics often overlook the African elements of the novel.^{iv} Only Cristina Sáenz de Tejada has done so in considerable depth, in both an article (1997) and in her book-length study (1998). However, she fails to investigate the representation of Oxum in the novel, which is the focus of this article.

One of Oxum's most important implements is the mirror; while critics have failed to recognize this relationship, many have analyzed the novel utilizing Jacques Lacan's

mirror-stage of psychological development to reveal how Parente Cunha engages with literary theory. For Carmen Chaves Tesser, the novel is a direct response to post-structuralist theory: she proposes that the narrator is the personification of language itself as it attempts to define who it is and how it functions (595). She writes: "As a post-structuralist, [Lacan] saw the decentering of thought as natural in his famous 'mirror stage' – the point at which the child realizes that his arms, legs, are part of a whole, a separate being from his mother. The mirror stage is also the point at which language begins to fill voids" (595). In comparison, for Khadija Safi-Eddine, the reflection in the mirror, "*a mulher*," is the protagonist's conscience that allows her to gain a greater understanding of herself (48). Naomi Lindstrom considers the way in which Parente Cunha blends these theoretical considerations with the "presentation of personal and social concerns" about womanhood (141), and for Laura J. Beard, the novel represents the self all the while underscoring the futility of the exercise (103). I agree with the critics who read the novel as one that fully develops the Lacan's mirror stage of individual development, thereby seeing "*a mulher*" as something that aids the protagonist to reconcile disparate parts of herself. However, I do so with one critical distinction: I posit that "*a mulher*" is actually the *orixá* Oxum, in which case the novel is one that traces the gradual recognition by the protagonist that this entity guides her life.

Obedience and Self-Sacrifice

At the opening of the story, the protagonist finds herself at an impasse. During the course of her marriage, she has attempted to follow what she perceives to be the dictates of her society regarding the roles of daughter, wife, and mother. In the process, she has restrained her own thoughts and feelings. Despite her best efforts, however, she loses her family. We learn at the outset that her husband is a known philanderer, and her three adult sons alternately ridicule and ignore her. The men in her life have all left the house in which they once lived as a family, leaving her alone and at a loss as to how to comport herself.^v

For the protagonist, a chief characteristic of womanhood is acquiescence: indeed, she learns to assent to the whims of those surrounding her. Early in the novel, we learn that the protagonist's father was the central figure in her younger life. She describes her relationship to him as follows: "Insignificantes éramos todos nós, em volta dele, todopoderoso, mandando e antemandando, e nós, aos seus pés, submissos, submetidos, subjugados, submergidos, subtraídos" (33). The protagonist makes clear that her father was like a god to her. The image she conveys is similar to that of the deity of the Old Testament, in that he is someone who remains distant from those who surround him and who demands that everyone succumbs to his will. She discloses that her father was "um homem do interior, filho de coronel, dono de terras, acostumado a mandar, chicote na mão, esporas nos pés, ele também por criação e temperamento sabia fazer-se obedecer" (59-60).^{vi} As the child, and more importantly, as the daughter, of this man, she is expected to obey without question until she marries a man of the same class who will then replace her father in her life.

In marrying her husband, the protagonist does in fact find a man who is very similar to her father. She acknowledges this (66), and reveals the similarity in her behavior toward both men: "Aceitei meu pai com a boca em linha reta. Com a boca esvaziada de porquês, aceito meu marido e meus filhos. Aprendi a agir como ajo com minha mãe. Minha mãe viúva, que eu amo e admiro. A sua voz pouca e leve. O seu silêncio denso. O altíssimo silêncio seu" (34). Notably, her mother is a woman that the protagonist

chiefly characterizes by her silence, to which she assigns depth and height. It is from her mother that "eu" learns to simply accept all that the men in her life do, without the benefit of asking why. Her primary model of femininity lived her own life in this way, and so, without question, the protagonist follows the unspoken rules. In the face of all authority, she accepts.

There are moments in the narrative in which the protagonist conflates her husband and her father. She writes:

Eu dependo de meu marido. Meu marido depende de mim, por mais que se tenha na conta de homem forte poderoso. Eu dependo de dependência dele. Eu dependia de meu pai. E meu pai dependia de mim. Ele, senhor de minha vida e do meu dia, dependia de mim. Eu, pobre criatura aos seus pés. (80)

She understands herself to be a woman upon whom these men depend, to the extent that she takes pride in being relied upon. This compliancy is the chief characteristic of her identity: her sense of self is determined by her ability to be reliable for these men who seemingly are able to take care of themselves. Yet in the last line of the passage, she communicates a quiet discontent with her position, an acute awareness perhaps that she deserved better treatment, both from her father and her husband.

Among the repeated themes in this novel are those of obedience, submission, and sacrifice. "*A mulher*" reveals that the protagonist was unwanted, or rather, that her father's preference for a son led to the protagonist's submissive behavior: "*Esta foi a sua primeira sensação de culpa. Por causa desta decepção primordial que você deu a seu pai, você procurou sempre, inútil tentativa, compensá-lo pela perda. A partir daí, você começou a traçar o seu caminho de obediência e submissão*" (67). Her commitment to quiet surrender, therefore, is rooted in her inability to repent for the seemingly unpardonable sin of being born a girl. From childhood, then, she assumes the blame for something that she could not change, her sex. Almost from the beginning of her life, therefore, she learns to bow to the wishes and desires of everyone surrounding her, rather than to her own will. "Eu" writes: "Aceitei que meu pai gostasse mais de meu irmão. Aceitei que meu marido não permitisse que eu sásse sozinha. Aceitei viver disponível para meus três filhos. Aceitei, aceitei, risco e perda, solitário ganho" (24). Once again, we hear the insistent repetition of her acceptance, almost like a steady drumbeat. This passage recalls the moment in the Catholic mass when, during the presentation of the Eucharist, the congregation repeats three times it is its fault that Christ was crucified. In accepting the blame for that act, there is a presumed recognition that redemption and transcendence is achieved through suffering.

Gender and the Catholic Church in Latin America

Throughout the text, in fact, Parente Cunha offers a sustained attack on the ideological influence of the Catholic Church. In an article about this novel, she writes: "Quando se pensa na identidade da mulher brasileira captada através da narrativa feminina contemporânea, faz-se indispensável incluir um traço comum a muitas escritoras – a culpa – sem dúvida, parte do legado deixado pela ideologia da Igreja Católica" (119). The Church, she suggests, informs all aspects of daily life in Brazil, even though one may not be an active participant in the rites of the institution. The protagonist's willingness to place the needs of the men in her life before her own recalls the concept of *marianismo*, as introduced by Evelyn P. Stevens in her 1973 essay entitled "*Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo in Latin America.*" There she

writes that in their aspiration to be like the Virgin Mary, Latin American women gain a great amount of spiritual strength that leads to a kind of superiority over men. This allows for "an infinite capacity for humility and sacrifice. No self-denial is too great for Latin American woman, no limit can be divined to her vast store of patience with the men of her world" (94-95). In fact, according to this line of thought, men must be humored, because "everyone knows that they are *como niños* (like little boys) whose intemperance, foolishness and obstinacy must be forgiven because 'they can't help the way they are'" (Stevens 95).

Stevens states that Latin American women have power in their relationships with men, and although those men might act disrespectfully, their wives and mothers understand that they do not have the spiritual fortitude to act correctly. Nowhere in her study, however, is there any mention of happiness, fulfillment, or contentedness felt by the women she examines. There is no hint at the reality of their emotional lives. In contrast, the protagonist of this novel provides an intimate portrait of the fictionalized reality of one Latin American woman. In describing her family, she says, "Meu marido acha que devo viver exclusivamente, totalmente, exaustivamente para ele. Isso me faz muito feliz. Na opinião de meus filhos, toda mãe tem obrigação de se dedicar de modo absoluto a quem pôs no mundo. Esta é a razão da minha vida" (26). At this point in the text, she does not question whether her husband or her sons have the right to demand that she live for them. She reveals that she is accustomed to a lifetime of service to her father: "Renunciei a tudo por amor a meu pai" (61). Upon marriage, the protagonist transfers that attention and devotion to her husband.

Though she hints that unrelenting devotion might have caused her pain and fatigue, "eu" insists that she welcomes pain into her life: "entreguei mãos e pés aos laços e aos nós que me amarram. Entre os laços e os nós, meu limite de liberdade. Minha escolha, minha liberdade" (26). Though she uses images of restraint to reference freedom, "eu" does not recognize the implicit contradiction. Instead, the reference to being bound recalls the suffering of Christ, to the extent that His followers are supposed to take up His cross. Again, the text presents the notion that there is redemption after suffering. In the same way that God so loved the world that He sacrificed His only Son, the protagonist does the same for her family. She says, "Há momentos em que eu tenho a impressão de que eles estão sugando o meu próprio sangue" (35). Similar to the figure of Christ, the protagonist sacrifices herself for the presumed good of everyone else. She expounds upon her idea of love when she says, "Só quem vive profundamente o amor, pode entender as ilimitadas compensações do sacrifício, a alegria de doar de tanto amor. É por muito amar que eu me divido entre meu marido e meus três filhos. Cada qual me disputando um do outro. Amar é também fazer doar e sangrar" (35). The protagonist evokes a form of Catholicism that believes in the spiritual value of physical pain. It is the belief that in suffering like Christ, we will join Him in heaven. Again, she ignores the apparent contradiction between love and pain, insisting instead that at times, those terms mean the same thing.

With her critique on the supposed spiritual value of pain for women, Parente Cunha calls attention to the fact that Brazilian culture, influenced by the Church, does not make similar demands of its men. On the contrary, such behavior could be deemed "unnatural," even "un-manly." In her 1989 study, Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara comments on the continued power of patriarchal thought in Latin American Christianity (22). This, in spite of the development of liberation theology in the 1960s which puts at its center the emancipation of all regardless of gender, race, or class. In a study published three years earlier, however, she calls attention to a space where women are not submissive but rather are in positions of power:

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No que tange a esta experiência religiosa primordial, seria de grande importância refletirmos sobre a função da mulher no Candomblé, particularmente no Nordeste brasileiro. Lembro apenas esta realidade para color e relevo o fato de que mesmo em culturas machistas como a nossa, no Candomblé, a mulher tem um lugar especial no exercício oficial de tarefas religiosas. A “mãe-de-santo” é “rainha” em seu terreiro. Recebe o desejo do santo o da santa, transmite-os, preside e coordena cerimônias religiosas. Em geral, não acontece o mesmo nas Igrejas cristãs, embora se verifique a existência de funções não oficiais (13).

Here she reminds her audience of the possibilities of liberation that *Candomblé* presents to its female practitioners. Parente Cunha's inclusion of this religious system in her novel suggests that she also recognizes the emancipating possibilities *Candomblé* presents for women and, in fact, proposes it as a means by which to combat patriarchal thought.

Birth of a New Self: Daughter of Oxum

The most noteworthy aspect of this novel is the idea that the recognition of an African heritage allows the protagonist to re-integrate her fragmented self, so that by the end of the work there is no longer a distinction between the various voices but rather one unified voice. Parente Cunha suggests that the European values of patriarchy are destructive to women, who should instead look to the world of *Candomblé*. There, one can find women not only as energies who are worshipped, such as Yemanjá, Oxum, and Iansã, but also women as priestesses who do not remain quiet and subservient to their male counterparts. As critic Cristina Sáenz de Tejada points out: “es significativo señalar el papel primordial que ocupa la mujer en estas ceremonias a través de la figura de la ‘mãe-de-santo’ que controla y regula el ritual religioso. Asimismo actúa como la transmisora de las tradiciones de su cultura” (47). In simply participating in the rituals of this religion, then, the protagonist finds a system of thought that places women in the forefront, in a position of power rather than one of submission.

According to the *Enciclopédia brasileira da diáspora africana*, Oxum is the

orixá iorubano das águas doces, da riqueza, da beleza e do amor. Segundo alguns relatos tradicionais, é divindade superior, tendo participado da Criação como provedora das fontes das águas doces. É o nume tutelar do rio Óshun, que nasce em Ekiti, no Leste da Nigéria. [...] É a Venus dos iorubás, famosa por sua beleza e por seu grande cuidado com a aparência... [ela] é descrita como divindade que *gosta muito de se banhar, que está sempre se mirando num espelho*” (505, my emphasis).

Oxum is the sole *orixá* in the pantheon of entities within this religion that carries the mirror, which she uses to appreciate her own beauty and sensuality. She is the quintessence of femininity. In examining Yoruban oral literature, Diedre Badejo finds that she is the entity that governs fertility, that which allows for the continuation of the human race. She writes: “As a female deity, she possesses the power to withhold the life-force which activates humanity through the male principle. That singular power emphasizes that without the female principle, the male principle is rendered impotent” (74).^{vii} Oxum, then, is an entity that represents and embodies all aspects of womanhood. She defends the power that all women inherently possess. In including this specific deity in the novel, Parente Cunha is proposing an alternate version of womanhood, one that should stand alongside the Virgin Mary in popular representations of the feminine.

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After the men in her life leave, the protagonist learns the identity of the *orixás* who guide her. While in trance, she discovers she is the daughter of Oxum:

Ela pertence a Oxum. Iansã é dona dela. Ela tem de fazer a cabeça. Ela vai morrer, se não quiser ser cavalo de Oxum. Se não quiser ser cavalo de Iansã. A força das águas. O poder dos ventos e das tempestades. Oxum. Iansã. A graça do passo. O grito da guerra. Oxum. Iansã. Ela sabe a mansidão. Ela espalha os temporais. Os amarelos de ouro. Os vermelhos de sangue. Oxum. Iansã. Ela pertence a Oxum. Iansã é dona dela. Ela vai morrer, se não fizer a cabeça. (164)

Here the protagonist learns that she must initiate into this religion (“tem de fazer a cabeça”) as a means by which to avoid facing death. To this point, she has sacrificed herself without any thought as to the harm she has caused herself. Living in an environment that actively encourages women to surrender their will for the good of the men in their lives, she has previously given little thought to the metaphors of blood and suffering that she uses to describe love. She understands love to mean something that brings about her own suffering, but for the sake of a greater good, namely that of her family. For “eu,” renunciation of her self (her thoughts, dreams, emotions, will, etc.) would bring joy to the lives of everyone around her. Throughout the novel, though, “*a mulher*”, who, I would emphasize, is the reflection of “eu” that appears in her mirror, encourages “eu” to think of herself first, to place herself at the forefront of her own life. Suddenly, in trance, the protagonist learns the identities of deities that will persuade her to do the same.

While the protagonist reveals that she is a daughter of Oxum late in the narration, there is strong evidence that Oxum has always been present in her life. A critical part in the protagonist’s journey to integration is the recognition of her sexuality and the role that her body has played in her life. As a child, she did not know the meaning of virginity: “Pensava que ser virgem era ser boa como a Virgem Maria. Na minha cabeça, virgindade representava bondade, humildade, delicadeza, altruísmo. Eu me considerava distante desses sentimentos, incompetente para a virtude” (81). Again, we see the grasp of the Catholic Church, as its only model for womanhood is a mother who reproduced without having sex. “*A mulher*” takes pains to point out how “eu’s” ignorance of the sexual act continued until she was seventeen years old (81), and while she experienced stirrings of her desire, she had no acceptable outlet because she was not married. Later the protagonist continues: “Eu era uma menina ingênua e sozinha, sem ninguém que me ajudasse a ter coragem de romper o cerco das proibições de meu pai, sem ninguém que me explicasse o que significavam palavras como virgindade, que nem de longe eu suspeitava o que fosse” (82). Her genuine lack of knowledge regarding her own sexuality underscores the situation in which many young girls find themselves: without encouragement to explore their own bodies, they remain unaware of what brings them pleasure or discomfort until they are with male partners.

Reclaiming the Body

In her influential essay “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Hélène Cixous highlights the relationship between the power of writing for women and its effect on women’s sexuality: “To write. An act which will not only ‘realize’ the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal” (351). Throughout her novel, Parente Cunha includes explicit descriptions of the protagonist’s relationship with her body, both during her

marriage, when she believes it to be something of which she should be ashamed, as well as after all of the men in her life leave her. The manner in which she treats her body reveals her location on her spiritual journey from psychic fragmentation to a reconciliation of all aspects of her personality.

As a wife and mother, "eu" denies the existence of her own sexual pleasure in favor of her husband's: "Eu simplesmente me assisto, sem espelhos, neutra e vaga, cada vez mais consentida" (48). According to Evelyn P. Stevens, "the ideal [of *marianismo*] dictates not only premarital chastity for all women, but also postnuptial frigidity. 'Good' women do not enjoy coitus; they endure it when the duties of matrimony require it" (96). The protagonist articulates her unhappiness when she says: "Meus seios solitários, minhas nádegas vazias de carícias, meu sexo ermo. Em chamas" (48). Rather than accept that she, the "eu" voice, has admitted to something less than happiness, she quickly blames "*a mulher que me escreve*," thereby denying responsibility for her feelings. She continues to do so until the conclusion of the novel, when the two voices become one.

While the protagonist's sense of self is not defined by her body, her spiritual integration is furthered once she has an active relationship with her body, that is, once she no longer denies herself pleasure or feels embarrassment when she enjoys herself. Her involvement with *Candomblé*, a religion that eschews the mind/body problem of Catholicism and much of Western thought, promotes this process. Early in the text, the protagonist hints at the passionate woman that lies within the woman who tires from attempting to please all of the men in her life. She says that when she dances alone, she can enjoy herself: "No pulso do ritmo, deduzo a minha quota de liberdade, desfruto de uma sensualidade que desconheço, gozo de uma beleza física que me restaura" (47). This recalls several of the defining characteristics of Oxum, she who loves to dance ("a graça do passo"), who in the movement of her body personifies sensuality and beauty. Alone, the protagonist allows herself to experience pleasure, and achieves sexual release without depending on her husband: "entro no chuveiro e deixo a água correr pelo meu corpo satisfeito, após o orgasmo que me concedi" (47).^{viii} In the water, this daughter of Oxum feels free enough to let go and release. Later, she says, "Muitas vezes gosto de me ver nua, sozinha no quarto, nos mistérios do meu corpo que o infinito dos espelhos cruzados me estendem, me prometem, me acenam. Espreito pelas frestas do que me foi negado. Do que me neguei. A minha nudez me atrai, me excita, me assusta" (47). At the same time, then, that she fascinates herself, she also scares herself, most probably because she has not yet integrated her sexual self with her conception of wife and mother. And yet, she uses the mirror, one of Oxum's chief implements, to study herself, to learn about the mysteries of her own body, to develop a greater sense of her own sensuality. In this way, she recalls Oxum herself, who revels in her own reflection in the mirror.

Certainly, the protagonist's relationship with her own body is symbolic of her relationship with Oxum. She has ignored it, repressing her most basic desires in order to satisfy someone else. And yet, the deity who governs beauty and love, who encourages the sensuality of women, is always present, laying dormant, awaiting recognition. Significantly, "eu" describes being away from mirrors when having perfunctory sex with her husband (48). After the men in her life leave, "eu" takes a moment to look at herself in those mirrors. Initially she only sees "uma imagem deprimida, o rosto contraído, os ombros encurvados, as mãos caídas, as pernas entreabertas, em busca de mais chão" (113). Once she ascertains that her body is all there, that there is nothing physically missing, she begins to laugh.^{ix} Standing naked in front of her countless mirrors, she says, "Uma sensação boa de liberdade percorre as minhas imagens. Apalpo

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os meus seios, apalpo o meu sexo. Vivos. Ansiosos. Um sorriso lúbrico surpreende o meu rosto no espelho. Olho fixamente. Sorrio mais no meu sorriso lúbrico e me reconheço" (114). She revels in her own beauty, enjoying her own sensuality. She recognizes the reflection in the mirror as herself. From this point, the voice of "eu" dominates the narration: no longer does the voice of "*a mulher*," again, originally identified as the reflection in the mirror, appear as often. This implies that "eu" no longer looks outward for guidance regarding her behavior as she had previously done with her father, husband, and sons; instead, she draws on herself as the source of her identity.

The protagonist thereafter begins to enjoy her body, recognizing that she is, in fact, desirable. This is contrary to what her husband has told her during the course of their marriage. Alone, she appreciates that she has "um belo corpo não jovem, à espera do prazer a que tem direito" (115). In the face of a Western culture that insists on beauty being synonymous with youth, this mother of three young adult men recognizes her own desire to experience pleasure. She details each caress:

As minhas mãos percorrem o meu corpo, de alto a baixo. Detêm-se na nuca e se misturam aos cabelos para soltá-los, livres, sobre os ombros. As minhas mãos descem, contornando os seios, levemente sobre as pontas endurecidas, que somente conheceram as mãos balofas e suadas de um homem. Sinto que haverá um prazer à espera dos meus seios solitários. As minhas mãos descem pela cintura, pelas nádegas, se afundam no sexo, polpa madura e úmida aconchegada ao abrigo de vãos e mergulhos. Agora, finalmente pronta para os vãos e os mergulhos? Sim, eu sou eu... (115)

In touching all the parts of her body previously only touched by her husband, the protagonist reclaims herself. She demonstrates that she is presently concerned primarily with her own pleasure rather than that of someone else. She can now affirm her self, her being: "Sim, eu sou eu" (115).

Re-emergence in the World

While the protagonist is engaged on her quest for fulfillment, her children, who are accustomed to her attention, languish. Her oldest son enters a rehabilitation clinic, her middle child is arrested for attempted murder, and her youngest spends his days drunk (109). While she asks herself if she is to blame for their actions, she accepts that there is very little she could have done to prevent them: "fiz o que pude. Sacrifiquei a minha vida e a minha morte" (109). After years in which she has tried to make the lives of her husband and children easier, she adopts a tone of regret. However, she does not blame herself for their misfortunes. On the contrary, she recognizes that she has done all that she could for her family. Significantly, she points to both a life and a death, an indication that the wife and mother that she was no longer exists: she has, instead, borne an entirely new version of herself.

She next mentions her children when her youngest son interrupts a meeting she has with a lover, forcing himself into the house, drunk, and demanding to know the identity of the man she is entertaining. Resembling a jealous lover himself, he puts his hands on his mother and calls her a whore. She asserts herself when she screams, "Sinto-me com toda a autoridade, ouviu bem? Sinto-me com toda a autoridade para lhe dizer a verdade. Para lhe dizer que você é um perdido. Cansei de lutar por você. Por você e seus irmãos. Me sacrifiquei. Me imolei. Virei cinza. Agora basta" (142). This may be the first instance in his life in which the protagonist has not cowed to her husband or to a child, and so he ignores her. In admitting her fatigue and her pain, she finally gives voice to all that she had suppressed previously. She now recognizes the damage she did to

herself in the course of her marriage, and so refuses to resume that behavior for the sake of placating her son. She continues: "Eu, sua mãe, faço o que quero e não admito que filho meu venha me dizer o que é certo, o que é errado" (142). From her words, we learn that her son believes that he has the authority to correct his mother's behavior, much in the same way as her father or her husband would. She maintains, "E se estou andando com muitos homens, é problema só meu. Você não tem nada a ver com este caso" (142). With this declaration, she challenges everything she has taught her son to believe about the role of men and women in his society. Like her mother before her, she previously lived in silence, attempting to satisfy the desires of her husband and children in order to keep the peace. Here, this daughter of Oxum claims a right to her own sexuality, recognizing that she is sole owner of her body: she refuses anyone else's claim to it.

The response of her son to his mother's newfound confidence is to show her a gun that he has been carrying. The manner in which she deals with him changes completely; her tone moves from one of defiance to one of soothing: "Não faça bobagem, meu filho. Não. Me dê essa arma. Filhinho, a mamãe está pedindo. Venha cá, meu benzinho" (142). In order to remove the weapon, she finds it necessary to placate him by assuming a voice to which he is more accustomed. She humors him, saying that she will introduce him to her guest, thereby effectively removing the possibility that he is in fact her lover. By taking up a reassuring presence, the protagonist temporarily mollifies her son. With this scene, Parente Cunha reveals yet another aspect of Oxum. Recognizing the threat that her son poses, the protagonist resorts to flattery in order to calm him, effectively ending the danger. Badejo writes: "Women's power is unequivocal because, like the womb itself, women are a mysterious matrix of internal synergism where spirit and body first meet. To defeat women is to defeat the awesome power of life itself" (85). While her son lives by the societal definition of manhood that dictate he utilize brute strength in order to destroy what he deems to be his (namely, his mother), the protagonist already lives according to the religious system of *Candomblé*, whereby women are empowered beings. Able to draw on her own inherent might, she reveals the possibilities open to women if they were to live by this system of thought.

In the last paragraph of the novel, the mirror of the title breaks and with it, the voice of "*a mulher*." No longer do we have the division between the two voices that have offered conflicting narratives. Instead the protagonist says, "Olho um rosto inteiro num pedaço de espelho. Um rosto só... Meu rosto. Inteiro. Sou EU" (175). The protagonist is no longer fragmented; instead, she speaks in a singular voice. She has now subsumed the identity of "*a mulher*," she who consistently encouraged her to live as a self-realized woman, one not divided by loyalties to her father or her husband or her sons, but indeed, one who is true to herself, to her own needs and desires. And because of this, we are left to ponder the true identity of "*a mulher que me escreve*": is she, as Naomi Lindstrom claims, a feminist novelist? Or could she possibly have been the voice of Oxum all along? Though the mirror is destroyed, the task is complete: no longer sacrificing herself for the benefit of others, the protagonist can easily claim: "Sou eu."

In this text, we find the journey of a woman who begins by defining herself in terms defined by her father, her husband, and her sons. After these men leave her, she finds herself in a position where she comprehends that she has the capacity to construct her identity for herself. From the beginning of the novel, she acknowledges that no one knows her true self, that, in fact, it is an impossibility for anyone to truly know anyone: "Por acaso, alguém sabe alguém, carne e grito sob a capa do rosto, ordenado e composto em carapaça?" (17). And while she asserts that she exists only in her own

imagination (18), she does not know herself at the beginning of the text. In fact, this feeling of unease prompts the writing of her life story. In doing so, the protagonist slowly comes to the realization that she is more than just someone who can be identified by the roles she plays in the lives of the men surrounding her: more than just "daughter of," "wife of," "mother of." The protagonist has to confront not only the memory of her own biological father, but also the patriarchal society in which she lives. She does so by engaging in the religious rituals of *Candomblé*, through which she learns that she is the daughter of Oxum. This entity leads her to begin integrating her disparate selves, those elements of herself that she believes to be objectionable, namely, her own wants and desires. In heeding the voice of Oxum, the protagonist succeeds at speaking in a singular voice.

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NOTES

ⁱI am following the stylistic conventions Parente Cunha establishes in her novel, using italics to distinguish the voice of “*a mulher*” from “eu.”

ⁱⁱFor a study of the role of Yemanyá and Xangô in the text, see Sáenz de Tejada 1998.

ⁱⁱⁱIn this interview with Elizbieta Szoka, Parente Cunha leaves open the possibility that this novel is in part autobiographical: like the protagonist, she had an “unbelievably special nursemaid... [who was] a granddaughter or great-granddaughter of slaves” (42); she describes her father as “very strict, very severe... [who] wouldn’t let [her] walk on the beach or go to parties” (43); and she describes having a complicated relationship with her body which was only resolved upon entering a spiritual path (49).

^{iv}Naomi Lindstrom recognizes the role of Afro-Brazilian culture in the refashioning of the protagonist’s identity (145), but does not explore this line of thought due to the scope of her study.

^vFor a fascinating discussion of the physical space where the protagonist lives and its function in the text, see Somerlate Barbosa.

^{vi}The protagonist’s family life reflects a traditional mold of life in many Latin American countries. Women of all classes and races throughout the region are taught to obey the men in their lives and to be silent, accessories to their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons.

^{vii}Jacob Kehinde Olupona writes of the Yoruba creation myth, in which Ọsun forces the male deities to reveal the accords they had reached in secret, without consulting the female ones. He writes: “The power of the myth lies precisely in making the male principles retrace their steps and communicate with female principles for the overall good of the world” (viii).

^{viii}In his *Brazilian Narrative Traditions in a Comparative Context*, Earl E. Fitz writes that Parente Cunha writes firmly in the tradition of Clarice Lispector by “allowing the act of masturbation to function subversively as a sign of female empowerment and self-realization” (146).

^{ix}In the *Dicionário de cultos afro-brasileiros*, Oxum is characterized as a “deusa-menina, faceira” (213). Here, then, “eu” once again recalls her guiding entity.

Edelma Zapata Pérez es hija del Dr. Manuel Zapata Olivella, admirado escritor y humanista, quien fuera considerado "el décano de los estudios afro-latinoamericanos" por Richard Jackson. Mediante su escritura, Edelma mantiene viva la rica tradición de la familia Zapata: ubicar en el centro de su discurso literario la voz de la gente negra de América Latina, especialmente la de Colombia. En 2008, Edelma Zapata fue designada invitada de honor durante el congreso de la Asociación de Investigación Afro-Latinoamericana (ALARA) en Cartagena, Colombia. Además de tener una licenciatura en Antropología de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Edelma Zapata es autora de *Ritual con mi sombra* (1999); su poesía ha sido publicada en diversas antologías, periódicos y revistas académicas en Latinoamérica, los Estados Unidos y Europa.

Plaza

Sobre la plaza un rayo de sol
camina tenue el ala de un sombrero,
lánguido acaricia la piel de una niña,
y cae como pluma en su boca.

Desde la sombra, en los tendidos,
de emociones urden los corazones.
De vino caliente, de boñiga y corrales.
La tarde repiten los espejos.

Como un dios que irrumpe con su trueno
el toro cimarrón de feroz instinto
¡Gloria da al rito!

El torero tenso en la piel de luz,
suspendido el aliento, desafía la muerte.
Y en el ruedo su cuerpo de asombro
y de deseo estremece los senos.

Lo sacro, lo profano;
un suspiro de vida, de muerte,
cierne grave sobre la bestia,
que crece y decrece en conmociones.

¡Gime la ansiedad atesorada en las espadas!

Viento salino

Un demonio de máscaras
burlonas me hace trampas.
Sudado rosario de desgracias
memoriza mi cuerpo.

Días y noches de un mismo amanecer.

PALARA

Hay una sola y triste tarde,
sentada en un banquillo.
Desde aquella huidiza tarde
en que otras tardes
prodigaron su olvido.

Hoy, he guiado sus ojos ciegos,
su noche oscura, entre pinos y ramas
de garras gigantes.
Aprisiona mi brazo taciturno su cintura.
Tiembla su cuerpo, y tiembla mi miedo.

Tarde querida, ya te alejas
entre las grietas del crepúsculo.
Como cae en ti el ocaso, cae en mí la pena.

Tierra

Entro vacilante en la manigua verde,
por entre manglares de oscuras aguas,
bajo tu cielo de estrellas ¡patria te invoco!

Coqueteas conmigo en las alas del viento,
en esta brisa loca que enreda mi falda
desde la cintura hasta mis tiernas bragas.

Sobre la playa se arrastra la verdolaga,
entre el agua y la tierra crece la flor morada.
Antes de que la tumben, cantaré mi canción.

Lentos amaneceres retrasan tu luz
propicios al rito y al amor.
Ondeante movimiento de unas caderas negras.

Dolor viviente
Siguen estos vientos álgidos y sombríos.
Llevando dolosos años, fantasmas invisibles,
a la sombra de una noche alterna.

Tierra polvorienta nutrida de sangre
De viudas gimientes, de niños huérfanos.
Los abuelos y los padres de ellos,
generaciones y siglos sentados a tu vera.

Amor querido
que cicatrice tu cuerpo, no cese tu canto,
ni calle tu eco.
Disuelta la bruma deje ver la luz.

PALARA

Mi preciosa estrella en el firmamento.

Rumores de melancholia.

Canción de esperanza

Ahora alma mía,
Recoge en ésta canción de amor
las lágrimas del amanecer
la algarada de los pájaros.

¿Y por quien
esa canción purificada?

Por los pobres del mundo,
desnudos de todas las cosas
menos del alma...

Que en el tumulto de los años duros,
ahogan la fe, la esperanza.
¡Oráculos de bocas ciegas!

Su espíritu sagrado
perece en tenebrosas aguas.
Un corazón alguna vez tierno, se derrite.

¡Desechables! Anuncia el clarín público
la disolución de un hombre.
Nuestro amor que desconoce el frío,
en su pecho permanece en silencio.

Somos raíz

Los que pasan, los que vendrán.
Polvo de esta tierra. Savia de esta tierra.
Sudor, ramas, fibras, semilla.

Tiempos de guerra, a su vez,
sueños de esperanza.

En sangre derramamos la vida,
las gargantas abiertas beben el sol.
Saludamos el alba con los ojos callados.

El impulso llega con los guerreros,
no los detiene el abandono,
los lentos, ni los cobardes.
No tiene voz la indiferencia.

De regreso,
una nación abre el camino.
Al amanecer arrastrará la oscuridad.
Vendrán los besos que perduren en ella.

Cicatrices viejas, promesas nuevas.

Afro América, las tantas caras de África.
Alma a alma para cientos de almas.
El poema va, en tonos altos y ecos bajos.
Cicatrices viejas y promesas frescas.

No cabe duda. Los soles mancillaron
las púrpuras espaldas
que a látigos maduraron los frutos.
Los días, los años, los siglos.

Es tu océano, mi océano que
suavemente llega.
A algunos les conviene nos miremos
de orilla a orilla, fácil así confundimos.

No te conozco, tampoco me conoces.
Si, tu piel es opuesta a la mía,
en la diferencia el encuentro.

Suficiente el gesto,
la transparencia que invita.
Un corazón abriendo brechas.

Una rosa se abre

El alma,
cuando un dolor la apena
se abandona.
Una persiana que al pasar los días
permanece cerrada.

Pero,
cuando al pasar
otra alma su pena alcanza,
al tocarla la ternura, florece.

La alborada anuncia la mañana,
en los confines amanece
la plenitud un alma

PALARA

detrás de la ventana
una rosa esparce la fragancia,
desde la tierra sube al cielo
un suave olor a primavera.

Todo es quietud ahora.
La lluvia disipa la tormenta.
En el árbol, por la dicha contagiada,
una luciérnaga titila.

El guardián y yo

Habla el cautivo:

Solos el carcelero y yo.
Las sombras del crepúsculo,
conocen quien es él y quien soy yo.

Yo, el que silencia su voz para no enlutar
de blasfemias el aire.
Él, quien sienta su rifle para la libertad
sobre el altar de la mía.

A veces conversamos él y yo.
A la conversación se unen los sapos.
Dos sapos croando bajo la luna llena.

Tan cerca, tan cerca,

que su aliento calienta mi aliento.
Los latidos pulsan la sangre,
y al mezclarse los alientos solitarios
son un solo aliento, un solo pulso lento...

No me confundo cuando, vencido,
lo siento vulnerable.
Juntos desafiamos las trampas del tiempo.

El abandono y el cansancio.
Él tiene la atención del animal que acecha,

yo, la paciencia de la presa

Edelma. 2009

Nalda Báez nació el 28 de agosto de 1973 en Santo Domingo, República Dominicana. Ella cursó sus estudios subgraduados en la Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras. En mayo de 1999, recibió su bachillerato en Psicología y una certificación en Lenguas Modernas, francés e italiano. Después de eso se mudó a los Estados Unidos a West Lafayette, Indiana. Posteriormente decidió continuar sus estudios de postgrado en Purdue University. Nalda finalmente pudo estudiar lo que le gustaba, la literatura, y en mayo de 2002 recibió su maestría en Literatura Latinoamericana. Más tarde ella continuó sus estudios de postgrado en Purdue University especializándose en Literatura Caribeña y Cultura. Ella recibió su doctorado en español de Purdue University en 2008. Actualmente, es profesora de literatura en la Universidad de Texas Pan -American. Como escritora, la Dra. Baez fue influenciada por algunos de los mejores escritores Afro-Latinoamericanos; entre ellos son Ana Lydia Vega (quien fue como una inspiración a la literatura caribeña y la igualdad de la mujer en la misma), Quince Duncan (estudió con Quince en Purdue University) y su gran patriota, Blas Jiménez.

Lo que te crees

Yo nací en la calle Pedro Villini
Mis padres me bautizaron en la Altagracia
Mi abuelo era español
Mi abuela era árabe

Yo toqué para la banda nacional
Yo tuve un hijo blanco de ojos azules
Mis padres eran dueños de la esquina...
Mis hijos estudiaron en el San Juan Bosco

Yo me defino no sólo por lo que tengo sino por mi herencia

Yo quiero ocultar que:

Mi abuelo era haitiano
Mi segundo marido al que realmente amé, era negro
Mi hija menor es negra

Yo quiero ocultar que:

No soy blanca
No soy católica
No soy española y menos árabe

Yo quiero ocultar que:

Soy una mezcla de razas y que aunque se manifieste mi herencia africana
Yo me creo blanca porque mi pueblo no ha aprendido a amar nuestro sincretismo religioso, nuestra riqueza ancestral y

sobre todo nuestra negritud

PALARA

¿Cómo me ven?

Mi papá me decía que era una princesa, pero no de canela sino de azúcar refinada
Un hermano me decía que era haitiana
Una hermana me decía que era una Santa por no mover el cuerpo al ritmo de Bachata

Mi abuela me decía que era buena a pesar de tener un padre negro
Mis amigos me decían que era trigueña
Mis compatriotas me llamaban piel canela o casi rubia

Uno de mis tíos me decía que era negra con cuerpo de blanca
Una tía me decía que era una morena elegante
Alguien me dijo que era una negra fina
Otra persona me dijo que era hispana

Todos me nombran sin aceptar quién soy

Sin admitir ...

Sin pensar ...

que dar tantos nombres no oculta lo que

SOY, NEGRA

Ponte pa' ese número

Hoy el pale
Mañana la caraca
Después un pal de quiniela
Y no pasa na'

Pero sigo en este número que me dio el destino
El papel no cambia sólo las fechas y los personajes
Despabilate mi sangre y ponte pa' otro número

Que el tuyo hace mucho que salió

Afro-Dominicana

No es ser jaba
No es ser india
No es ser trigueña ni trigueña amarilla
No es ser café con leche
No es ser un poco oscurita

PALARA

Afro-dominicana

Es moverte al ritmo de un tambor

Es ir a una Ora Santa y luego escuchar que te leen la taza de café

Es ver a un hermano haitiano y no juzgarlo por su piel

Es mover las caderas al son de un Perico Ripiao

Es comer patas de cerdo sin sentir que es comida de pobres

Es compartir un pedazo de chicharrón en una fritura

Es vivir orgullosa de tus cabellos, sin decir que es bueno ni malo

Es andar con la frente en alto de saber tener una herencia africana

Es mirarte al espejo y ver cuan hermosa eres

Es aceptar a los tuyos sin sentirte avergonzada

Es ver lo más bello no sólo de ti, sino de tu pueblo

Libre

Tengo una espina en el corazón y una braza en los pies

Todos los días pienso cuándo seré libre

Una libertad correspondida

Hoy o mañana, coño cuándo será

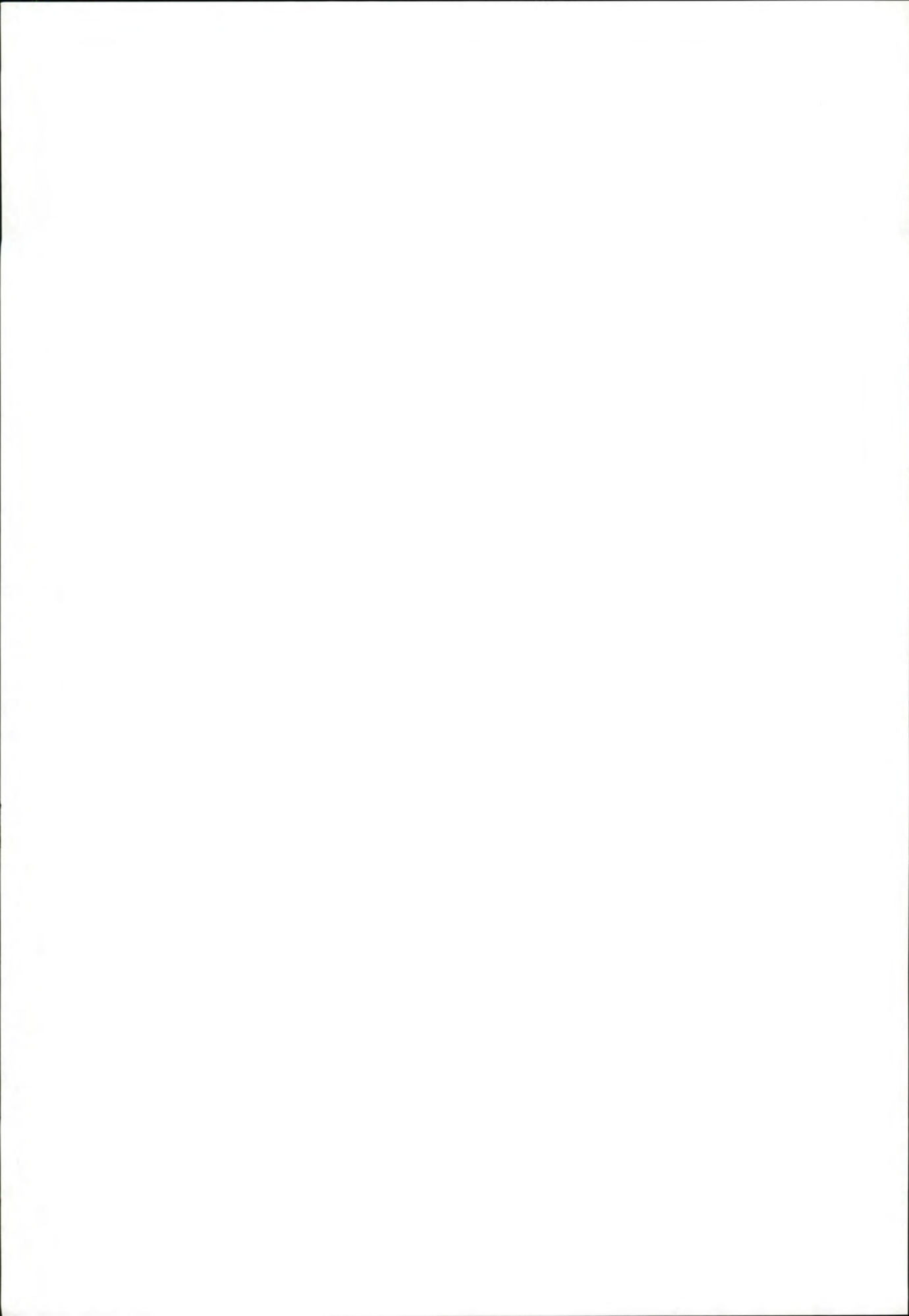
He estado tan cerca

Después de tanto esperar

Soy

Libre al fin desde mí maníel, desde la semilla de mí ser

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