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Editor's Note:

The year 2016 is a milestone year for *PALARA*, marking the publication of the journal's 20th number. The year also marked the celebration of Colombian writer Arnaldo Palacios (1924-2015), whose creative contributions elucidated the plight of Colombians of African ancestry. His most noted work, *Las estrellas son negras* (1948), centers rage, disenfranchisement and political and economic challenges of those living in the Chocó. Arnaldo Palacios died in November of 2015. Thus, the first entries in this 20th number serve as an homage to Don Arnaldo Palacios' life and creative legacy.

I am saddened to inform that 2016 also witnessed the death of our beloved colleague, Dr. Laurence E. Prescott. A founding member of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association (ALARA) and founding co-editor of *PALARA*, Dr. Prescott made numerous scholarly contribution to Afro-Colombian literary and cultural studies. He was a member of the faculty at The Pennsylvania State University for over 20 years. Dr. Prescott was very active with the Afro-Colombian sector of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the College Language Association (CLA). He is the author of *Candelario Obeso y la iniciación de la poesía negra en Colombia* (1985) and *Without Hatreds or Fears: Jorge Artel and the Struggle for Black Literary Expression in Colombia* (2000). Regarding recent activities, Professor Prescott was invited to be a contributor to the projected *Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography*, to be published by Oxford UP. He wrote the Introduction for a special issue of *Revista Negritud* devoted to Afro-Colombian Literature and Culture, in which his "Contribution to a Bibliography of Afro-Colombian Writers" is also slated to appear. His latest publications include the following article, book chapter, and book reviews:

Rev. of *El despertar de las comunidades afrocolombianas; relatos de cinco líderes: Dorina Hernández, Libia Grueso, Carlos Rosero, Marino Córdoba, Zulía Mena*. Edited by María Inés Martínez. Houston: Editorial LACASA; San Juan, Puerto Rico: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales, 2012. 307 p. *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 37.2 (Invierno 2013): 387-390.

"Liberating Blackness: The Theme of Whitening in Two Colombian Short Stories." *Callaloo* 35.2 (2012): 475-493.

"'Yo también soy América': Latin American Receptions of Langston Hughes's American Dream." *Critical Insights: Langston Hughes*. Ed. R. Baxter Miller. Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2012. 255-274.

"Poesía negra en Colombia: el legado duradero de Helcías Martán Góngora." Rev. of *Poesía afrocolombiana* (Cali: Adelaida Hurtado de Martán [Talleres graficos de Feriva S.A.], 2008. 329 p.), by Helcías Martán Góngora; comp. Alfonso Martán Bonilla. *Boletín cultural y bibliográfico* XLVII – Núm. 84 (2013): 186-188.

Dr. Prescott will be missed. However, his pioneering contributions to the field will live on. This number is dedicated to the life, legacy and memory of Arnaldo Palacios and Dr. Laurence E. Prescott.

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Remembering Arnaldo Palacios

I first heard Arnaldo Palacios' name while I was pursuing graduate studies in Spanish at Indiana University. One evening, several of us Teaching Assistants were engaged in correcting sections of examinations that our undergraduate classes had taken. Professor Joseph Schraibman, who was in charge of TA's, had us interrupt the grading to attend a lecture on the contemporary Latin American novel by a visiting Colombian writer. I could not help notice that the speaker, Dr. Manuel Zapata Olivella, was a man of color. During the question and answer period I summoned the courage to ask if there were black writers in Colombia. He seemed especially pleased to receive the question for he responded enthusiastically in the affirmative, mentioning Candelario Obeso, Jorge Artel, Arnaldo Palacios, Carlos Arturo Truque, and, of course, himself.

Years later (I think it was 1974), as a Fulbright-Hays Scholar in Bogotá, Colombia, researching the literary work of that country's writers of African descent, I was able to meet Arnaldo Palacios and spend some time conversing with him at a small café near his apartment. Unlike most of the Afro-Colombian writers whom I met, Palacios was a native of Colombia's Pacific coast. Born in Cértegui, Chocó, January 20, 1924, he was the second child and oldest son of José Venancio Palacios Martínez and Magdalena Mosquera de Palacios. Although stricken with polio in his legs at two years of age, which severely limited his mobility, the love and support of his family and community and his own determination enabled him to walk with crutches fashioned by his father, to complete primary and secondary school, and to begin studying law at a university in Bogotá. More interested in language and literature, he abandoned legal studies and committed himself to making a career in writing. In fact, according to one

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source (Zapata León), Palacios wrote his first novel, *Las estrellas son negras*, as a shortcut to gaining entry into the intellectual world of journalism.¹

Palacios impressed me with his sharp mind, keen sense of humor, and hearty laugh. I was especially captivated, however, upon hearing of his friendships with African American novelist Richard Wright and Martinican psychiatrist Frantz Fanon,² of his connections with intellectuals of the Négritude movement, and of his travels throughout Europe.³ He talked freely about the Chocó, his beloved homeland; about his studies there and in Bogotá; about the plight of black people in Colombia; about the articles he had published in *Sábado*, *El Liberal*, *Revista de las Indias* and other periodicals of the capital; and about the creation and near loss of his first novel, *Las estrellas son negras*. Completed in 1948, much of the manuscript was destroyed in one of several fires that broke out in Bogotá during the popular uprising (known as the *bogotazo*) that followed the assassination of Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948.⁴ Fortunately, a friend had taken part of the manuscript to make a copy, and a sister of Palacios' had held on to the pages of an earlier draft of the novel, which, ironically, Palacios had told her she could discard. Working intensely, Palacios was able to reconstruct the novel "in three weeks" (qtd. in Angarita B.) and delivered it to Clemente Airó, a Spanish writer and exile who owned and operated the publishing house Editorial Iqueima, which had also produced Manuel Zapata Olivella's first novel *Tierra mojada*, the previous year (1947). Significantly, Zapata Olivella, who encouraged Palacios to reconstruct his work, also recommended that artist Alipio Jaramillo Giraldo (1913-1999) illustrate the cover of Palacios' book ("Arnoldo Palacios (1924-) / Biografía." *Centro Virtual Isaacs*).⁵ Jaramillo's signature ("Alipio") can be seen in the lower right corner of the cover drawing on the book (Figure 1), which was published in 1949.⁶ Zapata Olivella also included Arnoldo Palacios among the writers

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he interviewed on the problems of Colombia's book publishing industry (Zapata Olivella, "Problemas del libro colombiano").

Palacios' novel was an immediate success and quickly went out of print. More than twenty years would pass, however, before a second edition, published in Bogotá in 1971, would become available to the reading public. (That edition is the one I read while working on my research project.) Since then, *Las estrellas son negras* has been republished three more times—twice by Colombia's Ministerio de Cultura--; the last edition forms volume 2 of the important collection Biblioteca de Literatura Afrocolombiana (2010).

Although the Chocó was also the setting of earlier novels such as *Quibdó* (1927) by Pedro Sonderéguer, *Oro y miseria* (1942) by Antonio Arango, and *Andágueda* (1947) by Jesús Botero Restrepo, Palacios' work/ *Las estrellas son negras* stood out not only because of its story, characters, and technique, but also because its author was a black man of the Chocó, possibly the first to publish a novel.⁷ At least one announcement and one review of the novel noted that Palacios was black (see "Tableros. Novela." *Jornada* 12 mayo 1949: 4; "De mes a mes (Notas). Libros"). Indeed, before 1949 the number of nationally or widely known and read Afro-Colombian writers who had published books could probably be counted on the fingers of two hands: Obeso, Artel, Francisco Botero (1885-1938), Antonio José Cano (1874-1942), Zapata Olivella. Juan Coronel (1868-1904), Jorge Escobar Uribe ("Claudio de Alas") (1886-1919), and Manuel Baena (1888-19??) are three more authors of note; however, their principal works, published largely in other countries, apparently did not circulate widely within Colombia.⁸

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I do not recall if I still had a tape recorder at that meeting with Arnolde in 1974. At some point, through carelessness, I lost the one I had taken with me to Colombia. In any case, I did have a notebook in which Arnolde kindly wrote for me the titles of French, Belgian, Italian, Swiss, Portuguese, Polish and Russian periodicals or books in which he had published or been interviewed. It was then, too, that he told me about his second novel, *La selva y la lluvia* (1958), which was published in Spanish by Ediciones en Lenguas Extranjeras of Moscow (Soviet Union). Copies of the book apparently did not reach Colombia. The Cold War no doubt contributed to restricting the novel's circulation. Moreover, a speech that Palacios gave in 1950 at a Peace Congress in Warsaw had resulted in the cancellation of the government scholarship he had received in 1949 to study at the Sorbonne. Colombians finally gained access to the book in 2010 when a second edition was published in Bogotá, more than fifty years after its initial appearance.⁹ With the information that Palacios provided me, however, I was able to broaden research on him beyond Colombia and managed to locate several of the publications he had mentioned.

My interest in poetry and eagerness to finish the research project on time pushed me to concentrate on Afro-Colombian verse and, particularly, the work of Candelario Obeso and Jorge Artel. Although I maintained a strong interest in Palacios, Zapata Olivella, and other prose writers, and generally kept abreast of writings by and about them, prose fiction was not the primary focus of my research and writing. Nevertheless, the connections and commonalities I discerned among the poets and prose writers allowed me to keep the latter constantly in mind and to expand the bibliography of Afro-Colombian writers that I was steadily developing. For example, research on Artel, who had left Colombia in the wake of the political violence of 1948, led me to discover a brief commentary on *Las estrellas son negras* published in the

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Venezuelan newspaper where he worked (Artel). In an article surveying opinions on the events of April 9, 1948, Palacios interviewed Eugenio Darío, a young black poet of Cartagena, who, like Artel, had been jailed in the wake of the turmoil of April 9, 1948, and whose first book had recently been published by Editorial Iqueima (Palacios, “Una Encuesta”). Years later, Darío would dedicate one of the poems of his 1953 book *Caminante sin sitio* to Palacios, who by then had been absent from Colombia for four years (Darío, “Confidencias con Arnoldo Palacios”).

The next time I saw Arnoldo Palacios was in 1993 at the Afro-Hispanic Literature conference that Professor Marvin Lewis and his colleagues had organized at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Palacios attended with his wife Béatrice and I with my bride. Manuel Zapata Olivella, Cuban poet Nancy Morejón, and Dominican poet Blas Jiménez also participated. Arnoldo and Béatrice shared with us his latest book, *Les mamelles du Chocó* (1989), a first-person narrative of his family and his early childhood in the Chocó. Translated into French by Béatrice Palacios from the original Spanish (titled *Buscando mi madre dedios*), it constitutes most of the first volume of a projected trilogy of Palacios’ life. After the Missouri conference Arnoldo and I were in touch only once or twice. He requested a copy of my book on Candelario Obeso, which I mailed to him. Several years later he notified me via e-mail of two forthcoming publications: the extended Spanish version of *Buscando mi madre dedios* (2009), which includes two additional sections (called “Libros”), and *Cuando yo empezaba* (2009), a collection of his articles published in the Bogotá weekly *Sábado* between 1944 and 1949 that also includes other writings in *Normandie Magazine* and *Présence Africaine* (“Recorriendo las entrañas del Chocó”).¹⁰ The latter book’s title refers to the words that Palacios exclaimed when Álvaro Castillo Granada, the compiler, showed him photocopies of the original articles. The Chocoano expression “buscar mi madre de

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dios” means to look for work that enables a person to live, to obtain the necessities of life (“Arnoldo Palacios (1924-) / Biografía”). By combining the last three words to create the noun “madrededios” (“Arnoldo Palacios (1924-) / Biografía”), Palacios gave a richer meaning to the expression.

I saw Arnoldo briefly for the last time at the Feria del Libro in Bogotá in August of 2010. We were both in attendance at the panel on the recently released collection Biblioteca de Literatura Afrocolombiana, volume two of which was a new edition of *Las estrellas son negras*, with an introduction by Gustavo Vasco and a prologue by fellow Chocoano writer Óscar Collazos. We exchanged greetings and I snapped a quick photograph of Arnoldo before he exited the room.

Last November, while searching the Internet for new information about Arnoldo, I learned of Arnoldo’s passing in Bogotá. The news saddened me but it was reassuring to know that he died peacefully, surrounded by loved ones, in the home of a family member. His remains were taken to the Chocó and interred there. **His son took away some earth from the grave to be scattered in Russia.** In the days, weeks and months that followed, many articles about Arnoldo Palacios’ life, writings, travels, lectures and talks at universities and other venues of Colombia, and his contribution to Colombian and African diaspora literatures, have appeared in newspapers and magazines, both in print and online. Happily, having reached the age of ninety one, Arnoldo Palacios had lived long enough to see new generations of readers in Colombia, other Hispanophone lands, and the United States appreciate and appraise his novels, early journalism, and (auto)biography.¹¹ In spite of the hardships he experienced during his childhood in the Chocó, adulthood in Bogotá, and the years in France after the rescission of his scholarship, he maintained a positive attitude and approach to life that enabled him to persevere and to gain the respect and admiration of those he

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encountered. His writings evince that same determination, self-confidence, strength of character, and spirit of struggle and *joie de vivre* that characterize much of Afro-Colombian and other diaspora cultures and literatures. To date, only one of Palacios' works has been translated into English (see Palacios, "Christmas for a Black Child"). As more scholars investigate and study Palacios' writings, and as more teachers and professors include them in college and university courses on Latin American, African diaspora, and comparative literatures, even wider audiences will discover his talents, enjoy his art, and learn from his experiences and ideas. The bibliography of publications by and about Arnaldo Palacios included in this issue of *PALARA* aims to make that possible by facilitating awareness of Palacios' contributions to these literatures, identifying important sources of information about his life and work, and fostering scholarly research on his multifarious writings and prolific career.

Laurence E. Prescott

¹ It is interesting to note that Arnaldo Palacios' name does not appear among the thousands of journalists and writers listed in Antonio Cacia Prada's *Historia del periodismo colombiano*.

² According to the note that precedes the excerpt of *La selva y la lluvia* translated into French ("La Pluie et la Forêt"), Palacios met Fanon in 1959 at the Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in Rome.

³ Like Manuel Zapata Olivella and Jorge Artel, Palacios traveled a great deal throughout his life. Also, like Juan Coronel and Jorge Escobar Uribe, two lesser known Afro-Colombian writers whose lives ended abroad, Palacios spent many years away from his homeland. While Coronel and Escobar remained in the Americas, Palacios settled in France, from which he visited other nations of Europe, Africa, and America (Cruz Cárdenas, “Los espejos de Arnoldo” 16).

⁴ Accounts differ about the total or partial loss of the novel. In his interview with Angarita, Palacios says his manuscript was destroyed: “Yo me quedé sin nada, sin original, sin transcripción en limpio.” Encouraged by friends, he adds that he rewrote the novel “de un tirón, en tres semanas.” He gave roughly the same story in “Origen de un escritor” and in Sergio Zapata León’s “Retrato de Arnoldo Palacios.” The 1948 note “Las estrellas son negras” published in *El Liberal* states that only part of the novel was lost.

⁵ Zapata Olivella was quickly becoming familiar with younger Colombian artists. Hernando Tejada (1925-1998) provided an appropriate and attractive illustration for the cover of *Tierra mojada* (1947), Zapata Olivella’s novel of the struggle of rice growers in the Sinú Valley. Alipio Jaramillo and sculptor Rodrigo Arenas Betancourt were the subjects of articles written in 1948 by Zapata Olivella.

⁶ According to this same source, the very first printing of the novel carried a drawing by Jaramillo of a black woman in the Chocó rain forest (“Arnoldo Palacios (1924-) / Biografía”). This print run, however, reportedly sold out in two weeks and the familiar edition with a green cover and an illustration in black and white (charcoal?) of a crucified black man flanked by two women on his right (one of whom holds two seemingly naked children at her sides) and two men on his left (one of whom is also

crucified) is generally considered to be the first printing. Projecting outward from the waist of the crucified man are two other arms that support the feet of the first woman and the children as well as those of the other crucified man. The third man, located below the smaller crucified figure, is running while scattering stars. The second woman, standing and looking to her right, appears to be on guard.

⁷ It is important to note that in 1947 Teresa Martínez Arce de Varela, a native-born *chocoana* and a black woman, had her first novel, *Guerra y amor*, published in Cartagena by Editora Bolívar, the same press that had issued poet Jorge Artel's *Tambores en la noche* (1940). Martínez Arce may well be Colombia's first black female novelist. Perhaps the fact that her book was not published in Bogotá by one of the major presses may help explain why it did not receive much publicity or critical attention.

⁸ For a list of works by the Afro-Colombian writers mentioned here, see Prescott, "Contribution." Awareness of the novel *La noche de la pájaros* (Fiquefleur, France: Fondation Palacios, 2013) by Venancio Palacios (1932-2013), a younger brother of Arnolando Palacios, came too late for it to be included in that compilation.

⁹ It is worthwhile noting that in Warsaw, Poland, in May of 1959, Palacios gave to fellow Colombian and distinguished writer Germán Arciniegas (1900-1999) a copy of that first edition, which is now located in Colombia's National Library within the collection that bears Arciniegas' name (Restrepo).

¹⁰ Many other writings, not included in the collection *Cuando yo empezaba*, show Palacios early and developing style as a journalist and writer; reveal issues and concerns of importance to him and other Colombians (such as racial prejudice and discrimination, the suffering and needs of the people of the Chocó, the exploitation of

natural resources, the selfish attitude of foreign engineers), and unveil Palacios' readings of other writers (such as Richard Wright) and his awareness of, and identification with, the struggle of U.S. African Americans.

¹¹ Although several sources (e.g., Cruz Hoyos; "La selva y la lluvia." *La Alegría de Leer*) state that some of Palacios' works have appeared in Italian and French editions, *Les mamelles du Chocó* seems to be his only book published in a language other than Spanish.

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Arnoldo Palacios y el lenguaje revolucionario en *Las estrellas son negras* (1949)

Arnoldo Palacios perteneció a una gran generación de escritores que defendían su cultura escribiendo relatos de ficción para describir, a través de un lenguaje revelador y subversivo, su medio ambiente de pobreza y opresión. Desde su infancia Arnoldo Palacios demostró un dinamismo y pasión hacia la literatura. Estaba rodeado de la cultura oral de una comunidad de poetas que mantenían intacta la africanidad de los tiempos de la esclavitud. El Chocó, Quibdó y Bogotá se convertirían desde entonces en el centro de su formación como escritor, y le despertaron el deseo de recorrer el mundo. Termina sus estudios secundarios y emprende viaje hacia París. Al llegar a ese mundo francés lejos de su cultura natal, y con sus estudios en la Sorbona, Arnoldo Palacios entiende la importancia del lenguaje afro-colombiano al estudiar las lenguas clásicas que concretizan ese lenguaje de negritud que había delineado en su novela *Las estrellas son negras*.

Arnoldo Palacios nació en el año 1924. En la época de su nacimiento, Colombia estaba en un estado de turbulencia y tensión política. La guerra de los mil días y la masacre de los bananeros crearon de Colombia un país inestable que llevó a los negros del Chocó a una miseria desesperante. Cuando Palacios publica su novela en los años cuarenta hay una migración europea hacia Colombia huyéndole al fascismo europeo. Palacios esboza este evento en los cuatro libros de su novela. Algunos ven a Palacios como el precursor de la época novelística de reivindicación social. Demostraremos en este artículo que más allá de lo social que sí existe en su novelística, Palacios señala la clave de la negritud de la literatura colombiana del siglo XX. El lenguaje negroide de su novela es la voz afro-colombiana olvidada durante gran parte del siglo XX. En *Las estrellas son negras*, se subrayan tres elementos estructurales que forman la misma: 1) los negros del Chocó cuentan la vivencia racial del país e indican

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los sentimientos de incertidumbre, de violencia y de miseria por la que atraviesa el pueblo de la región. En el personaje de Nive se centraliza este concepto. Mientras que Irra, el personaje principal, es la voz del movimiento de negritud y las consecuencias de crimen, prostitución, violencia y desamor por el prójimo que siente el pueblo; 2) el gobierno recibe a los refugiados extranjeros con los brazos abiertos sin embargo le da poca atención a la situación socio-económica del Chocó; 3) la voz negroide que subraya la diferencia entre el mulato, el blanco y el negro.

En este artículo delinearemos las teorías del lenguaje y cómo estas teorías ayudan a identificar la estrecha relación que existe con los simbolismos afrocolombianos. Segundo, estableceremos cómo y por qué estos dos elementos son importantes en la sociedad afro-colombiana. Tercero, con algunos de los pasajes de la novela pretendemos demostrar la relación estrecha que existe entre el lenguaje y la cultura. Para darle un vistazo al movimiento de negritud de Aimé Césaire. Cuarto, explicaremos la perspectiva mística y espiritual como huellas de la cultura africana. Veremos como los personajes de *Las estrellas son negras* intercambian y transfieren sus experiencias y vivencias de ese mundo que va más allá de la ficción.

La teoría de Saussure (1974, 67) dice que: “el lenguaje es un sistema de signos. Y estos signos se llevan de la mano con el significado y el contexto en que se encuentran para ser diferentes e inseparables a otros lenguajes en otras regiones.” Por otra parte, de acuerdo a Roohul Amini (1981, 15), “la cultura tiene múltiples significados. Cada región tiene su propio campo y cada campo requiere una visión general y particular de la definición de cultura. La cultura desde una perspectiva sociológica es la totalidad de las ideas, actitudes, creencias, valores y conocimientos que forman una sociedad y que llevan a una acción determinada.” La aproximación conceptual que presenta Palacios en su novela *Las estrellas son negras*, es lo que llama Jaime Jaramillo “La célula social en la que el negro trato de dar cauce a su tendencia a

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la vida libre y necesidades de sociabilidad,” (Boletín cultural bibliográfico, Volumen 27, 47.)

Las estrellas son negras’ expone una conciencia de deseo de libertad, de lucha, de justicia y de identidad. El lenguaje de los personajes de Palacio es un lenguaje de rechazo a la explotación. Es un lenguaje que denota la violencia existente en la época de los cuarenta y cincuenta, y que perfila una mayor verosimilitud de la realidad del Chocó. Por ejemplo, la voz de Irra presenta la tragedia de su existencia al decir: «¡Viejo maldito! ¡Negro infame!», pensaba Israel. «Me has hecho una brujería... Me has puesto a vomitar... ¡Quién sabe qué me habrás metido a la barriga! Si no querías que me embarcara en tu champa podrida, ¿por qué no me pegaste y te desgüevaste conmigo?» (p.35). Irra al invocar su angustia, el racismo, la falta de interés de su condición por la clase privilegiada señala la desigualdad social. Palacios denuncia las condiciones adversas a las que se encuentran los negros del Chocó y escribe sobre el mundo afrocolombiano y las huellas africanas. En esa zona aurífera del Pacífico colombiano, Palacios presenta su compromiso a la defensa de la cultura negra en Colombia: “Ya se oía el rugido de los motores de pequeñas lanchas repletas de bañistas, lanchas rojas recorriendo el río, agitando las aguas. Sabroso debía de ser bañarse así, y que cuando le disminuyeran la velocidad uno se lanzara a nadar y que luego volvieran a recogerlo a uno... Eran lanchas del Gobierno y se las prestaban a los blancos. El intendente era blanco también, tenía roce social, era de primera, por eso el intendente facilitaba tales vehículos a los empleados blancos.” (p. 33). Era imposible aceptar la bienvenida de extranjeros al país cuando el gobierno no quería reconocer el fuerte rechazo social y económicos de la región del Chocó.

La lengua como dialecto que se esquematiza en la novela está íntimamente ligada a la cultura de pobreza y desesperación del Chocó. A través de la unificación de lengua y cultura *Las estrellas son negras* muestra la metáfora de búsqueda de esos

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astros. Mientras las estrellas son un símbolo universal del judaísmo y la identidad judía, Palacios convierte este simbolismo en una conjunción y alianza simbólica negroide en la región: “No entendía bien lo que estaba sucediendo, ni dónde se encontraba. El hambre lo había debilitado y quizás el viento le acabó de hacer daño. Le parecía que entraba ya la noche. Y que la ciudad se reflejaba bajo las aguas como los castillos de las viejas leyendas... Y que en la bóveda celeste parpadeaban las estrellas, los luceros que luego navegaban en las ondas del río... Y la más inmensa de todas las estrellas, el lucero de la Boca de Quito, estaba allí rasgando las tinieblas, quitándole el pavor al silencio nocturno.” (p. 33) Ese silencio que siente el protagonista es el medio de subsistencia que sienten todos los negros del Chocó. La fuerza del pincel del escritor está en el silencio del Chocó y en la vivencia de su juventud en esa región.

El primer libro “Hambre” es el lenguaje de humillación y tragedia que rodea a los personajes de la novela: “La brisa constante disipaba rápidamente el humo, quedando penetrante olor a nicotina. Flotaban en la mitad del Atrato. En la orilla derecha veían la ciudad de Quibdó, con una profusión de puntales esqueletudos sosteniendo las cocinas de las casas. Sí, las cocinas destartadas de las casas de los negros y los blancos. Por allá abajo se movía en la playa un hormiguero humano que alborotaba pies y manos entre las canoas de plátanos, agitándose los gajos en las manos del hormiguero viviente.” (p. 34).

En Francia, Palacios se une a los poetas y escritores de la negritud como Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon y Leopold Sédar Senghor para proseguir su campaña de reconocer la situación existente en la cultura de la región pacífica de Colombia. La negritud de Césaire, era un movimiento anti-colonial y que reflejaba “la raza de los oprimidos.” Esta unión después de la guerra fría marca el comienzo de una literatura honorable, sincera, y ardiente de lo que se conoce hoy como la literatura afro-colombiana. Arnoldo Palacios también perteneció a esa “raza de los oprimidos,” de Césaire. El dialecto

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negroide de la novela señala la fuerza cultural oral y cómo el lenguaje subraya la vivencia de sus personajes: ““Extenuado, la comisura de los labios amargada por el vómito verde, se tendió de espaldas en el plan de la piragua. Yacía allí rendido, nervioso, mirando vagamente el cielo claro sobre su frente. Se sentía caliente. No entendía bien lo que estaba sucediendo, ni dónde se encontraba. El hambre lo había debilitado y quizás el viento le acabó de hacer daño.” (p. 33) La vivencia del autor en el Chocó, pobre y de arrastre por su deficiencia física facilitan la voz de esa realidad impregnada en su ser y marcan la riqueza de su ficción.

El escritor colombiano, Arnoldo Palacios de los Santos Palacios Mosquera abrió con *Las estrellas son negras* las puertas al simbolismo negroide prevaleciente en la región. En una de las muchas entrevistas hechas a Palacios, este comentó que en “la escritura hay que buscar la economía de las palabras.” (Arcadia, Junio 2006) El autor juega con esta frase de una forma irónica ya que esa economía de palabras sólo refleja las huellas de los tiempos de la esclavitud. El negro en esos tiempos mantenía esa “economía de palabras” para ocultarle al amo sus verdaderos pensamientos. Usaban un dialecto que los protegía del invasor, y al igual desarrollaban su música y los rituales de su religión africana para ocultar su verdadero sentir.

En este artículo se toma como base la definición de cultura de Goodenough (1996). De acuerdo a Goodenough, cultura es la asociación de personas que tienen el mismo estilo de vida. En esta definición de cultura se subraya la distinción separatista entre humanos y animales. Palacios retoma este concepto y demuestra con su novela que en el Chocó esta distinción de separación no existe, sino que hay una relación de semejanza. Al principio de la novela, la semejanza con el perro señala el hambre por el cual atraviesa Irra en el primer libro semejante al perro: “un perro negro se revolcaba en el polvo. El perro se paró en sus cuatro patas. Perro alto, largo, la cabeza larga, las orejas escurridas. El pelaje se le había ido cayendo. El animal parecía no tener aliento

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para sostenerse. Perro flaco, hambriento. Perro desnutrido como las gentes de allí, sin savia en el organismo, como savia no tenían las plantas durante el verano. Tampoco valía la vida siendo perro o gato o gallina.” (p. 49) Durante la época que surge la novela de Palacios, hay levantamientos en todo el país: “—¡El Tiempo! ¡El Tiempo!... ¡Graves desórdenes en Barranquilla!...¡El pueblo se apodera de los almacenes y los saquea!... ¡Tiempo de hoy! ¡Choques con la Policía!... ¡Muertos y heridos!... ¡Se temen repercusión es en Bogotá!... ¡Cali! ¡Medellín!... ¡Expectativa por la manifestación obrera del Primero de Mayo!...” (p. 52).

El lenguaje en las descripciones de *Las estrellas son negras* refleja el simbolismo literario de un paisaje opresivo, oscuro y abandonado en el tiempo; destella una sociedad hambrienta con un futuro incierto. Esa consciencia es la que recrea la situación complicada del país. “Hombre o perro era lo mismo, a diferencia de que el perro no tenía conciencia de lo perro que era, y en cambio el hombre padecía la tremenda certeza de ser menos que perro.” (p. 47) Por otra parte, la descripción del boga y la ciudad de Quibdó, y las orillas del Atrato nos delinean la vida de miseria del negro del Chocó. El río de Irra trae riquezas para los blancos y más hambre para los negros de la región. En la metáfora de miseria que abarca toda la novela encontramos un perfil de sombra y desespero y una súplica religiosa: «Dadnos, Señor, algo que comer esta tarde. No hemos comido desde ayer. Ayer almorzamos cada uno con medio plátano cocido no más. Acuérdate de tus hijos, Señor mío Jesucristo. Y no nos dejes perecer ahogados en tanta miseria...». (p. 36)

El dialecto del Chocó también mantiene las vertientes del lenguaje africano: “Ar juin, ¿qué te contejtó er diretó d'erucación, mijo? —habló la madre, voz cavernosa, doliente.” (p. 54). Este aspecto conceptual del lenguaje es público y presenta una realidad socio-cultural regional. Los signos (palabras) en boca de los negros del Chocó

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presentan relaciones paradigmáticas y sintagmáticas que demuestran la clase social de la región.

El lenguaje de la novela no sólo difunde construcciones activas y pasivas que expresan violencia, desilusión, crueldad en la voz de los personajes, pero también subraya lo simple y complejo de su propia cultura. T.S. Eliot (1961) consideró la cultura como el medio para desarrollar conocimientos en orden de terminar los problemas que comparte una sociedad. Arnoldo Palacios parece tomar esa posición al representar con el lenguaje los problemas del Chocó y provoca al lector a fijarse en cómo ese lenguaje se entrelaza con la cultura de pobreza de la región. El lenguaje promueve la inestabilidad económica y política del Chocó: “Pero más difícil no debería ser vivir en Barranquilla que en Quibdó. Los que venían de allá decían que había mucho qué hacer. Que una persona podía ganarse la vida vendiendo cigarrillos y fósforos a la puerta del edificio de la gobernación. Aquí no había fábricas, ni talleres de ninguna especie. Si no ya él sería mecánico. Cómo le gustaría ser mecánico. Pero por más que Irra caminaba durante todo el santo día no lograba conseguir trabajo en ninguna parte.” (p. 53)

En vista que la cultura es un producto social que conectan a las personas según T.S. Eliot, los elementos como el lenguaje, rituales, creencias y es el lente por el cual el lector ve la región del Chocó y visualiza los pensamientos y percepciones de sus personajes. El lenguaje y la cultura manifiestan el subsistir de los personajes: “Peo nué necesario ojendé a Dio, mijo... Yo te lo tuve iciendo, Irraé, que no te metiérai en su mardita política... Qu’eso no t’ia tré sino peljuicio. Dejáloj no má que gocen... sí, que gocen... ¡Ajunto!... Vó veréi cómo vái a hacé... Yo ya toy mú vieja ya, y mú enjelma; lo que gano no loj arcanza ni pa la comira... Colmigo no contéi, no, Irraé... Tu mamá ya no resijte... Y tuj helmanitaj mujere necesitan tu apoyo...” (p. 54) Este contexto cultural es lo que le da la fuerza lingüística a la novela y viceversa. Irra ve al mundo desde su

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lente y enjuicia la situación del Chocó con su propio lenguaje de revolución: “Hasta hace unos instantes Irra era uno de tantos muchachos que soportaba con resignación la miseria de él y la miseria de toda la familia, dejando su vida a merced de la voluntad divina. Pero ahora había cambiado. Él mismo no entendía qué fuerza exterior se había infiltrado en su sangre. No entendía cómo su corazón latía al tic-tac de nuevos impulsos. Por fin Irra iba a hacer algo. De ninguna manera se detendría en ese camino. Él era otro muchacho desde ahora. Era un Hombre. Un hombre completo con responsabilidad de matar. Para liberarse de algo que se le atravesaba en su vida. Ahora Irra se sentía alentado. El hambre daba tregua para prepararse a la acción grande, a la acción libertadora del tedio y la ineficacia de la existencia.” (p. 55) Esta posición de Irra es lo que Sapir y Whorf I (1952) llamaron la hipótesis de relatividad lingüística. Esta relatividad señala que cada perspectiva en el individuo se deriva de su propio lenguaje nativo.

Hegel decía que la cultura era un proceso de alejamiento. Salir de las formas limitadas de ver las cosas. La conducta de Irra en el pasaje precedente es el momento crucial en el cual este protagonista crea una conciencia de liberación. Es el momento de conexión entre el hambre y la conciencia de liberación. Aunque a partir de este momento la novela de Palacios tiene una voz diferente, es el lenguaje del “paneslavismo” (1972, p. 72).

El paneslavismo fue un movimiento político y cultural, nacido de una ideología nacionalista, surgido en el siglo XIX con el objetivo de promover la unión cultural, religiosa y política, y la mutua cooperación entre todos los países eslavos de Europa. Palacios retoma esta idea como una metáfora para resaltar que la situación negroide en Columbia estaba aún peor en el siglo XX: “A la margen izquierda, extremo superior, una caricatura grotesca representando a un hombre con un brazo inmenso, brazo fantástico, un brazonón, que parecía una gran lengua de tierra empujándose

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allende el océano... El brazo ostentaba una manaza dispuesta a atrapar el mundo... ¿Qué significaba aquello?... ¿Era eso un dibujo mal hecho?... ¿El primer trabajo de un principiante?... Al fondo una bandera blanca, triangular, con una marca en letras gordas: paneslavismo... ¿Qué significaba paneslavismo?... ¿Qué quería decir ese brazo? «... Pudimos notar profunda decadencia en su movimiento que nació muerto... El Teatro Municipal vació: la luneta llena, pero los palcos y galería desiertos. El desencanto de las masas fue evidente: no aplaudían con el desenfreno de otros tiempos... Y hasta se escapaban nutridos rumores de sabotaje en el seno dela mul...ti...tud». (p. 72) Resuenan los acentos de un movimiento añejo que resurge en la novela manifestando el amor, el odio, el dolor, el laberinto y extraviado curso de la vida de pobreza.

En la tienda del pueblo el personaje del hombre-lector con su lectura del periódico manifiesta las distintas tendencias políticas en la novela. El pueblo se apodera de un anhelo insólito que enfurece aún más a Irra. El lector habla de Antonia Santos, una de las heroínas de la independencia de Colombia. Antonia Santos se unió a la causa de Simón Bolívar: “llamamos la atención de las madres colombianas, vástagos vivientes de una Antonia Santos, para que nos ayuden a salvar la República de la amenaza comunista” (p. 76). Hay una mención de Hitler y Mussolini que indica que el país estaba tomando una dirección que les quitaría la libertad que poseía el pueblo y que los llevaría más allá del hambre: “Él trae los mismos métodos con que Hitler y Mussolini sojuzgaron las libertades públicas, sacrificaron a millones de seres en campos de concentración y crematorios, redujeron a la indigencia a millares de familias. Métodos que envenenaron en todos los rincones de la tierra el bello concepto de libertad, dignidad humana. Este demagogo colombiano, con su elocuencia brillante, su verbo ardiente, su garganta poderosa, no ofrece a la nación sino el desastre.” (p. 76). Irra habla de los linchamientos en Estados Unidos de los negros por el Ku-Kux Klan. (p.78). A través de un pragmatismo lingüístico Irra promueve una teoría de acción:

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“Debería irse a Cartagena. En Cartagena cambiaría su vida.” (p. 83) El paneslavismo del siglo XIX aparece en esta novela como un movimiento socialista revolucionario. Un estremecimiento invade a Irra y lleno de inquietud bailan en su mente pensamientos de una falta de libertad que unida a la religión se presentan como un calvario: “En la mente de Irra, cuyo estómago gemía, se dibujó la imagen de Cristo. Cristo con las heridas de las rodillas, de los costados, de las palmas de sus manos. Estampa de Jesús en el Calvario, según la vieja página de la Historia Sagrada.” (p. 81).. Cuando Palacios representa los linchamientos de los Estados Unidos en su novela es para mostrar la correlación de la opresión de los negros en las Américas.

El segundo libro de la novela, *Irra*, es la revolución interior en contra de la iglesia que con sus creencias mantiene al pueblo negro tan oprimido como lo hace el estado. En el primer capítulo es la imploración a Dios que lo salve del hambre y la miseria. El lenguaje del primer libro nos hace recordar estampas literarias de “Los miserables” de Víctor Hugo. La novela de Hugo sigue la vida e interacciones de varios personajes como una condenación social que combina la fatalidad de la miseria de la vida con los problemas de la pobreza. Palacios hace lo mismo con su novela. En “*Las estrellas son negras*,” los protagonistas son asfixiados en una decadencia socio-económica donde el gobierno del país los ha abandonado y lo que sobrevive es una cultura de pobreza y miseria. “Los sirios y los antioqueños eran propietarios de grandes almacenes... Los blancos estaban empleados en el gobierno. Esos vestían bien y fumaban cigarrillos finos. Pero los negros nada. ¡Maldita nada! La mamá se mataba trabajando día y noche. Lavaba ropa, planchaba, cocinaba, hacía vendajes...Sin embargo, siempre lo mismo. ¿Dios no se acordaba de ellos? ¿Acaso ellos no rezaban bastante? ¿No le encendían muchas velas a la Santísima Virgen? (p.43). En este segundo libro, sin embargo, el lenguaje cambia. El mundo se le hace más grande a Irra y tiene una necesidad de liberarse de las cadenas de la religión y el hambre: “¡Qué

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hambre! ¡Bendito sea Dios! ¿Cómo poder admitirse que Dios fuera tan...? ¡Que se vaya a la porra con su religión y sus curas embusteros, que se mantienen engañando y robando a los pobres!... Lo que decía el periódico... tal vez fuera cierto. Los audaces engañan, verdad... A los ignorantes y pobres, peor... «No creo nada». (p.83)

En la novela hay una concientización y compromiso de parte de Irra para el cambio. La lectura del periódico “El Tiempo” por el hombre-lector muestra el analfabetismo del lugar y cómo por este medio de comunicación Irra aumenta su sentimiento subversivo. Irra quiere matar al Intendente. El tono desde las primeras páginas subraya la violencia que se agudiza en el personaje: “...adentro, en las grietas de las profundidades de su conciencia, se agitaba la desesperación nutrida por el hambre, la ignorancia, la incapacidad.” (p. 88) Es difícil sostener desde nuestro punto de vista que Arnoldo Palacios pertenecía a la ideología comunista cuando este escrito señala más una ideología socialista. Claro está, si basamos el término comunismo en la teoría de Marx como lucha de clases donde siempre se alcanza una etapa nueva, la novela demuestra rasgos de comunismo. La dialéctica de la novela propone una tesis, una antítesis y una resolución es entonces una novela de orden socialista que combate el capitalismo como régimen en el que el colombiano blanco explota al colombiano negro. Por ello, Irra quiere matar al intendente para tomar control del estado. Es el deseo de un orden socioeconómico en función de una clase trabajadora para la evolución social de todo ser humano. Palacios denuncia el olvido de la región por el gobierno e incita a una revolución socioeconómica con el personaje de Irra: “El sol ahora estaba incrustado en su pecho. Irra tenía potestad sobre la luna y las estrellas. Y si a él, Irra, no le provocaba su perra gana soltar una ráfaga de luz a la tierra de los mortales, jamás de los jamases regresaría la estrella matutina.” (p.92). Palacios a través de la voz de Irra se enfrenta a la clase dirigente y la política de exclusión en la región:

¡Oh, influjo implacable de los astros sobre el alma de los mortales!

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¡Oh, Dios! ¿En cuál estrella pusiste mi llave?

Algunos nacemos para morir sin tregua... Otros nacen para la alegría.

Son estrellas diferentes.

Las de ellos titilan eternamente y tienen el precio del diamante. Y la mía, Señor, es una estrella negra... ¡Negra como mi cara,

Señor! El turno del intendente había llegado. Irra subiría al tercer piso. (p. 93)

Ese Chocó olvidado es la dolorosa experiencia de introspección que sufre Irra al batallar en su interior con el bien y el mal: “«¡No matarás!», oyó quizá desde el fondo de la tierra. O tal vez arriba en el cielo. Palabras milenarias, escritas por Dios mismo, entre rayos y relámpagos. La maestra le había enseñado los mandamientos de la Ley de Dios. Cuán encantador evocar la vocecita de la maestra, enseñando la religión..., y las oraciones. Irra se erizó. Sentía miedo. Temor horrible. Invadido por un frío violento, temblaba. Iba a desplomarse.” (p.93). La ira hacia el gobierno en poder aumenta en este segundo libro. Irra está determinado a cambiar la situación y salvar a su familia de la pobreza y al resto del Chocó. Piensa que si mata al Intendente se acaba el hambre y la pobreza de la región. El autor lleva a Irra a pisar fondo en el laberinto de miseria en el que se encuentra con falsas promesas de políticos y ricos que no les importa la suerte de los negros. El simbolismo de *Las estrellas son negras* es buscar salir de la miseria: “¿Para qué tratar de justificarse, cuando en el fondo de su corazón lo atormentaba precisamente la tremenda situación de su familia, cosa que él deseaba remediar? Lo mejor era irse. A Cartagena, su más indicada ruta.” (p. 101). Los negros tienen estrellas diferentes a los blancos. Todos los signos que aparecen en la novela señalan una mala estrella. El río Atrato es el camino a la liberación. Todos sueñan con montarse en la barca que los lleve a otro destino, pero quedan en un estado de esperanza y no de acción.

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El Libro tercero Nive, es la euforia sexual que dura sólo un corto tiempo. En ese momento de posesión de una virgen, Irra reacciona como el invasor que ultrajaba a las mujeres y las abandonaba a su suerte durante la esclavitud. Irra la llama “muchacha corrompida y seductora.” La ironía es que quien la seduce es Irra deshonrando a Nive. Irra es el corrupto: “A mí me asustaron... Me tenían abrazada, besándome —dijo, sonriendo. Y toda nerviosa, terriblemente azorada, se pegó a él, abrazándolo con ahínco...—No te asustes... No es nada, Nive... Ya vendrán ellas —le habló Irra, el pecho rebosante de gozo. Le pasó otra vez la mano a Nive por todo el cuerpo. (p. 126) Se arrepiente de su acción contra Nive: “No lograba tranquilizarse. Su conciencia lo acusaba, y sentía el pecho devorado por fuego encendido en lecho nefando. Él había perjudicado a una criatura. Sí... Maldita vida... (p.132) Es un mundo al revés. “La imagen de Nive se le convirtió en celda de presidio, en calabozo, en grillos, en el derrumbamiento de sus aspiraciones...«¡Soy preso!», exclamó. «¡Oh, Dios!... Tengo los pantalones manchados todavía... ¿Por qué lo contaste todo, mi Nive querida?».» (p.141).

En el libro cuarto *Luz interior* el autor demuestra un cierto optimismo. “Irra tomó la resolución definitiva de marcharse. Viajar. Sí. Viajar. Irse lejos. Allá, más allá. Mucho más allá. Si posible recorrer el mundo y estrellarse contra el horizonte. No detenerse mientras le faltara el pan. Pan para su madre. Pan para sus hermanas. Pan para Jesús. Pan para él... para todas las gentes... pan...El pan nuestro de cada día, dánoslo hoy. Parecía ser la plegaria íntima de su corazón. (P. 146) Es la voz que propone el irse de la región para tener una posibilidad de salvación. Irra sabe cuál es su situación y quiere mejorar las condiciones de vida del pueblo negro de la región. Es un lenguaje de compromiso en que la desventura interior es revelada en la referencia al sermón del monte del prólogo. El lenguaje del sermón del monte es un llamado a la igualdad y fraternidad social que debería existir hacia el pueblo afrocolombiano. El lenguaje espiritual y místico de la novela es lo que une a Palacios a la literatura afro-

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caribeño de Aimé Césaire. El epígrafe dice: “Y descendió la lluvia, y vinieron ríos y soplaron vientos y combatieron aquella casa; y no cayó: porque estaba fundada sobre la peña.” *Mateo, El sermón del monte*. Este pasaje es la última parte del sermón del monte. Y si unimos esta última parte con el principio del sermón del monte “Bienaventurados los que tienen hambre y sed de justicia porque ellos serán saciados. “(Mateo 5:6). Tiene el lector que preguntarse cuál es la ironía que nos quiere presentar Palacios. El lenguaje del sermón del monte empieza con la descripción de aquellos que serían bendecidos por Dios y termina con el olvido de esa edificación de la casa sobre la peña que sólo refleja cuán desaventurados son los personajes de Palacios: “¿Dónde estaba Dios? ¿Por qué Dios no se compadecía de ellos, y les dejaba algo a la entrada de la puerta? ¿Por qué no venía Dios una mañana, o una noche, y les dejaba un poco de arroz y plátano, o unos dos pesos siquiera en la cocina? (p. 146) Palacios introduce la mística afrocolombiana cuando hace mención del nombre de la barca que viene de Cartagena, Santa Teresita. Esta religiosa en el mundo católico es considerada la cumbre de la mística experimental cristiana. Así como Palacios, Santa Teresita desde muy joven demostró una imaginación vehemente y apasionada. Al igual que Palacios sufrió de una enfermedad que la dejó parálitica por dos años. A diferencia de Santa Teresita, Arnoldo Palacios no profesa pobreza, soledad y silencio. El lenguaje de Palacios es un contrapunto al camino de Santa Teresita que utilizó con genialidad.: “Un poco más arriba, en el puerto de la «casa» de mercado estaba anclado un pequeño barco llegado de Cartagena la tarde anterior. Lancha grande, sin camarotes, ni nada de eso... Simplemente una lancha de carga: en uno de los costados de la embarcación se advertían unas letras negras; pero desde donde iban Israel y el viejo no se alcanzaba a leer el nombre... Ah, sí..., la Santa Teresita.” (p. 34).” El lector siente el poder de la imagen y el simbolismo de su obra. Es la energía socialista que corre por sus venas.

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Las estrellas son negras no es sólo una novela de negros. Es una novela de la humanidad y sus problemas, sus sueños, sus esperanzas, sus luchas, sus amores y cómo combaten mentalmente por su liberación de un yugo socioeconómico opresor. El hambre, la ira, el amor efímero y la lucha interior son sólo los primeros pasos a un socialismo lingüístico y a una cultura de independencia y control del destino: “Y que en la bóveda celeste parpadeaban las estrellas, los luceros que luego navegaban en las ondas del río... Y la más inmensa de todas las estrellas, el lucero de la Boca de Quito, estaba allí rasgando las tinieblas, quitándole el pavor al silencio nocturno. Ahora cruzaba por su mente una sensación como la de las películas en serie que daban en el teatro: Tim McCoy... Warner Baxter... El macho —como denominaban ellos, los muchachos, a los protagonistas—. batiéndose en el corazón de la selva...”

La Columbia del Siglo XX se refleja en la novela como un símbolo de miseria y abandono de un país que se preocupaba sólo por la clase privilegiada. Por ello pensamos que Arnoldo Palacios a través de su pluma literaria quiso presentar la cultura afro-colombiana desde los ojos de su protagonista Irra, y crear concientización de una realidad recurrente en muchos países del Caribe y Latinoamérica. Palacios desarrollo una literatura de sobrevivencia, y abrió las puertas a un futuro tal vez incierto en su descripción del Chocó pero que podría culminar con la atención merecida en la literatura afro-colombiana. Palacios a muerto pero su voz sigue latente y su objetivo primordial de hacer conocer al mundo de esa región olvidada sea cumplido. A fines del siglo XX y principios del siglo XXI surgen una multiplicidad de tendencias. Arnoldo Palacios fue y será siempre el mayor exponente de la cultura afro-colombiana.

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Selva, hambre y lluvia: El Chocó y las novelas de Arnoldo Palacios

Nosotros hemos vivido como los árboles, sujetos al viento, a la lluvia, al rayo, al hachazo que un día u otro se hinca en el árbol para derribarlo. Nuestra niñez se envejece y muere, a veces en la esperanza diluída o bien, así no más simplemente: como si se nos hubiese impuesto, por adelantado, el nacer con la soga en la garganta, con el estómago trancado, una tierra resbaladiza bajo nuestras plantas. (Palacios, Arnoldo. *La selva y la lluvia* 113-14)

Al escritor Arnoldo Palacios lo sorprendió la muerte, a sus 91 años, el 12 de noviembre del 2015 en Bogotá. Con su muerte desaparece de las letras colombianas uno de los escritores afrocolombianos más importantes aunque tal vez el menos reconocido dentro del panorama de la literatura colombiana contemporánea. Si bien es cierto que el gobierno colombiano a través del Ministerio de Cultura le hizo un homenaje al autor e hizo una reedición de su primera novela, *Las estrellas son negras*, en 1998; Arnoldo Palacios es, en palabras del periodista y amigo personal del escritor Alfonso Carvajal, “uno de los autores más injustamente ignorados por la literatura nacional.”

Arnoldo Palacios nació en Cértegui un pueblo muy pequeño del departamento del Chocó en 1924. A los dos años lo afectó una poliomielitis que lo obligó a usar muletas toda su vida. Desde niño, el escritor tuvo que aprender a sobrevivir en condiciones muy difíciles de pobreza, afrontando también las dificultades de vivir en medio de la belleza majestuosa y pluvial de las selvas y los ríos chocoanos. A pesar de que por muchos años tuvo que arrastrarse en “cuatro patas” para desplazarse de un lado a otro, Arnoldo aceptó sus limitaciones y las transformó en retos que templaron su carácter y su espíritu independiente. Muy pronto aprendió a adaptarse al hecho de que no era como los otros niños:

Jugar, para los niños de mi pueblo, era correr, gritar, reír, entrenarse en lucha libre, tirar piedras, a los pajaritos, marranos, vacas, perros, gatos, gallinas, a las

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frutas de los árboles, nadar en el río o bajo un aguacero torrencial descujado en medio del calor tropical. Cuando los otros chicos se dispersaban atraídos por cualquier bagatela, pues, podían vagar libres con sus pies, yo me divertía solo, contemplando mi mundo: la iglesia, su veleta que daba vueltas con el viento; las mismas tres vacas flacuchentas que atravesaban la plazoleta sin gente; las puertas entornadas; el río claro; la luz del sol creando los dibujos que yo deseaba para identificarlos con las sombras de las cosas; los techos humeantes. A menudo mi papá venía hacia mí, me proyectaba al aire y me recibía en sus brazos, sensación de júbilo, yo reía mi papá también, tenía yo la impresión de ser yo mismo quien ejecutaba el acto de lanzarme al espacio, libre.” (2009, 34)

Arnoldo Palacios salió muy joven de su pueblo natal para continuar su educación, primero en Quibdó, la capital del departamento, después en Bogotá y, posteriormente en París a donde fue a cursar estudios de posgrado gracias a una beca. Se radicó finalmente en Francia y, haciendo caso omiso a sus problemas de movilidad, fue un viajero incansable llegando a recorrer casi todo el mundo y llegando a lugares tan remotos como el polo norte. A pesar de pasar la mayor parte de su vida en Europa, Arnoldo Palacios siempre fue un chocoano. Sus experiencias durante su infancia y adolescencia vividas en el Chocó marcaron tanto su vida como la temática desarrollada en sus obras. En primer lugar, tanto en *Las estrellas son negras* (1949), en *La selva y la lluvia* (1958) como en su novela/autobiografía *Buscando mi madre dediós* (2009), el espacio, es decir, la geografía del Chocó: su selva, sus ríos; su clima inclemente de calor y lluvia constantes, no son meramente un escenario en el que se mueven sus personajes. El espacio físico es un aspecto fundamental en sus ficciones porque determina las características, la forma de vida y el destino de toda esta galería de personajes que desfilan por estas extraordinarias novelas. En segundo lugar, su

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experiencia única de crecer, imposibilitado para caminar como estaba, en un lugar con las características físicas y económicas del Chocó, determina que las nociones de movimiento y libertad sean también muy importantes en sus textos. Este ensayo explora estos dos aspectos de su obra y muestra cómo a partir de su interacción, Arnoldo Palacios construye y deconstruye una experiencia que no solamente produce un espacio afrodescendiente sino que se produce en una geografía negra de exclusión e injusticia en la cartografía física y social de la nación colombiana.

Aunque en un sentido estricto, estas novelas pertenecen al canon de la literatura colombiana, me interesa resaltar en este ensayo que estas novelas son netamente chocoanas, no porque quiera enmarcarlas dentro de una narrativa regional, sino porque son textos que surgen o se generan a partir de un espacio específico de la geografía nacional. Estas novelas son chocoanas no solamente porque son escritas por un autor chocoano, sino porque son textos que se articulan y se enuncian a partir de una geografía, tanto física como humana, específica, la del Chocó. Surgen de un espacio que ha sido particularmente racializado, segregado y excluido del total de la cartografía física y humana de Colombia. Y es precisamente esta geografía racializada, claramente negra y de exclusión, la que va a determinar no sólo las características esenciales y el destino de los personajes de las novelas de Arnoldo Palacios, sino también su forma de hablar, su gastronomía, su música, sus ritos y ceremonias, sus festivales y su interacción con el resto de la nación. Así mismo, son novelas chocoanas porque la experiencia de las comunidades que habitan esta geografía negra es vastamente diferente de la de otras comunidades afrocolombianas que residen en otros espacios geográficos así sean también racializados y de marcada desigualdad. Y son experiencias diferentes porque precisamente las geografías son diferentes. Y por ser diferentes los mecanismos de opresión y de explotación social son diferentes también. Es esta

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perspectiva, la espacial, la que informa mi lectura de las novelas de Arnoldo Palacios en este ensayo.

En la entrevista con Jairo Henry Arroyo, el maestro Palacios aseguró, con la alegría y el entusiasmo que siempre lo caracterizaron que quien “había vivido y sobrevivido en el Chocó podría vivir y sobrevivir en cualquier parte del mundo.” Este comentario, aparentemente sin importancia y entendible para cualquier colombiano habituado con la situación de pobreza y abandono de la región, lo que resalta realmente es el cómo las geografías sociales (reales e imaginadas) son esenciales para la manera de vivir de sus habitantes, estableciendo así un vínculo entre las categorías de espacio y raza. Implica además que el Chocó, no es solamente una geografía negra, sino que es una geografía que ha sido definida o determinada por la convergencia entre raza y espacio. Es un espacio construido por la experiencia de sujetos negros (lo racial), afrodescendientes (lo étnico); quienes a su vez han sido determinados por la geografía en la que viven y sobreviven cotidianamente. La obra de Arnoldo Palacios capta y reproduce con singular delicadeza la complejidad de la experiencia de las comunidades afrodescendientes en el Chocó. El hambre y la ira que agobian a Irra, el adolescente protagonista de *Las estrellas son negras*, y una expresión como *buscando a su madre diós*, que da título a su tercera novela/autobiografía y que quiere decir el rebuscársela, es decir, el encontrar el sustento diario; sólo tienen sentido en el contexto del Chocó. Además de servir de ejemplos de esta convergencia entre espacio y raza, el hambre que sufren los personajes de la novela y su lucha permanente por sobrevivir, dan testimonio de las prácticas hegemónicas espaciales de abandono y de segregación que tienen lugar en el Chocó desde la época de la colonización española.

Establecido en 1944, el Departamento del Chocó está habitado predominantemente por descendientes de esclavos africanos traídos por los colonizadores españoles durante la conquista de América. La estrecha relación que

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existe entre los chocoanos con su región es de vieja data. Siempre dispuestos a defender su territorio, los chocoanos tienen una larga historia de protesta y rebelión. Con ocasión del último paro cívico en la región, que tuvo lugar durante el mes de agosto del 2016, la periodista María Paula Rubiano escribió lo siguiente:

De no haber sido por un paro cívico, Chocó no existiría. Era 1954. Gustavo Rojas Pinilla planeaba dividir los 46.530 kilómetros cuadrados que hoy se llaman Chocó. La gente salió a las calles y evitó el desmembramiento de su territorio. Desde entonces, cada vez que el abandono llega a un punto crítico, los chocoanos se movilizan. Cierran sus tiendas, colegios y oficinas, llenan las calles, gritan consignas.

El segundo grupo étnico es el grupo indígena Emberá. Más de la mitad de su población vive en el Chocó. Debido a su baja densidad de población, su topografía inhóspita, la falta de vías de comunicación con el resto del país y la gran distancia que lo separa de la capital, el Chocó ha recibido muy poca atención del gobierno colombiano. De hecho, fue una de las últimas regiones del país en establecerse como Departamento lo cual contribuyó a la marginalización de la región.

El departamento del Chocó está localizado en la parte occidental del país. Tiene costas tanto en el Atlántico como en el Pacífico y constituye la frontera con Panamá. La región tiene una geografía diversa, ecosistemas únicos y recursos naturales inexplorados. La alta lluviosidad del departamento (una de las más alta del mundo), hace difícil la agricultura y, sin embargo, se cultiva el plátano, maíz, arroz, cacao y coco. La región es rica en oro y en platino y la explotación minera, que se lleva a cabo mayormente en el litoral del río San Juan, constituye una de las principales fuentes de trabajo para los chocoanos. Buena parte de la explotación del oro se hace de manera

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ilegal y está teniendo un gran impacto sobre el medio ambiente de la región.¹ Los ríos están contaminados con mercurio y según la entrevista de Laura Betancur Alarcón al director del Instituto de Investigaciones Ambientales del Pacífico, se están perdiendo alrededor de 3350 hectáreas de bosque al año y especies de mucha importancia ecológica están prácticamente extintas.

El Chocó posee, además, un altísimo potencial de pesca fluvial y marítima que no ha sido técnicamente aprovechado. La riqueza maderera es considerable, pero se hace en muchos casos sin normas de protección del medioambiente. A pesar de que las condiciones económicas han mejorado desde el 2010, la participación departamental en el Producto Interno Bruto del país es apenas del 0,53% del total nacional. Además, según el Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, DANE, el 79,7% de la población del departamento tiene las necesidades básicas insatisfechas.² Cansados del abandono estatal, durante el mes de agosto del 2016, líderes regionales convocaron un Paro Cívico por la Dignidad del Chocó pidiendo la construcción de carreteras con otras ciudades y regiones del país, la instalación de servicios de agua potable, alcantarillado y electricidad en los principales centros urbanos y la construcción de un hospital, entre otras cosas. Sin embargo, como indica el artículo de María Paula Rubiano, “el problema de los chocoanos va más allá de la falta de vías y centros de salud. El desempleo es el más alto del país —según la última cifra del DANE es del 16% en Quibdó— y, según las cifras más recientes del Ministerio de Salud (2013), 35 de cada 100.000 niños mueren de hambre,” la tasa de mortalidad infantil más alta del país.

El aislamiento del departamento debido a una deficiente infraestructura vial y a su retraso económico, ha permitido que grupos como las FARC y el ELN hayan

¹ Para más información sobre el impacto ambiental de la extracción ilegal del oro ver además <http://www.eltiempo.com/politica/justicia/extraccion-ilegal-de-oro-en-choco/16636126>

² Ver Dane. *Informe de Coyuntura Económica Regional 2011*.

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impuesto su autoridad en esta zona por muchos años fomentando cultivos ilícitos como la hoja de coca, materia prima para la producción y fabricación de cocaína. Aquí también ejercen su dominio otras bandas criminales como los Urabeños, cuyo objetivo es controlar la producción y comercialización de cocaína, además de proteger las rutas del narcotráfico hacia Centroamérica. En los últimos 20 años, el Chocó ha sido una de las zonas más afectadas por el conflicto armado y, como consecuencia, la región ha tenido uno de los índices más altos de desplazamiento forzado del país. La masacre de Bojayá, por ejemplo, está aún muy fresca en la memoria colectiva del pueblo chocoano. Sin embargo como indica la periodista Ana María Ruiz Perea,

Bojayá es emblemático del horror de la guerra; pero para miles de chocoanos, ese es solo un hecho más de la infinidad de momentos que tiñeron de rojo los ríos y las selvas. Las tomas guerrilleras, las devastadoras retomas paramilitares y la crudeza del desarraigo de pueblos enteros, generaron por décadas una hecatombe social; tras la excusa de la guerra se escondieron la incompetencia y la corrupción de los funcionarios chocoanos y la desidia del gobierno nacional.

Paradójicamente, por ser una región de una maravillosa belleza natural, el Chocó es un lugar adecuado para la práctica del turismo de naturaleza y ecoturismo. A pesar de las dificultades, este sector viene creciendo de manera importante, mejorando las condiciones de vida de algunas regiones. Cabe resaltar que a pesar del continuo abandono en que el gobierno colombiano mantiene a la región, su más reciente campaña para fomentar el turismo hacia el país, que lleva el nombre de Colombia Realismo Mágico, incluye, por primera vez, al Chocó como una de las regiones del país

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que promociona. No obstante, llama la atención que esta campaña promueve el paisaje del Chocó más no a sus gentes.³

El Chocó es una región de amplios contrastes. Un espacio rico en recursos naturales y biodiversidad. No obstante, la historia de la región produce una narrativa diferente. Es una historia estrechamente relacionada con su pasado colonial cuando los esclavos fueron llevados a la región para la extracción del oro de los ríos. Una historia firmemente entrelazada con un patrón de segregación racial, con la indiferencia estatal, con la diferenciación y explotación socio económica y con el abandono tanto de sus habitantes como del medioambiente. No sorprende, entonces, que en esta geografía predominantemente negra, la mayor parte de su población viva en condiciones de extrema pobreza. Según indica un editorial de *El tiempo* a propósito de la reciente huelga cívica, “casi dos terceras partes [de la población] se encuentran en situación de pobreza y 37% está en la miseria.”

En este punto vuelvo a la frase ya mencionada de Arnoldo Palacios: “quien ha sobrevivido en el Chocó, puede sobrevivir en cualquier parte del mundo.” Sus novelas dan testimonio de la lucha constante del chocono por sobrevivir en medio de la escasez de recursos, de la adversidad, del racismo, de la majestuosidad de la selva, de la inmensidad de sus ríos y del abandono estatal. Aunque sus primeras novelas fueron escritas a finales de la década de los 40 y a principios de los 50, y su tercera novela, por ser de carácter autobiográfico, se remonta al Chocó de sus años infantiles hacia los años 30, “lo vergonzoso es que, medio siglo después de la publicación, su alegato siga teniendo vigencia,” (1998, xvii) como escribía Antonio Cruz Cárdenas en la introducción a la reedición de *Las estrellas son negras* en 1998. Y sigue teniendo aún más vigencia hoy, en el 2016, en el actual contexto de la política neoliberal de los

³ Ver la campaña en <http://colombia.travel/realismomagico/colombia/avistamiento-ballenaspacifico#poster>

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últimos gobiernos colombianos que otorgan la explotación de los recursos naturales a compañías multinacionales y en el contexto de los diálogos de paz con las Farc que no necesariamente van a reducir la violencia en la región porque las Farc no son las únicas responsables de dicha violencia, de las masacres o de la intimidación a la que viven sometidas las comunidades para que abandonen sus tierras.

Con maestría singular y con un estilo sobrio pero directo, Arnoldo Palacios crea una multitud de personajes en sus novelas cuyos destinos están encadenados por encuentros fortuitos. En *Las estrellas son negras*, al seguir el deambular de Irra por las calles de Quibdó durante casi dos días buscando alimento para él y para su familia, el lector va conociendo a sus habitantes y va siendo partícipe de la historia y de la vida de cada uno de ellos. Son personajes que aparecen brevemente y que, como Irra, están buscando algo de comer para mitigar su hambre. Estos pocos párrafos de texto dedicados a cada uno de ellos van entretejiendo una novela que revela las complejidades de la problemática humana no sólo de Quibdó, sino también de todo el Chocó. Cada historia además va salpicando ese espacio que es Quibdó, a orillas del Atrato, con rostros negros y mulatos: de hombres y mujeres, de jóvenes y viejos, y desde la lejanía, de los rostros blancos del Intendente y de otros representantes del Gobierno. Y aunque las descripciones del entorno (las calles, la selva, el río) son relativamente escasas, el texto nos introduce en un espacio transformado y apropiado por sus habitantes afrodescendientes: Quibdó es una geografía negra.

Irra, el protagonista de *Las estrellas son negras*, es un joven agobiado por el hambre, la falta de oportunidades de trabajo y de educación. Atrapado en una situación de miseria absoluta y desesperado porque no puede hacer nada para cambiar su destino y el de su familia, Irra se debate entre su deseo de rebelarse contra la indiferencia del gobierno colombiano y el irse de Quibdó para buscarse el sustento lejos del Chocó. En sus momentos de ira, piensa:

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A los gobernantes de la nación no les importa un bledo la tragedia del pueblo. Ellos tenían el dinero y el poder. Pero nada realizaban en bien. ¿Hasta cuándo debería soportarse aquello? Los pobres tendrían que rebelarse, aun cuando hubiesen de ser reducidos a calaveras, aunque las paredes, las calles, los montes, los ríos y mares se tiñeran de sangre. Pues si habían de morir de hambre..., ¿por qué no jugarse el todo por el todo? (95)

Al fracasar en su intento febril por atacar y matar al Intendente, Irra decide, en medio del delirio ocasionado por el hambre, dejar a su familia y salir de Quibdó para irse a Cartagena a buscar trabajo:

Porque la vida, allí, a todo trance rodaba hacia el aniquilamiento del hombre... Entonces Irra sintió el aullido del hambre. El hambre aulló en todos los agujeros de la casa. Y en el polvo de las calles. ¡Hambre!... Escuchaba alrededor y a distancia el llanto de niños indigentes, amontonados en los umbrales de las puertas. Porque las madres lavan ropa, bajo el sol quemante a la orilla del río... En cuyo fondo ellas contemplan sus imágenes famélicas, enfermizas, quemadas por el sol a las orillas de las fuentes. ¡Y pensar que la tragedia había sobrevivido siglos! ¡Presentir que el destino de las generaciones venideras era el mismo destino! Irra tomó la resolución definitiva de marcharse. Viajar. Sí. Viajar. Irse lejos. Allá, más allá. Mucho más allá. Si posible recorrer el mundo y estrellarse contra el horizonte. No detenerse mientras le faltaba el pan... Irra iba a abandonar el Chocó, aun cuando no lo volviera a cobijar ese cielo. Cielo donde se extasiaron sus ojos infantiles... Aun cuando nunca más pisara la tierra reseca que había enjugado el vaho de su sangre. (166)

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En las casi cuarenta y ocho horas en las que el lector acompaña a un Irra alucinante por las calles de Quibdó en busca de comida, en las que siente su impotencia, su desazón y hasta su odio por esta tierra que le niega oportunidades; también participa de su ambivalencia. A Irra no le resulta fácil dejar su hogar, su tierra porque son la esencia de su identidad:

Se sentía atado a esta tierra, pegado a las paredes destartadas de su casa misérrima, donde había vivido siempre. El amor al hogar se le despertaba con más fuerza. ¿Cómo dejarlo de un momento a otro? Sus plantas, los cabellos de su cabeza, la médula de sus huesos, adquirirían raíces más profundas, agarradas a esas piedras lóbregas, molientes, a esa tierra polvorienta y reseca. A esas piedras rechinantes. A ese sol que lo había quemado desde niño. A su río majestuoso, sobre el que había galopado su piragua, castigándole Irra las ondas con el canaleta. (121)

No solamente no le es fácil irse por los sentimientos de arraigo a la familia y a su tierra, sino porque el desplazamiento mismo es muy complicado. Ir de un caserío a otro no era fácil. Salir de la región tampoco era fácil por la falta de carreteras. Su única alternativa era irse en un barco para el puerto de Buenaventura al sur, a orillas del Pacífico; o al puerto de Cartagena al norte, a orillas del Atlántico. Sin embargo, al final de su odisea de hambre y dolor, recuerda a Nive, su amiga de infancia, con la que se había hecho hombre el día anterior, y decide quedarse en Quibdó, en su tierra: “Si otros habían vivido bien allí, ¿por qué Irra no podría vivir allí? Se quedaría allí. Lucharía. Y el día de hoy sería otro día. ... En la calle proseguía el ceceo de las gentes acaloradas pasando, deteniéndose. Los campesinos subían desde la orilla con huevos, racimos de plátano, chontaduro, pescado, piñas. Cada cual hacía lo que podía. Irra también haría” (184).

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La novela termina con la imagen de Irra a orillas del Atrato lavándose la cara, con una expresión de confianza y “alegría purísima,” sintiéndose libre al lado de un grupo de chiquillos que juega y se ríe en el río. (186). Este final no es de ninguna manera idílico. Irra todavía no ha comido nada. Su familia no ha comido tampoco. La lucha por sobrevivir continúa pero la ira se ha disipado y ha dado lugar a la esperanza. El espíritu de rebelión continúa. Lo importante es quedarse. Quibdó es su hogar, su tierra. Es su mundo. Quedarse no es un gesto de derrota o de impotencia. Es genuinamente un gesto de libertad: quedarse con quienes como él están condenados a vivir la miseria por el simple hecho de habitar en una geografía negra.

Además de ser la primera novela colombiana en la que sus protagonistas son negros, *Las estrellas son negras* fue y es una novela que, desde la margen, cuestiona al orden establecido de una manera directa, sin rodeos, lo cual es un hecho extraordinario en la Colombia revolucionada por el bogotazo a finales de la década de los 40. Es una novela en la que la voz de su protagonista negro se levanta contra la injusticia, contra el racismo y contra el abandono del gobierno colombiano. Dice Irra: “Algunos nacemos para morir sin tregua... Otros nacen para la alegría. Son estrellas diferentes. Las de ellos titilan eternamente y tienen el precio del diamante. Y la mía, Señor, es una estrella negra... ¡Negra como mi cara, Señor!” (108). La novela denunció de manera desgarradora la imposibilidad de los chocoanos para vivir una digna en su propio territorio. En *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, McKittrick and Woods, en su discusión sobre las geografías negras establecen lo siguiente:

The politics of citizenship, specifically the rights and protection of those residing in [a] democratic nation-state... are clearly not available in some communities, which suggests that the black and poor subjects are disposable precisely because they cannot easily move or escape. ...The combination of unavailable rights, immovability, and abandoned subjects-- those subjects who

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were... forgettable, unseeable, and occupying the underside of democracy, and then during [a tragic event] catastrophically brought into view... do not simply provide empirical and three-dimensional evidence of injustice... The geography of the region... provides a clear picture of how the underside is, for some, not an underside at all, but is, rather, the everyday. (3)

La idea de que sólo abandonando al Chocó les es posible a los chocoanos obtener los beneficios y tener los mismos derechos que ofrece la nación a sus ciudadanos está aún más desarrollada en la segunda novela de Arnoldo Palacios. *La selva y la lluvia* narra la trayectoria de dos jóvenes Pedro José y Luis Aníbal, oriundos de distintos pueblos del Chocó, quienes se conocen después de muchos sacrificios personales, hambre y extrema tenacidad en el Colegio Carrasquilla de Quibdó. De los dos, sólo Luis Aníbal logra cumplir su sueño de viajar a Bogotá para concluir sus estudios secundarios y, posteriormente, ingresar a la universidad. Pedro José, por su parte, debe conformarse con ingresar a la Normal de Quibdó y después de graduarse se emplea como maestro de escuela en un lugar cercano a su pueblo natal. Sin embargo, los hechos políticos ocurridos el 9 de abril que culminan con el asesinato del líder liberal Jorge Eliécer Gaitán en 1948, truncan los destinos de ambos jóvenes, y al final de la novela, el paso de los conservadores por el Chocó deja una estela de muertos, de torturados, de pueblos masacrados, de miedo y desolación. Caimacán, otro de los personajes de la novela, a quién le hubiera gustado tener la oportunidad de estudiar que tuvieron Pedro José y Luis Aníbal, es forzado al final de la novela a huir de su tierra para salvar su vida:

Caimacán había querido ese pueblo con el corazón, él había padecido en carne y hueso el dolor de esa gente, explotada y humillada a lo largo de los siglos. Allí había quedado su hermana Rosario. ¡Quién sabe qué iría a ser de ella!... Sobre el puente, el cadáver de su hermano... ¡qué digo!...Juancho es un

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hombre que en la memoria de la lucha permanecerá cálido, porque creyó en la libertad. En el cementerio, allá sobre la loma que bordea la carretera, estaban enterrados sus padres. Al menos éstos murieron de muerte natural, un consuelo al pensar en decenas de miles de campesinos, hoy asesinados a bala, y que se quedaron insepultos o rodaron con los ríos... O aquellos, chamuscados, revueltos inocentemente, mujeres y niños, hombres en Yacopí. ¡Ah, Colombia!..., podía uno exclamar ahora, el corazón en la mano y el rostro entre lágrimas... (236)

Empezaba así una guerra civil en el país conocida como la Violencia, de la que surgirían eventualmente las Farc y empezaría el ciclo de violencia que hasta hoy azota al país y con especial saña al Chocó.

De la misma manera que en *Las estrellas son negras, La selva y la lluvia* encadena la trayectoria de los personajes principales con la de múltiples más. Con Pedro José viajamos desde que huye de su casa cerca del río San Juan, hasta eventualmente llegar a Quibdó a cursar sus primeros años del bachillerato. Pedro José vive en diversas poblaciones a lo largo de estos años buscando completar su educación. La narración se detiene en muchos otros rostros negros y, como lectores, escuchamos sus historias de hambre, de injusticia y de supervivencia. En la segunda parte de la novela, acompañamos a Luis Aníbal a Bogotá, a donde ha viajado para completar su bachillerato, y conocemos a jóvenes bogotanos y a otros llegados de otras provincias que llegan a la capital con deseos de cambio y con la esperanza en el futuro, deseando ser parte del movimiento que lideraba el jefe liberal Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. Son jóvenes militantes que comparten los sueños de justicia social de Gaitán. Estas dos narrativas establecen un contraste entre estos dos espacios geográficos en los que se desarrolla la novela y permiten delinear las enormes diferencias no solamente entre el centro y la margen del país, sino también entre una geografía negra y otra no negra.

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Con respecto a los personajes chocoanos de la novela, *La selva y la lluvia* establece un contraste entre el destino de pobreza y hambre de aquellos que se quedan con los que logran salir de la región. Los primeros, como Pedro José y Caimacán, se quedan ya sea porque no tienen los medios para viajar o porque, como Irra en *Las estrellas son negras*, únicamente se sienten libres quedándose allí, en ese hogar, en ese pueblo, en esa selva, bajo esa lluvia, así vivan en medio de la pobreza absoluta. Los segundos, los que si logran salir, pueden desarrollar su potencial intelectual fuera del Chocó, como Luis Anibal y José del C. Valencia, aunque, en el caso de éste último implique que comprometa sus principios éticos e ideológicos no necesariamente para llevar una vida digna y sin pobreza sino para ascender los escalones del poder.

Según Hannah Arendt, “[of] all the specific liberties which may come into our mind when we hear the word ‘freedom’, freedom of movement is historically the oldest and also the most elementary. Being able to depart for where we will is the prototypical gesture of being free, as limitation of freedom has from time immemorial been the precondition for enslavement” (9). Según su premisa, cuando nuestros movimientos o nuestra posibilidad para movilizarnos están de alguna manera limitados o restringidos, se considera que nuestra libertad se encuentra amenazada o de alguna manera coartada. Las novelas de Arnoldo Palacios muestran, además del hecho ya señalado de que las mínimas condiciones para vivir una vida digna y productiva les son negadas a los chocoanos; que las condiciones de pobreza y abandono restringen a los chocoanos para establecerse en otras ciudades, pueblos o zonas donde puedan aspirar a una vida mejor. Los jóvenes que quieren aprender a leer y escribir y obtener una educación deben abandonar su pueblo natal, tal y como hace Pedro José. Buscando esas oportunidades que la nación les niega, la única opción es la mudarse a otra parte de la región o del país lo cual implica grandes esfuerzos y sacrificios personales y familiares, En muchos casos, los jóvenes están, como Pedro José y Caimacán, a merced de la misericordia de

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otros chocoanos casi tan pobres como ellos mismos; o abandonados a su suerte como Irra. Los más afortunados como Luis Aníbal o José del C. Valencia logran salir de la región a pesar de que el desplazamiento físico a otras partes no sea fácil o sea costoso por la falta de infraestructura y la complicada geografía de la región. En palabras del propio personaje José del C. Valencia, “[n]osotros los negros hemos nacido ya, peor que nadie, sujetos al infortunio. Si nosotros no llegamos a alguna parte por nuestro propio y único esfuerzo, nadie nos da la mano, el contrario se nos trata de hundir” (173).

En este sentido, los textos de Arnoldo Palacios articulan no solamente una denuncia contra un estado racista e indiferente sino que muestra que las consecuencias de este “abandono” estatal se transforma en una forma moderna de esclavitud de los habitantes del Chocó porque los despoja de su capacidad para moverse libremente dentro y fuera de los límites espaciales de su territorio. No sólo no existe la posibilidad de movilidad social sino que existen serios limitantes a su libertad de movimiento. En *Movement and the Ordering of Freedom: On Liberal Governances of Mobility*, Hagar Kotef establece que,

How subjects move or not move tells us much about what counts as human, as culture, and as knowledge... Movement is a technology of citizenship or subjectivity, as I noted above. Through the production of patterns of movement (statelessness, deportability, enclosures, confinement) different categories of subjectivity are produced. Regimes of movement are thus never simply a way to control, to regulate, or to incite movement. Regimes of movement are integral to the *formation of different modes of being*. (15)

Aunque el gobierno colombiano nunca ha formulado directa o expresamente una política de tipo apartheid con relación a ciertas zonas del país, sí es posible encontrar un patrón de desigualdades en la distribución e inversión del presupuesto del estado que ha

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fomentado la creación de geografías discriminatorias, beneficiando a ciertas zonas e ignorando a otras. La consecuencia de esta práctica injusta de inversión social constituye una manera indirecta de segregación. En palabras de Edward W. Soja autor de *Seeking Spatial Justice*, “[w]hether imposed from above or generated by spatial decision making from below, segregation or the confinement of specific populations to specific areas seems clearly to be connected to the production of spatial injustice” (54).

Con *La selva y la lluvia*, Arnoldo Palacios inserta al Chocó como geografía negra dentro del contexto de la nación colombiana revelando, en el proceso, la total desconexión entre estas dos Colombias y haciendo aún más marcadas las injusticias espaciales que tienen lugar en el Chocó. Un diálogo inocente que sostiene Luis Aníbal con un niño en Bogotá ilustra en parte la naturaleza de tal desconexión:

-¿La mamá suya no viene a verlo? --le preguntó [a Luis Aníbal]

-Está muy lejos, en el Chocó--respondió.

-¿Por qué no viene aun cuando una sola vez?--inquirió el niño

-Es lejos te digo... (147)

No obstante, centro y periferia están unidos, al final de la novela, por la guerra entre conservadores y liberales a raíz del asesinato de Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. Una guerra que fue capaz de atravesar la complicada geografía del Chocó, navegó sobre las aguas de sus ríos y azotó a sus habitantes sin importar raza, clase ni credo. Una guerra que dejó miles de muertos a lo largo y ancho del territorio colombiano.

Con su tercer texto *Buscando mi madre dedió*s, Arnoldo Palacios se centra exclusivamente en el Chocó, específicamente en su pueblo natal Cértogui. A través de sus recuerdos de infancia recrea a sus familiares, a sus amigos, a los vecinos, conocidos y desconocidos; todos afrodescendientes. De la misma manera que en sus dos novelas

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anteriores, Arnoldo Palacios presenta una galería de personas/personajes que entran y salen de la casa de sus padres, que viven en su mismo pueblo y otros que va conociendo a lo largo de sus viajes buscando una cura para sus males:

Yo escribí la biografía de mí mismo porque el tema que me interesaba llegó al punto de no dejarse plasmar independientemente de mi propia existencia inalienable ... Mi técnica consiste en canalizar el relato o los relatos mediante lo que yo defino como la cronología de la memoria.... Alimenta el estilo un lenguaje hablado, en su mayoría, por analfabetos negros afrocolombianos, afrolatinoamericanos. En realidad se trata de un viejo castellano heredado de los conquistadores, amasado a mi manera de ver en pensamiento, forma de ver y sentir, que conserva mucho de lo ancestral cultural africano. (20)

Aunque nunca llega a especificar en su introducción cuál exactamente era aquel tema que le interesaba, la lectura de este texto híbrido (novela/autobiografía) revela que lo que le interesaba plasmar es al propio Chocó, su Chocó y por eso él y sus recuerdos de infancia son esenciales para la narrativa. Esenciales también son las descripciones de su entorno: la casa, el pueblo, otros pueblos, el río, las selvas, el firmamento, los días de lluvia, las montañas y los lagos. El hilo narrativo que une a todos los personajes y a todos los lugares es su enfermedad. De acuerdo con Teverson y Upstone en *Postcolonial Spaces: The politics of place in contemporary culture*, “place plays a significant role in how one defines one’s own identity and, equally, how that identity is defined by others” (2). *Buscando mi madre dedíós* revela la estrecha relación entre el Chocó y Arnoldo Palacios. Aunque fue un ciudadano del mundo, su identidad fue siempre la de un chocoano y por eso sus obras son netamente chocoanas también.

La novela empieza en la mañana cuando sus padres se dan cuenta que sus piernas no lo sostienen y que no puede caminar. La narrativa documenta su proceso para aprender a movilizarse en “cuatro patas” y los viajes que emprende su familia a

otras poblaciones buscando vanamente una cura para su poliomelitis: “Yo me movilizaba en cuatro patas, gateando. Las rodillas me ardían, sangrantes, con el roce del cascajo, se me pelaba. Al hallarme bien, bien rendido, trataba de utilizar las piernas propiamente dichas como un animal; el cuerpo se me cansaba rápido... No me dejaba sacar de combate, durante los paseos, en los alrededores. Nunca dije: ‘estoy cansado, espérenme’” (43). Después de perder toda esperanza, su padre le hace unas muletas que le dan libertad porque le permiten lo que más ansía en el mundo: caminar: “Fue así. Aquella mañana cambió mi existencia de reptil. Ya no me arrastraré más. Y no fue posible que me mantuviera sentado. El mundo se me hizo aún más grande y se hinchó mi necesidad de andar. ... A cada ratico me caía. ... Caer, levantarme, soportar, hacían parte natural de mi nueva vida, caminando” (279). El texto termina cuando, años más tarde, Arnoldo quiere dejar Cértegui e irse a Quibdó a continuar sus estudios. Su padre lo apoya y aunque su madre duda un poco, preocupada por su enfermedad, finalmente acepta su decisión diciendo: “Si esa es su suerte, que se vaya. Esa será su forma de conseguir algún día su madre dediós” (339).

Buscando mi madre dediós está dividido en cuatro libros. El título de cada libro corresponde a cada uno de los viajes que hiciera con su familia buscando la cura para su enfermedad. Cada viaje, además de ser complicado por la falta de vías de comunicación, lo pone en contacto con otras aldeas y con otros chocoanos. Guiado por sus recuerdos, Arnoldo Palacios cuenta sus historias. Al igual que en sus novelas anteriores en las que el lector sigue la trayectoria de Irra en Quibdó, las de Pedro José en distintos lugares del Chocó y las de Luis Aníbal en Bogotá, en *Buscando mi madre dediós* seguimos la trayectoria del niño Arnoldo aquejado por una enfermedad incurable. Vemos su extraordinaria tenacidad frente a la adversidad a la vez que escuchamos las historias, unas trágicas y otras cómicas de sus familiares, amigos, conocidos y desconocidos, mientras lo acompañamos en sus viajes. Como lectores

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estamos inmersos en una geografía negra, nos desplazamos a través de ella y compartimos las alegrías y sufrimientos de sus habitantes. Según McKittrick and Woods,

[the] tension, between the mapped and the unknown, reconfigures knowledge, suggesting that places, experiences, histories, and people that "no one knows" do exist, *within our present geographic order*. In black geographies we find a history of brutal segregation and erasure as these processes inform a different or new approach to the production of space; thus erasure, segregation, marginalization, and mysterious disappearances are geographically available, depending on the vantage point. (4)

Las obras de Arnoldo Palacios dan voz a los chocoanos. Al entretener historias, lugares, rostros y experiencias de la cotidianidad chocoana muestra que dentro y en contra de formas dominantes de poder, conocimiento y espacio, estas narrativas de geografías negras y experiencias vividas existen. Si bien el Chocó es una geografía de exclusión y una geografía de injusticia en términos económicos, es también una geografía negra, es decir, un espacio informado y construido a partir de la experiencia afrodescendiente. Una geografía negra constituida por una comunidad que vive junta, que sufre junta, que recuerda junta, que comparte una identidad y diversas manifestaciones culturales que hacen al Chocó y a los chocoanos lo que son. Paradójicamente, a la vez que es una geografía de exclusión, es una geografía de opción. Es por esto que lograr justicia espacial en esta región de Colombia es, como lo muestran las obras de Arnoldo Palacios, una tarea compleja. La solución no está, como le tocó a Arnoldo Palacios, en buscarse su madrededios fuera del Chocó, sino en tener la libertad, como hizo Irra, de quedarse en su tierra siempre y cuando exista la garantía de acceso a derechos fundamentales tales como la vida, educación, salud y trabajo de la misma manera que cualquier otro ciudadano del país y del mundo. Para esto, es

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necesario insertar estas geografías negras en nuestra manera de ver el mundo y de replantearnos el concepto de justicia espacial e incluso la noción de geografías de exclusión. La escritura de Arnoldo Palacio permite comprender cómo la injusticia espacial es un proceso de exclusión que parte del no reconocimiento de la alteridad. Su obra aporta a la comprensión de la producción de espacialidades injustas y opresivas en las que se encuentran atrapados los afrochocoanos desde tiempo inmemoriales. Leída en el contexto colombiano de hoy en día, su obra adquiere aún mayor relevancia porque puede impulsar el debate sobre la dimensión geográfica de la justicia y para involucrar esta categoría de análisis al estudio de las estructuras espaciales de la injusticia en Colombia en relación no sólo a las comunidades afrochocoanas sino también en relación a los afrocolombianos en general en el marco del proceso de paz. Este debe ser uno de los desafíos dentro del proceso de reconstrucción de la nación una vez que los acuerdos de Paz de la Habana entren en vigencia. Es una lástima que Arnoldo Palacios no haya vivido para celebrar este momento histórico por el cual abogó toda su vida con sus novelas y con su activismo intelectual y político dentro y fuera de Colombia. ¡Descanse en paz, maestro!

Olga Arbeláez

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Experienced pickers pick with both hands': Puerto Rican and Jamaican Apple Picker's Body and Public Discourse on Migrant Workers

"Eli Denny, who can clean an apple tree as fast as any man alive, braced his feet and knees to balance himself high on a narrow 22-foot ladder and used both hands to pick apples into a metal bucket strapped to his feet. Denny is one of some 3,000 Jamaicans imported this fall to harvest the apple crop from Virginia to Maine. With his skill, endurance, eagerness to work and lack of US citizenship, he embodies the complex problem of the alien farm worker in America."¹

The excerpt above aptly captures the very essence of this study - perceptions of farm workers' bodies and debates over non-immigrant labor contracts in the United States (US) during the mid- twentieth century. In the 1970s, growing unemployment in the US generated widespread scrutiny of contracts to non-immigrant seasonal farm workers in general, but apple picking drew significant attention. A struggle between the US Labor Department and migrant labor contractors to determine the legitimacy of apple growers reliance on foreign workers became increasingly contentious. It was in this context that the demographic prominence of Jamaicans in a field that had been dominated by Puerto Ricans, placed migrant workers from the Caribbean in particular at the center of these debates.² This paper looks at Caribbean contract apple pickers in the US, particularly Puerto Ricans and Jamaicans, between 1939 and 1992.³ Using public discourse on apple contracts to migrant workers from two newspapers, the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, the study examines how the migrant worker's body became a platform for maintaining wartime labor policies in a post-war period. In several instances, the apple pickers' body emerged as a critical element of this discourse

¹ Wilson Morris, "Apple Work." *The Washington Post*, September 18, 1977, ProQuest Historical Papers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p.29.

² At the turn of the 20th Century, Jamaicans concentrated in agricultural clusters in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans and Virginia. The literature shows that issues with employment in these areas focused on Jamaicans employed in apple picking jobs. For more on British West Indians' contracted in US agriculture, see Holger Henke, *The West Indian Americans*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001. Also see Percy C Hintzen, *West Indian in the West: self-representations in an immigrant community*. New York: New York University Press. 2001. Klevan, Miriam. *The West Indian Americans*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1990. Ransford Palmer, *Pilgrims from the sun: West Indian migration to America*. New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1995.

³ While 1939 captures the wartime period, 1992 marks a shift in apple picking away from Jamaicans in particular and more towards Hispanics on a whole.

and was read by both employers and policy makers as a fundamental premise upon which claims could be made for or against non-immigrant visas, which allowed seasonal laborers to work on US farms. The paper shifts focus away from legislative and anthropological interpretations that have dominated studies on the topic and draws attention to a rhetoric that codified notions of Jamaican bodies on one hand, and that of Puerto Ricans and African Americans on the other, within an industry intransigent to changing legislations on immigration.

The apple industry provides a prolific case study because it remained one of the biggest agri-business in the US throughout the twentieth century. In 1973, for example, apple was recognized as the sixth largest cash crop in Virginia; a state which consistently ranked fifth and sixth among the largest producer of apples.⁴ Before the turn of the twentieth century, apple picking was done mainly by local workers and some farms relied on neighboring families to do the work. By the 1952, the industry mostly employed migrant workers who had been recruited during World War II (WWII) to fill large numbers of vacancy in both manufacturing and agricultural sectors.⁵

Although Puerto Ricans formed a fairly significant faction of the apple industry's labor force, they held a peculiar position in the debates over apple picking jobs because, unlike Jamaicans, they held US citizenship, which in theory and practice allowed for greater flexibility to enter and/or leave agricultural jobs. Despite their inimitable position in the history of migrant farm workers, however, the existing

⁴ "Apple Gets Grade Test." *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, October 18, 1973, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p.H1.

⁵The year 1952 it especially important as a framework here. It marks the year when a Nationality and Immigration Act was passed. The Act established two pre-requisites for hiring alien workers: insufficient American workers in the field and proof that such hires would not have adverse effects on US citizens doing similar work. It was also the year when Puerto Rico became a US Commonwealth. As a Commonwealth, the country was an "unincorporated territory" of the US. Notwithstanding the political complexities, the status allowed Puerto Ricans access to the US in ways that other Caribbean nationals did not. Jorge Duany uses the term "colonial immigrants" to underscore ambiguities surrounding Puerto Ricans' status in the US as a result of this classification. See Duany, "A Transnational Colonial Migration: Puerto Rico's Farm Labor Program," *New West Indian Guide*, Vol. 84, No. 3/4 (2010), pp. 225-251.

literature has hardly given much attention to Puerto Ricans in the whole issue of apple picking. Most scholars have only examined the issues of Jamaican contract labor in relation to African Americans, not Puerto Ricans. David Griffith, for instance, argued that to understand the legal issues of contract workers in apple picking, a transnational approach is necessary. This transnational approach linked Jamaicans in the industry to push factors in home country but hardly expanded that view to account for Puerto Ricans, too. Griffiths does mention Puerto Ricans in some cases but his conceptualization of US domestic labor, for the most part, is built upon arguments from the African Americans' case.⁶ Similarly, a comparative study of apple pickers by Richard Napoli and Nancy Foner contrasted Jamaican and African American apple pickers.⁷ Thus, the scholarship mainly conceptualizes 'local/ domestic' workers as African Americans and, to a smaller extent, poor whites.

The relative non-recognition of Puerto Ricans in the conflicts over apple picking jobs may be a reflection of tensions and/ or ambiguities where national discourse on the status of Puerto Ricans is concerned.⁸ By focusing on Puerto Ricans as a noticeable part of the debates, this paper revises the discussion of apple pickers giving full legitimacy to Puerto Ricans as a significant faction in the whole debate over contracts to Jamaicans, and their significance to agricultural labor employment, or the lack thereof.

The great paradox of the twentieth century agricultural industry since WWII is that there was a 'labor shortage' that ironically ran concomitantly with rising

⁶ See David Griffith, "Peasants in Reserve: Temporary West Indian Labor in the US Farm Labor Market," *International Migration Review*, Vol. 20, No.4, *Special Issue: Temporary Worker Programs: Mechanisms, Conditions, Consequences*, Winter 1986, pp. 875 – 898.

⁷ See Richard Napoli and Nancy Foner, "Jamaican and Black-American Migrant Farm Workers: A Comparative Analysis," *Social Problems*, Vol. 25, No.5 (June., 1978), pp. 491-503.

⁸ Jorge Duany discusses the complex situation of Puerto Rican nationalism and point out that even in academia, there has been no consensus on how to term Puerto Ricans residing in the US much more to give adequate and comprehensive conceptualization of their political and civil status. See Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: identities on the island & in the United States*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

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unemployment, especially among minority groups; that is, African Americans and Puerto Ricans. In 1977 when a reported nine million US citizens were unemployed, one of several court rulings authorized the importation of some 5,000 immigrants to pick apples.⁹ Similar labor contracts were authorized for other farming industries. In 1965, for example, the Attorney General Nicholas deB Katzenbach overruled the Secretary of Labor, W. Willard Wirtz's motion to have contracts for migrant workers to pick celery in Florida terminated. On May 23, 1965, the *New York Times* reported:

'One member of President Johnson's Cabinet overruled another today and allowed 500 foreign farm workers to remain in the country until June 1. They were to have left today... The 500 workers are harvesting celery in Florida. They have been here for about four months under a section of the general immigration statute - Public Law 414 - that permits growers to hire foreign farm workers if the Attorney General certifies that they are needed.'¹⁰

It was the apple industry, however, which bore the brunt of the debate over the extension of such contracts to migrants for farm work. Nevertheless, since the legal issues involved have been adequately covered in the existing literature, the aim here is not to regurgitate the debate but locate it in a broader framework on identity.

Apple growers fought vehemently to maintain these labor contracts on the basis that US citizens who could have filled the positions enjoyed high levels of mobility. Growers argued that large numbers of Puerto Rican pickers who prematurely left the job is a factor that made them unwilling to hire domestic workers in the apple industry. In 1977 growers conceded to increased numbers of Puerto Rican pickers, several companies found that the Puerto Ricans did not complete the season on the job. According to one grower, of the 600 Puerto Ricans who were hired to pick apples on the East Coast in 1976, "Only 153 of them finished the season, 48 worked two days or

⁹ Wilson Morris, "Apple Work." *The Washington Post*, September 18, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p.29.

¹⁰ John D. Pomfret, "Wirtz Overruled On Farm Workers." Special to the *New York Times*. *New York Times* (1857-Current file), May 23, 1965, ProQuest Historical Papers *The New York Times* (1851-2003).

less and 94 failed to finish the first week.”¹¹ Prior to this 1976 case, growers complained that, “. . .75 percent of the Puerto Ricans brought in left the orchards within 10 days.”¹² These experiences only heightened apple growers’ uncertainty about non-immigrant pickers.

In his analysis of the legislative conflicts in the apple industry, Griffiths argued, “Coming from poor nations where it may take as long as ten years to earn what they earn in the US in five or six months. West Indians constitute a willing, reliable, and highly docile labor force. Most importantly, the West Indians constitute a captive labor force.”¹³ This argument posits the view that the apple picking industry preferred Jamaicans because, as contract migrants, they remained comparatively unaffected by increased unionization and strikes during the period.¹⁴ In reality, pickers on temporary work visas could not protest or strike since they risked deportation. In one incident, 132 Jamaicans who engaged in a strike for higher wages in the sugar cane fields near Pahokee were arrested and deported.¹⁵ While this example is of the sugar cane industry, the same held true for Jamaican apple pickers. The risk of being deported was a constant force that, to some extent, assured pickers’ compliance at a time when labor strikes were prevalent in several industries.¹⁶ Scholars like Griffiths who argue that Jamaicans were hired because they provided a docile labor force were reiterating the arguments of one party in the debate whose point of view became a platform upon which the Labor Department argued against growers.¹⁷

¹¹ Wilson Morris, “Apple Work.” *The Washington Post* (1974-Current files), September 18, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p.29.

¹² Wilson Morris, “Labor, Apple Growers Reach Truce.” *The Washington Post* (1974-Current file) August 19, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990).

¹³ Griffiths, “Peasants in Reserve”, p. 881.

¹⁴ See Issel, William, et. al. (ed.) *American labor and the Cold War: Grassroots Politics and Postwar Political Culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004.

¹⁵ “Wirtz Asked to Investigate Deportation of Jamaicans.” *New York Times* (1857-Current file), January 7, 1968

¹⁶ See Issel, 2004. Also see Michael H. Frisch and Daniel Walkowitz, ed.s. *Rethinking US Labor History: Essays on the Working-Class Experience, 1756-2009*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010.

¹⁷ See ‘Apples and Jobs,’ *The Washington Post* (1974-Current file), September 6, 1977. ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), pg. A20. Also see Wilson Morris, “Apple Work.” *The*

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Yet, this difference between domestic and contract laborers, however, did not mean that migrant workers were without agency. According to Napoli and Foner, farm work offered Jamaicans a chance to improve their occupational and economic status, migration to the US was not always for settlement and farm work was not a total way of life for those working in the programs.¹⁸ Apple picking, therefore, provided opportunities for upward social mobility to those who enlisted. Foner, in an editorial response to the argument that Jamaican apple pickers were docile and captive, further stipulated,

“It is also crucial to realize that farm labor abroad has traditionally been a way for Jamaicans to improve their position on the island. Jamaicans on the contract see their sojourn here [in the US] as a way to increase their land holdings, to expand or set up small businesses and to improve their living standards back home.”¹⁹

Foner’s argument suggests that while Jamaicans may have had limited or no access to places outside the camps, they were not ‘captive’. Although an inability to strike or unionize meant could have meant some degree of acquiescence by labor principles, migrant apple pickers gave a different meaning to ‘mobility’ as a medium by which they could improve living standards.

The Body Politics of Apple Picking

In some sense, the underlying issue was less about ideas of docility and more so on notions of what constituted a reliable worker in an industry operating on a seasonal basis. One letter to the *New York Times* editor hints at greater complexities of unemployment and labor supply in agricultural labor and apple picking in particular. It

Washington Post (1974-Current files), September 18, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p.29.

¹⁸ See Finer and Napoli, "Jamaican and Black-American Migrant Farm Workers," p. 499.

¹⁹ Nancy Foner, "Why Jamaicans Come Here to Pick Apples," Letter to the Editor. *New York Times* (1857-Current file), October 13, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The New York Times* (1851-2003), p.20. At the time, Foner offered her views in the capacity of Associate Professor of Anthropology at State University College at Purchase, Purchase N.Y.

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read, "General unemployment and the agricultural labor market are not related in a simple supply-and-demand situation."²⁰ This may have been the case. The growing migration of Puerto Ricans to the US presented a viable alternative to the Jamaican contracted pickers. From the Labor Department's perspective, Puerto Ricans would have reduced the need for Jamaicans but growers seemed more determined to keep Jamaicans.²¹ One main argument apple growers had in their defense was the need for experienced hands in a delicate and surprisingly technical field as apple picking. Ralph N. Dorsey, president of one of Virginia's most successful apple farms – Moore and Dorsey in Clark County – pointed out that,

"During harvesting, one of the most difficult decisions is determining when to pick the fruit – do it now or wait a week. An apple can't be improved after it's picked. To find out if a block of fruit is ready, [a picker] relies on his eyes, a pressure tester (which tells if the apple had the right degree of firmness) and, perhaps most important, his mouth... There have been refinements in storage, packing and marketing, but the Virginia apple is picked as it has always been – by two hands."²²

Since apple picking really needed workers who knew the right time to pick an high grade apple, the growers' argument for skilled and experience pickers in the person of Jamaicans, who had eventually dominated the industry during WWII, was a compelling one. Apple picking was a job that benefited from experience; it thrived on finding 'seasoned workers'. Writing for the American Enterprise Institutes' journal in 1978, Edward Cowan, who had visited the Frederick County Fruit Growers Association in

²⁰ "Why New Yorkers Can't Pick Apples in Virginia," Letter to the Editor, *New York Times* (1857-Current file) September 25, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The New York Times* (1851-2003), p.172.

²¹ Wilson Morris, "Apple Work." *The Washington Post* (1974-Current files), September 18, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p. 29.

²² "Apple Gets Grade Test." *The Washington Post, Times Herald* (1959-1973), October 18, 1973, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990) pg.H6, Col.1. Apples had a rigorous scale. Once picked, they are classified into one of five categories based on established criteria: "Color – A Red Delicious, to be graded Extra Fancy, has to be at least 66 percent red. Fancy has to have at least 40 percent color. Size – An apple can't be more than 5 percent smaller than its listed size. Discoloring – An Extra Fancy Golden Delicious is allowed 10 percent rust, a Fancy, 15 percent. Blemishes – An Extra Fancy is allowed an eighth of an inch blemish (usually bruises caused in picking, packing or handling), a Fancy, a quarter of an inch. Shape – Extra Fancy and Fancy apples must be 'fairly well formed.' Misshapen apples, though ordinarily as tasty as shapely ones, usually go to the processor, where they wind up as applesauce or juice, along with the undersized apples."

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Winchester Virginia to investigate tensions over who gains contracts to pick apples, argued:

"Experienced pickers pick with both hands, putting the apples into a half-bushel bucket suspended from a shoulder harness. When the bucket is full (and weighs about twenty-four pounds), the picker descends his ladder and pours his apples into a bin. The ladders generally used in Virginia are twenty-two or twentyfour feet high and weigh about thirty-five pounds. A picker must become skillful at moving the ladder from tree to tree while keeping it upright, to avoid the loss of time and energy required to lower and raise it."²³

The seasoned worker was therefore defined by ambidexterity, agility, and physical strength. From many accounts, it was Jamaica that provided some of the most 'seasoned' apple pickers. In 1977, Dekalb Russell, a grower who employed 12 domestic laborers, all of whom had said that they were 'seasoned', found that only,

"Five showed up at 7a.m. that first Tuesday... at 10 that morning, I had two left, and by 3 o'clock I didn't have any. They just took off... I don't think they had actually done it before and it surprised them."²⁴

Conversely, Russell explained that most of his pickers, of which 460 out of approximately 610 were Jamaicans, had been with the business for over ten years.²⁵

Similarly, on another farm in the same year, the Jamaican R. W. Johnson revealed in 1977 that he was picking apples with his employer since 1947.²⁶ The custom of using Jamaicans during the world war years meant that by the 1970s there was a ready supply of laborers who were already used to the job.²⁷

Puerto Ricans, on the other hand, were not historically concentrated in apple picking. In the early 1900s, they were mostly recruited to work sugar plantations in

²³ Edward Gowan, "Apples and Aliens", *AEI Journal on Government and Society*, 1978.

²⁴ Ben A. Franklin, "Jamaicans Are Favored in 'Apple Capital'." Special to the *New York Times*, *New York Times* (1857-Current file), September 24, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The *New York Times* (1851-2003), p.8.

²⁵ Ben A. Franklin, "Jamaicans Are Favored in 'Apple Capital'." Special to the *New York Times*, *New York Times* (1857-Current file), September 24, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The *New York Times* (1851-2003), p. 8.

²⁶ Wilson Morris, "Apple Work." *The Washington Post* (1974-Current files), September 18, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990) pg.29.

²⁷ Jamaicans had the highest rate out of the contract farm worker programs established for the British West Indies. See Holger Henke, *The West Indian Americans*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001. Also see Constance Sutton and Elsa M. Chaney (ed.s). *Caribbean Life in New York City: Socio-cultural Dimensions*. Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc., 1987.

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other US territories, including Hawaii, Cuba, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Dominican Republic, and St. Croix. Some sought work in other industries such as road and railroad construction in Ecuador and in clothing factories of Venezuela. Jorge Duany's work shows that Puerto Ricans did not really look towards the US mainland for work until the 1940s and it was not until after WWII that they sought seasonal jobs. These groups, however, were not limited to agricultural jobs and when they did enter the industry, this was not limited to apple picking. Among other things, Puerto Ricans planted and harvested corn, cabbage, and broccoli in the Delaware River Valley, potatoes in Maine, and avocados, lettuce, and oranges in Florida.²⁸ Puerto Ricans also formed large numbers of seasonal worker in manufacturing, domestic services, and other industries in the US.²⁹

Nevertheless, this long history of Jamaican apple pickers not only meant that Jamaicans would have more readily been drawn for the job but it was also a function of worker stereotypes in industries that perpetuated ethnic niche. In her comparison of West Indian success in the US vis-à-vis that of African Americans, Mary C. Waters had argued that the cultural stereotyping of West Indian immigrants as usually successful overemphasizes the differences between the two groups but at the same time, West Indians tended to have an edge in some areas. From Waters' point of view, this relative 'edge' often stem from West Indians' high labor force participation rates.³⁰ Apple picking was one such area where the high participation of Jamaicans signaled success. In view of other ethnicities, the contention with this outlook is that apple pickers automatically equated high participation rates with innate high performance. At the same time, equating participation rates and performance rates formed the very foundation of ethnic niche. According to Suzzane Model's theory of ethnic niche,

²⁸ Duany, "A Transnational Colonial Migrant", p. 233.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

³⁰ Mary C. Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*, p. 94.

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members of an immigrant community that are over-represented in an industry constitute an 'insider' forte that brings with it a rule of identity for the 'insider' in contrast to the 'outsider'; that is, the least represented immigrant groups.³¹ These theories play out in the apple picking industry through the stereotypes given to Jamaican pickers in contrast to their Puerto Rican counter-parts who, by 1940, were nicknamed *los tomateros* (the tomato pickers) to reflect their dominance in the tomato industry.

In his interview with *The Washington Post*, Dorsey gave a very detailed description of what he deemed the 'hard work' of apple picking,

"The work is hard and monotonous. Each time a picker fills the bushel-sized tin-rimmed canvas bag, he carries on his shoulder, he has to climb down a ladder and deposit the fruit in a crate next to the tree. Then he goes back up the ladder and repeats the operation, more than a hundred times a day. If a picker takes a break, it's on his own time. If he hits a bad section, where there are a lot of dead or diseased trees, he doesn't get any bonus for spending more time picking less fruit, as he would in Florida's orange fields. The pay is the same in good orchards or bad ones."³²

Several other writers reiterated Dorsey's opinion and these publications framed Jamaicans as hard workers based on their body, and abilities of the body, were interpreted. Bud Walker in an editorial, for example, argued that apple picking should continue with Jamaicans because the job required a lot of stamina and,

"Most Jamaicans who are imported worked their own farms during the year. The American apple harvest time is their off-season. They are year round agricultural workers who have developed the skills and physical stamina necessary to work as apple pickers... This foreign-labor program is simply not a conspiracy against the American worker. It is a necessary evil imposed on American apple growers by reality."³³

These pro-growers' arguments conveyed an image of Jamaicans as ideal workers for apple picking. There is evidence that Jamaicans themselves subscribed to this image of their work ethics. Lloyd Reid, one Jamaican picker who had 14 years of experience,

³¹ Suzzane Model, "Where West Indians Work," p. 52.

³² "Apple Gets Grade Test." *The Washington Post, Times Herald* (1959-1973), October 18, 1973, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p. H1.

³³ Bud Walker, "Why New Yorkers Can't Pick Apples in Virginia," Letter to the Editor. *New York Times* (1857-Current file), September 25, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The New York Times* (1851-2003), p. 172.

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was asked about his perceptions of the job and commented, "It is not too hard because we are used to the hard work. For a man not used to hard work, however, it would be killing."³⁴ The ideal apple picker was agile, used both hands to pick, mouth to taste gauge readiness of the fruit, and had the endurance to work longer hours carrying buckets and moving ladders from tree to tree.

While the notion of who made the best apple pickers remained very subjective, the fact that the job was usually associated with Jamaicans meant that the public was left to assume, based on the growers' arguments in favor of Jamaican pickers, that 'outsider' ethnicities could not perform a hard job. If Moore and Dorsey stipulated, "Jamaicans are more willing to do the hard work,"³⁵ then the public is led to believe that Puerto Rican and African Americans – the outsiders – could not perform a hard work. The 1978 Republican Senator for Virginia, John W. Warner, allegedly argued that, "Jamaicans were three times as efficient as the inexperienced Puerto Ricans."³⁶ A *Washington Post* article interpreted a 1978 compromise between the East Coast apple growers and The Labor Department as an opportunity for testing, "...growers' contentions that the Puerto Rican recruits are not sufficiently hardworking and disciplined to handle the long ladders and heavy buckets which are an apple picker's tools."³⁷ This image of Puerto Ricans as apple pickers seems to have been measured against the image developed for Jamaicans, as if fitting two different sides of the same coin. It was a stereotype propagated mostly by growers but one which remained a seminal perception in the industry. Jim Robinson, a grower in Winchester, Virginia,

³⁴ Wilson Morris, "Apple Work." *The Washington Post* (1974-Current files), September 18, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p.29.

³⁵ "Apple Gets Grade Test." *The Washington Post, Times Herald* (1959-1973), October 18, 1973, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p.H1.

³⁶ J. Regan Kerney, "Puerto Ricans Stranded." *The Washington Post* (1974-Current file) September 17, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), pg.C1.A

³⁷ "Farm Workers Compromise." *The Washington Post* (1974-Current file) September 9, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspaper *The Washington Post* (1877), p. C6.

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argued that "We knew that the Puerto Ricans-from past history-could not pick fast enough." In his estimation,

"Jamaicans, Robinson added, all pick 100 or more bushels a day, with the most productive picking 200 or 210. The incentive to hustle is a piece-rate system of compensation. Few Puerto Ricans, he said, even after the three-day learning period required by federal regulations, picked even 70 bushels a day."³⁸

When Carmen Teresa Whalen looked at Puerto Rican migration to the US in the post war years, she argued that Puerto Rican labor, like that of African Americans, filled the labor needs of the US economy. According to Whalen, stereotypes of Puerto Ricans in the form of a 'culture of poverty' sees these migrants as urban and by doing so, renders their relations with agriculture as ahistorical.³⁹ Whalen, therefore, argues that Puerto Rican migration to the US was the result of an internal migration from sugar, coffee and tobacco farms that eventually became an external migration into the US industries. Puerto Ricans who migrated to Philadelphia, for example, were mostly rural people but most importantly Whalen found that these contract laborers ignited scores of informal networks that eased mobility once they were in the US.⁴⁰ In relation to apple picking Whalen's study suggests that in the case of Puerto Ricans their relative absence in the apple industry was more by virtue of their ability to form networks within the US and move out of the jobs as US citizens than their inability to do agricultural work. Yet, Puerto Ricans became stereotyped as a group incapable of the hard work apple picking demanded as a result of how apple growers perceived the extent to which they could maneuver their bodies.

³⁸ Gowan, p. 42-43.

³⁹ See Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001, p. 8.

⁴⁰ See Whalen, p. 69.

Reflections of the Apple Industry

The apple industry's ability to sustain seasonal migrant contracts meant that it successfully maintained war time policies long after the wars ended. During WW II, several reports in the *New York Times* welcomed the arrival of Jamaicans to work cash crops and the apple industry saw a dramatic increase in the number of Jamaicans contracted. In April 1943, the Western, Mid-western and Eastern states of the US were to expect about 10 000 Jamaicans to work in agriculture.⁴¹ By June 1943, another reported, "New York's farm labor situation brightened further today with the arrival of 325 more laborers from Jamaica."⁴² In war times, therefore, Jamaicans were welcomed and their presence was almost seamless in terms of relations between growers and the Labor Department as well as relation to domestic workers. Although the immediate postwar years opened up employment opportunities for many workers, these openings eventually declined because of the depression that followed and the subsequent reshuffle in the economy.⁴³ It was in this period of reshuffle that the apple picking proved most resilient in maintaining its war time labor policies.

Although contract farm worker programs had been a war time policy, there were those who believed that West Indian migrant contract workers were still needed for their significance to low prices rather than focusing on the availability of domestic workers. O. R. Strackbein, president of an association called The Nation-Wide Committee on Export-Import Policy, chastised another writer in the *New York Times* for suggesting that the solution to decrease rising costs for food in the 1970s was to allow the importation of fruits and vegetables from Mexico. From Strackbein's point of

⁴¹ "10 000 Farm Workers to Come From Jamaica," *New York Times*, (1857-Current files) April 6, 1943; ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The New York Times* (1851-2003), p.17.

⁴² "More Jamaicans Reach Farms," *New York Times*, (1857-Current files) June 25, 1943; ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The New York Times* (1851-2003), p.36.

⁴³ See Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*, p. 138.

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view, it was the reduction of Jamaican contract laborers in the field that contributed to inflation. Strackbein wrote,

“Lets put this suggestion into proper context...Did you applaud the sharp cutback in the number of Jamaican farm workers who can be brought into Florida?...Have vegetable prices risen more than 50 per cent? Why not rewrite your editorial?”⁴⁴

For the most part, however, the apple industry had a steady increase in the number of Jamaicans that were contracted to pick apples for decades after WWII.

The jurisdiction from court cases suggests that apple growers were not just very selective in recruitment but that: (1) they either had a good command of labor laws or (2) the laws themselves tended to work in favor of the apple industry. Most times when the Labor Department brought apple growers to court, it was the growers who won and in turn secured further extension of apple picking contracts to migrant workers. Take, for instance, in 1977 the Labor Department brought a group of New England growers to court based on the argument that these growers denied unemployment to American citizens. In this case, apple growers won the permission to import 1,500 Jamaicans and Canadians.⁴⁵ Again, in 1978 the East Coast apple growers, “...won a major victory in their fight to avoid using Puerto Rican workers... when a federal judge ordered the U.S. Labor Department to admit 1,030 additional Jamaican pickers.”⁴⁶ A similar case emerge in 1979 – the Puerto Rican Secretary of Labor, Carlos Quiros versus the Sheandoah Valley apple growers – and like a few others, the judge dismissed the suit.⁴⁷ The latter cases, reflected Puerto Rican claims to the rights of domestic. By 1952 Public Law 414, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act, allowed

⁴⁴ O.R. Strckbein, “Checking the Cost of Food.” *New York Times* (1857-Current file); May 4, 1972, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The New York Times* (1851-2003), p. 44.

⁴⁵ “A Double Difficult Apple to Pluck,” *Time Magazine*, Monday, November 7, 1977.

⁴⁶ Wilson Morris, “Federal Court Approves Jamaican Apple Pickers.” *The Washington Post* (1974-Current file) September 7, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877), p. C3.

⁴⁷ “Judge Dismisses Apple Picker Suit”. *The Washington Post* (1974-Current file) April 19, 1979, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1993), p. C9. Also see Jane Freundel, ‘Apple Growers’ Alleged Illegal Pay to Jamaicans Under Study by Jury.’ *The Washington Post* (1974-Current file) August 24, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1993), p.C3. This slightly earlier case involved Virginia apple growers, as part of the larger East Coast investigation. The Growers won on the merit of no evidence that growers were not illegally giving preferential treatment to Jamaicans.

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for migrant farm workers only on the premise that their presence did not mean a loss of jobs to American workers or adversely affected the conditions of American employment.⁴⁸ This clause was intended to protect US citizens from competition with migrant workers for jobs. The court rulings, however, did not give precedence to Puerto Ricans. In these cases, the courts institutionalized prevailing perceptions of Puerto Ricans as non-citizens; foreign workers who had no greater claim to apple picking jobs than other migrant workers.⁴⁹

One contributor to *The Washington Post*, Ronald L. Goldfarb saw these victories as evidence of how growers had taken advantage of loopholes in the system. Goldfarb wrote in 1978, "Growers have learned to manipulate the system, and the secretary of labor has allowed himself to be manipulated."⁵⁰ To some extent, Goldfarb's suspicion was not baseless. A labor dispute in 1978, which left 300 Puerto Ricans pickers jobless, introduced a new twist because in this case, the Puerto Ricans' insufficient experience or high mobility rates were not at fault. According to apple growers, this group of Puerto Ricans were employed as apple pickers because the, "...Labor Department's bungling had caused a glut of workers and... jobs were no longer available in the orchards."⁵¹ For many government officials, the large numbers of Puerto Ricans turned away from the orchards was sign of foul play on the part of the apple growers since Jamaicans were still absorbed into the fields that season. A representative from the U.S. Employment Service reported that the situation emerged because,

⁴⁸ Gabriel Chin, et. al. ed.s. *The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965: Legislating a New America*. London, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

⁴⁹ Duany, "A Transnational Colonial Migrant", p. 236.

⁵⁰ Ronald L. Goldfarb, "Imported Farm Labor: How Growers Manipulate the System." *The Washington Post* (1974-Current file) August 2, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p.A1.

⁵¹ "300 Out of Jobs Picking Apples" and "300 Jobless Sit in Motels in Apple Picking Dispute." *The Washington Post*, (1974-Current file) September 13, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1993), p.C1.

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“...the workers arrived to fill job orders submitted by the growers, but were being told there was no room in the work camps and no jobs available... the growers are game-planning us to avoid seeing what the Puerto Ricans can do.”⁵²

Instances such as this 1978 case of jobless Puerto Ricans do suggest that growers were able to manipulate the system but the courts also gave leeway to the growers' preferences. A 1978 court ruling on East Coast growers versus the Labor Department sought a 'balance between Jamaicans and Puerto Ricans'; a verdict that suggests the contending parties were both non-citizens. Rather, it 'balanced' one foreign group (Jamaicans) and another group that was deemed "foreign in a domestic sense" (Puerto Ricans).⁵³

According to Model's take on the ethnic niche hypothesis, the apple industry by virtue of Jamaicans' dominance infers some level of discrimination in favor of the 'insider' or majority group and that preferences for 'insiders' are usually established through pay differentials to the disadvantage of 'outsiders'. In some respect, this argument would be applicable to the apple industry if Jamaicans, by virtue of being Jamaicans, got more pay than say African Americans or Puerto Ricans. Wages, however, varied on an individual basis depending on how many apples a picker got in each day.⁵⁴ Differentials were established, however, through other non-wage means. In her study of one Jamaican dominated farm, Foner found pay variations along ethnic lines where non-Jamaicans - the 'outsiders' - were usually given the worst trees and had to wait longer in the orchards before being moved to other locations.⁵⁵ Notwithstanding these cases of informal biases on the farm, the apple industry should

⁵² "300 Out of Jobs Picking Apples" and "300 Jobless Sit in Motels in Apple Picking Dispute." The Washington Post, (1974-Current file) September 13, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1993), p.C1.

⁵³ "Farm Workers Compromise." The Washington Post (1974-Current file) September 9, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspaper The Washington Post (1877), p. C6. Also see Duany's discussion on the treatment of Puerto Ricans as domestic-foreigners in "A Transnational Colonial Migrant".

⁵⁴ Apple pickers were paid on a piecework basis. See Nancy Foner, *Migrant Farm Workers*, p. 493.

⁵⁵ See Foner, p. 495.

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be also seen as a reflection of discrimination against Puerto Ricans and African Americans when trying to enter other occupations. Whalen found that even while Puerto Rican women hardly found jobs, they were concentrated in the cities' manufacturing sectors and since opportunities for Puerto Rican men were limited elsewhere, they remained in agriculture.⁵⁶ In relation to the apple picking conflicts, therefore, the issue was much bigger than just Jamaicans or immigrants taking the farm jobs. Instead, the debate over Jamaicans in the industry and the legislative battles are inherently a reflection of discrimination against Puerto Ricans and African Americans elsewhere. In the end, the benefits went to Apple growers who gained large profits from the industry and Jamaicans who, by securing the apple picking jobs, moved closer to achieving upward social mobility. Puerto Ricans and African Americans, however, remained at a disadvantage. At the end of the dispute between apple growers and The Labor Department in mid-1978, it was the Puerto Ricans who suffered. From one report, the dispute ultimately, "...left about 300 confused Puerto Ricans without jobs and living in Virginia and West Virginia motels at federal expense."⁵⁷ Another report noted 600 Puerto Ricans who were, "...caught for a week in the middle of a struggle between the U.S. Labor Department and the men who grow the multimillion dollar apple crop..."⁵⁸ In some respect, this outcome for Puerto Ricans and African Americans was the result of The Labor Department's shortfalls. Charles Knapp, a Special Assistant to the Secretary of Labor, argued that apart from promulgating false notions of a labor shortage, apple growers applied, "Other ploys...to similar effect. For example, none of the New York apple growers offer domestic workers travel advances. Yet Jamaican workers receive advances, either directly or through agreements with

⁵⁶ See Whalen, p. 148 – 165.

⁵⁷ "300 Out of Jobs Picking Apples" and "300 Jobless Sit in Motels in Apple Picking Dispute." The Washington Post, (1974-Current file) September 13, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1993), p.C1.

⁵⁸ J. Regan Kerney, "Puerto Ricans Stranded." The Washington Post The Washington Post (1974-Current file) September 17, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1990), p.C1.

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institutions in Jamaica.”⁵⁹ For Knapp, the solution lied in extensive recruitment efforts that would re-position US workers to take apple picking jobs. While Department had been very consistent with their efforts to get Puerto Ricans and African Americans into the apple picking jobs, the mere fact that they had only been able to rely on judicial procedures does not speak much for the measures available to them to shape the recruitment policies of the farmers. Monica Heppel et. al. traced the history of apple picking in West Virginia and pointed out that it was not until 1992 that apple picking contracts to West Indians ended; a time when the industry simultaneously became a job dominated by Hispanics.⁶⁰ This transition from West Indians to a predominantly Hispanic job, however, had a long tumultuous history that should be viewed as an exchange of West Indians for Hispanics that only succeeded with the sanction of apple growers instead of as a victory of the US government’s Labor Department. Moreover, the process tended to be more confrontational and futile than it proved conciliatory and effective. By August 1978, The Labor Department had recognized that confrontations were contributing to its unimpressive track record with apple growers and so along with the new plan to get 1000 Puerto Ricans into apple picking jobs, Knapp conceded, “Our first priority was to pick U.S. workers...But the one conscious change was that we made it clear that we were going to cut off all the scar tissue from the past,” in order to have an effective truce between the Labor Department and the apple growers.⁶¹ The attempt at improved relations, however, failed in light of the 600 stranded Puerto Ricans. Political sentiments also pinpointed the inefficiencies of government labor agencies as the root cause of relative non-improvement of Puerto Ricans’ situation in

⁵⁹ Charles Knapp, “Are Imported Migrant Workers Taking US Jobs?” Letter to the Editor. *The Washington Post* (1974-Current file) August 12, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p.A1.

⁶⁰ Monica Heppel, Joanne Spano and Luis Torres. “Changes in the Apple Harvest Work Force in West Virginia: Implications for the Community.” *Changing Faces: Research and Seminars*. Online: http://migration.ucdavis.edu/cf/more.php?id=151_0_2_0

⁶¹ Wilson Morris, “Labor, Apple Growers Reach Truce.” *The Washington Post* (1974-Current file) August 19, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p. A4.

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the apple industry. The Democratic Senator for West Virginia blamed, "...the department of 'dumping' the workers in the region without proper planning."⁶² In the midst of this blame game, however, were Puerto Ricans who were caught in the middle. One writer in *The Washington Post* had said, "The apple has been as formidable in history as it has been in recipe books. It was the agent in the Fall of Man and in Newton's discovery of the law of gravity."⁶³ This paper has shown that the apple has yet another significance in history. It captures the procedures, conflicts, struggles, achievements and transitions in one particular industry in the US during the twentieth century. For Jamaicans, the American apple embodied personal aspirations and symbolized a chance at upward social mobility upon return to Jamaica. While some scholars and growers alike have argued that Jamaicans dominated the apple picking industry because they provided a captive and docile labor force, this discussion has shown that there were several factors working together, including but not limited to the structure within which apple growers operated. Although Puerto Ricans provided an alternative labor force, apple growers gravitated towards Jamaicans.

The justification for these preferences, while couched in within arguments on availability and mobility, were equally grounded in notions of an ideal apple picker body. In spite of the Puerto Ricans in US agriculture, and especially as tomato pickers, apple growers argued and perpetuated the view that Puerto Ricans were incapable of hard work. The debates surrounding Puerto Rican and Jamaican workers, as it relates to apple picking, generated stereotypes of both groups. These stereotypes portrayed Jamaicans and Puerto Ricans as complete contrast to each other. Where court rulings on labor contracts to migrant workers were concerned, however, there was little distinction between Puerto Ricans and Jamaicans as non-domestic workers. For this reason, Puerto

⁶² J. Regan Kerney, "Puerto Ricans Stranded." *The Washington Post* (1974-Current file) September 17, 1978, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p.C1.

⁶³ "Apple Gets Grade Test." *The Washington Post*, Times Herald (1959-1973), October 18, 1973, ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post* (1877-1990), p.H1.

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Ricans gained little protection under Public Law 414, which gives precedence to US citizens. It also allowed apple growers to maintain policies that encouraged Jamaican migrant farm workers dominance in apple picking.

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Roots and Routes: Solomon's Grandpa Really Did Go to Ecuador: Jamaican Migrant Workers in Ecuador, in *La Nariz del Diablo* by Luz Argentina Chiriboga

“Solomon Grampa gone a Ecuador
Lef him wife an pickney out a door
Nobody's business but him own.”
(Jamaican Folk Song)

“Migration has been fundamental in the Caribbean experience.” (Franklin W. Knight)

Several scholars who have traced the “roots and routes” of Caribbean Anglophone migration patterns have confirmed that the movement of Caribbean populations across the region and the world, has been pivotal to the Caribbean experience. Indeed, Caribbean migration has come to be typified as a “restlessness,” an “urge to move hither and yon” (Knight 8).

The specific subject of Jamaican migration in the 19th century to Central America and other parts of the Caribbean has been the subject of much study. There is a significant body of research on the first large-scale movement of Jamaicans, merely twelve (12) years after Emancipation in 1850, to Panama, where they worked on the construction of the railway line. Similarly, their departure in 1880–1904 to build the Panama Canal is also well researched and documented. Other movements of Jamaicans to Cuba for various reasons: to provide workers for the sugar plantations of Cuba in the early 19th Century; as entrepreneurs in Cuba, to fight in the Cuban War of Independence and as seasonal workers in Cuba employed by the United Fruit Company between 1902-1931, have been well documented (Knight 14). However, to date, I am not aware of any meaningful or noteworthy studies that have given attention to the migration of Jamaicans to Ecuador in the early to mid-twentieth century. The extract from a well-known Jamaican folk song which appears at the beginning of this essay, is one which is often sung by Jamaican folk groups and individuals alike. Nonetheless, it is quite dubious if many Jamaicans are aware that these rhythmic lyrics actually have a basis in historical reality.

My research has unearthed only one reference to this song and its grounding in the history which informs it. Eminent UWI Professor Emeritus, Patrick Bryan, in an article in *The Gleaner* of June 2, 2000 claimed: “Between about 1850 and 1930 Panama, Cuba and Costa Rica were the three most important destinations for Jamaicans, but there were other destinations as well – Ecuador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Haiti and the

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Dominican Republic. In the 1920's and in the 1930's others worked in the oil refineries of Curaçao, and Aruba. One folk song reminds us that "Solomon Grandpa gone a Ecuador lef him wife and pickney out a door" (*Gleaner* 2000). Bryan, however, does not provide us with any details of this period of important contact between Jamaica and Ecuador. Efforts to find other references to the history of this song by Jamaican historians and musicologists have proven fruitless.

The publication of Luz Argentina Chiriboga's novel, *La nariz del Diablo/The Devil's Nose*, in 2010 marks a fundamental point in opening the conversation about this historic event which has been omitted from the official historical accounts in Jamaica, and even in Ecuador where most persons are unaware of this important connection between the two countries. Indeed, the fictionalised accounts of the novel provide an opportunity for scholars and persons with an interest in Caribbean migration to uncover the facts surrounding what remains a major event in both Jamaican and Ecuadorian histories. Chiriboga provides a dramatic narration of this period in Ecuadorian history, in her well-crafted and highly engaging novel.

Materials in the Ecuadorian Historical Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are probably not abundant, with reference to Jamaicans, but exists, because the construction of the Guayaquil-Quito Railway line was a momentous achievement for Ecuador. It remains a testimony of the determination of President José Eloy Alfaro who had believed that the answer to Ecuador's pursuit of prosperity would be found in the locomotive. Alfaro took the plan to link the lowlands with the highlands that were designed by his predecessor, Gabriel García Moreno to the English engineer Kelly and together they obtained a contract in 1885 to build the railway line. Kelly, however, immediately became bankrupt and left Ecuador. Alfaro then found favour with two Americans – Archer Harman and Major John Harman, who committed to building the railway line.

The Guayaquil-Quito Railway line was then built between 1897-1908 and has been described as the "most difficult and most expensive" railway line to be constructed, as it had to be built through some of the most treacherous parts of the Andean range. In addition, the periods of construction were plagued by torrential rainfalls and landslides that repeatedly destroyed sections that had already been built. Workers were hampered by diseases such as malaria which killed many of them. The most dangerous sections of the constructions were the highest parts of the mountain range and even more perilous was the peak which comprised a monstrous rock called

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“La nariz del Diablo – a vertical wall that had to be surmounted to get the steam engines up to the highlands” (Web blog Post, Clark, July 2014.). For this section 4,000 Jamaicans were recruited, as it was believed that no one would be able to conquer this mountain. Galo García Idrovo, in an article entitled, “El Ferrocarril más difícil del mundo,” provides brief historical accounts of what was perceived as an insurmountable task for which Jamaicans were recruited. Its completion was celebrated as a success as it improved mobility in the country from the highlands to the coast. José Alfaro was convinced that it would modernise Ecuador and rescue it from, stagnation. Although it is not now functional, it is still regarded as the most “complicated railway in the world” which would not have been a reality without “the presence of an anonymous group of indigenous and African descent workers from Jamaica and Central America”. (Idrovo www.scribd.com)

Today, the stretch of the railway called *La nariz del Diablo/ The Devil's nose*, is a tourist attraction referred to as “the railway in the sky” and is a place that inspires awe and admiration for those who dared to build a railway line through such perilous terrain. Chiriboga’s novel derives its name from the formidable rock– *La nariz del Diablo*, and this most treacherous part of the railway line. It seems, she takes care in remaining faithful to the historical facts as the names of actual individuals such as the Ecuadorian President José Eloy Alfaro (1895-1901) at the time, as well as place names are maintained. Chiriboga takes the historical facts and embellishes them with her own imaginative representations of how some events unfolded. Indeed, she must be lauded for breaking the silence and for using her fiction to fill the void which has existed on this critical chapter of the history of two countries.

The purpose of this essay is to first fill the gap that exists in official historical discourse regarding the historical link between Jamaica and Ecuador, and to argue that Jamaicans followed new routes to Ecuador not only for financial gains, or to establish new roots, but also because their importance to other nation’s efforts at nation building was well-recognised by others. I intend to use discourse analysis, close reading strategies and broad post-colonial theories to connect both my research and Chiriboga’s literary work, and to locate the inferences in a strong critical frame. I will also draw on broad post-colonial theories involving issues of inequities in business related transactions related to the exchange of labour for economic gains to problematize the discussions. To this end, I argue that the Jamaicans were also exploited and utilised as agents in the destruction of the natural environment in a project designed for the

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economic and political gains of Ecuador's Liberal Party and the bourgeoisie class. Indeed, the railway line which has been dubbed,— “The Redemptive Work”, The Integration Dream”, and “The Iron Embrace” remains the single most celebrated achievement in Ecuador, since it was regarded as a project designed for national unity, but it was one which also resulted in the most widespread destruction of the Ecuadorian landscape and terrain.

The very beginning of the novel *La nariz del Diablo/The Devil's Nose*, draws attention to its strong historical grounding. The early chapters of the novel foreground historical conditions at the time in Jamaica, when, despite having been emancipated from slavery, and attempting to be self-employed, many Jamaicans were experiencing tremendous difficulties supporting themselves and their families. According to Franklyn Knight: “For the British West Indies, wages, erratic employment opportunities, all the supporting colonial political system all coincided to drive people away from their birthplaces in pursuit of bettering their own lives and those of their families (Knight 10). Such are the impecunious living conditions highlighted by Chiriboga that one of the main characters, Leona, is willing to practise gender alteration to “pass as a man” and be selected, to go for employment in Ecuador:

“Es Leona Cuebute que, cubierta con una manta y puesta pantalones, se ha embarcado rumbo al Ecuador. Ella cree que nadie sospecha de su osadía y que nadie descubrirá que es mujer, pues se confunde con los peones, razón por la cual nadie puede notar su presencia. Todo lo que ve y todo lo que escucha es un secreto para ella..., si es descubierta, ¡Yemayá no lo permita!, la lanzarían al mar” (26).

Essentially, the novel recounts the second stage of the building of the Ecuadorian Railway Line. The plot presents a chronological, organized description of the events that unfold leading up to the construction of the Ecuadorian Railway Line. Intermittent, vivid dialogues are employed as a means of lending veracity and authenticity to her characters. The story is narrated mainly in third person narrative voice revealing the dexterity of the author, in wielding various perspectives, as multiple stories are also recounted from other characters' perspectives. The story commences with the arrival of two American representatives, from the Guayaquil-Quito Railway company, who visit the capital of Kingston, Jamaica, in their quest to recruit four thousand (4,000) Jamaican labourers to work on the continuation of the railway construction in Ecuador.

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The news in Kingston diffuses like wildfire about the possible employment in Ecuador. Mac Donald and H. Killan, the American representatives, designed a carefully crafted agenda to capture the attention of the impoverished Jamaican workers. They dexterously employ sharp hyperbole to capture the creative imagination of the workers, assuring them that they would obtain a good salary, adequate treatment, and a safe working environment. The Jamaican workers, destitute and poverty-stricken, hold tenaciously to the promises, desperately hoping to use this opportunity as a means of upward social mobility in their native country, upon their return. Chiriboga suggests through her work that the decision was also taken by many Jamaicans because they were overwhelmed by the images of financial gains that were created.

The author draws on history to provide explanation for the massive recruitment of Jamaicans to travel the long journey to Ecuador. Indeed, the Jamaicans had gained experience in the building of railway lines, having witnessed and in some cases worked in the construction of the railway line in Jamaica (opened in 1845) which was the first railroad outside of Europe and North America and the second British Colonial Railway after Canada. Their experience working alongside British engineers later made them suitable for recruitment to Panama, to work on the construction of the Panama railroad between 1850–1855. Jorge Sánchez, writing of the recruitment of Jamaicans to Ecuador observes:

Los trabajadores jamaquinos son parte de nuestra historia y nuestra leyenda. Los primeros llegaron durante el gobierno de Gabriel García Moreno, contratados por la empresa de construcción del Ferrocarril del Sur. Vinieron desde el istmo de Panamá, a donde diez mil obreros jamaquinos habían sido llevados por la Panamá Railroad Co. para construir el ferrocarril interoceánico (1850-1855). Su fama de buenos trabajadores, que además resistían bastante bien las enfermedades tropicales, determinó que fueran contratados para el Ecuador, cuando esa masa de obreros se dispersó al terminar la obra.

Los jamaquinos cumplieron una gran labor en los trabajos del ferrocarril garciano. Y dejaron tan buena fama que, al emprenderse los trabajos del ferrocarril Guayaquil-Quito, en tiempos de la Revolución Liberal, fue traído al país un nuevo contingente de cuatro mil trabajadores jamaquinos (Sánchez online.library.wiley.com).

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Besides their reputation for good work ethics, discipline and experience with railroads, the Jamaicans were also valuable for their linguistic skills and ability to handle dynamites: “Al ser angloparlantes, conocedores del empleo de explosivos y usos del trabajo en cuadrillas, se adaptaron rápidamente a los sistemas de trabajo impuestos por Archer Harman y los jefes norteamericanos” (Sánchez online library.wiley.com).

The doubts and ambivalence with which the recruits would have struggled, despite the opportunity for economic gains are epitomised in the characters Gregory and Syne Marret, the Marret brothers. Initially, Gregory exhibits apprehension about accepting this employment opportunity. His brother, Syne, on the other hand, appears optimistic, and animated about the future economic prospects and convinces him about the positive economic returns of the job, claiming: “los gringos pagarán cuatro reales ...” (Chiriboga 18). The narrator reveals, through the character of George, the complex, independent minds of the workers. For example, while George thoroughly comprehends his brother’s (Syne’s) justification and animation for leaving Jamaica for Ecuador, he is also fully aware that his brother does not have any family commitments. He is single, without a wife and children, while he, a husband and father of two, must seriously ponder the matter of leaving his family behind. Gregory personifies an exemplary black father, who, though being poor, is a responsible provider and a protector of his family. Nevertheless, he lacks adequate financial capability to sustain his family as Pamela, his wife, is an ordinary street vendor, who similarly earns a pittance. Gregory’s ultimate objective is to purchase a piece of land on which he can farm. The circumstances, therefore, for both brothers differ. So it is, that Gregory’s economic deprivation coerces him into action.

The narrator uses an effective tool of repetition, for emphasis, seen in George’s oft-reiterated aspiration of earning money from the proceeds of the railway project, to then return to his native country to buy a piece of land. Here, one sees the great value of owning land in early 20th century Jamaica. Apart from the economic returns from land ownership, it represented the rite of passage from a slave to a liberated/emancipated person. In other words, one was not fully liberated until he had acquired economic prosperity— symbolized through the ownership of land: “Pero Gregory necesita dinero, de modo que quizá si sea un acierto el viaje... Aquel proyecto es la fórmula mágica para salir de la pobreza: regresaría con dinero, con oro para comprar el terreno y hacer su casa” (Chiriboga14).

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Irony is an important discursive strategy employed by the author to highlight the uncomprising bravery and devotion of the Jamaicans in fulfilling their contractual obligations. The Jamaicans had earned the reputation of being brave and willing to help in the nation building agenda of other countries. This latter desire is presented as a strong "pull factor" in getting the Jamaicans to accept employment in Ecuador:

Los jamaicanos se embarcan para ir a trabajar donde los árboles...de unos gasanos y las aves son capaces de hacer sus nidos casi en el cielo. Con orgullo viajan para aportar con su fuerza, su sigor y su juventud a un país hermano que no conocen y van a dar una lección de solidaridad. (Chiriboga 18)

Despite their lack of knowledge about the destination, Jamaicans, with their strong sense of bravery, looked forward to working on the railroad line, as a demonstration of brotherhood and fraternity. They perceive themselves as making a solid contribution to the development of another country, commit to realizing the dream of their host country:

Los enrolados se sienten capaces de realizar trabajo que les encomendaren. El optimismo, el pensamiento de su espíritu es dejar en alto el nombre de Jamaica. (Chiriboga 22)

Están dispuestos a ser extranjeros capaces de a coger y asimilar el espíritu del ecuatoriano y demostrar su habilidad y disciplina. (Chiriboga 29)

A strong anti-colonial position may be advanced when the enormous sacrifices, excruciating suffering and the investment of time, heart and mind, which the Jamaican workers invest in the construction of the most difficult railway in modern history, is weighed against the broken promises and breached contractual arrangements. This is even more forceful in the face of the determination of the Jamaican workers to see the termination of the project. The inhumane working conditions, low wages, compounded by the rough terrain, implacable weather conditions, arduous back-breaking nature of the job, are reminiscent of another time when blacks travelled from their homeland to work elsewhere. This idea is underpinned by the image of the four thousand (4,000) Jamaicans packed into an overcrowded ship, on the long, uncertain route to Ecuador, recalling the treacherous middle passage undertaken by black slaves to the Caribbean. The graphic representation of the working conditions and the unmistakable allusion to this historical, calamitous and perilous journey, suggests that the author is opening space for strong criticism of the inhumane conditions meted out to the Jamaicans, even

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before they arrived in Ecuador. Eleodor Portocarrera writes—“...many a Jamaican finger, hand and life was lost” (www.blogspot.com).

Records in both the London Archives and the Jamaican Archives in Spanish Town attest to the fact that several Jamaicans who, overwhelmed by the treacherous conditions of their jobs, requested that they be repatriated. In 1933 for instance, fifty - four Jamaicans were helped by the Colonial Office to return to Jamaica. So determined were they to leave Ecuador that many of them even paid their own fares back to Jamaica between January 1930 and December 1934. Indeed, Minute Paper No. 6900/35 of the Unemployment Commission in Kingston (1930 -1934), reported in an October 12 document, signed by the secretary E.V. Lockett in 1935 and addressed to the Colonial Secretary, verified that fifty-four Jamaicans repatriated from Ecuador between January 1930 and December 1934 (Minute Paper 6900/35 1935).

Interestingly, a long standing myth in Ecuador, among the very few who know of the Jamaican presence in Ecuador, was that the Jamaicans went to Ecuador as slaves. This view was published in *La Revista Del Diario El Universo* on the 12th of August, 2012, in an article about the history of “La nariz del diablo”:

“Se llama así porque se decía que los constructores hicieron pacto con el diablo para poder terminar la obra”, indica sobre “El tren más difícil del mundo”, que desde finales del siglo XIX hasta 1908 se abrió paso por las montañas a punta de dinamita, y provocando la muerte de unos 2.500 esclavos jamaquinos en medio de las explosiones, las enfermedades y los asesinatos entre ellos. “El acuerdo con los ingenieros era que mientras menos obreros, más paga para quienes quedaban vivos”.

(Tomado de *La Revista del Universo*: “*La nariz del Diablo*, Edición del 12 de Agosto del 2012, esto decían los guías del ferrocarril en la ruta de La nariz del diablo).

It was this erroneously misguided and ungrounded misunderstanding of the status of the Jamaicans who migrated to Ecuador and their specious claims about their disloyalty to each other, that led Eleodor Portocarrera, one of the few remaining informed Afro-Ecuadorians of Jamaican descent to conscientiously and diligently research the history of his forbears in Ecuador and challenge the specious position of the journalist.

“Era Vox Populi, que el ecuatoriano medio como un reguero de pólvora, había corrido la apreciación que justamente recogían los Guías Turísticos del

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Ferrocarril en el tramo Alausí- Huigra, de que los jamaíquinos eran esclavos”(Portocarrero). Ahora imagínate que la mayoría de la gente que no gusta de la lectura lo único que sabe es repetir algo que alguien le dijo o que cree saber. De hecho al escribir Jamaica en Ecuador, procuraba si esclarecer este tema, pero no quería dedicarle un espacio, pero aprovechando este elemento coyuntural me tiré al ruedo a poder aclarar este espacio, para quien lea se encargué de difundir la verdad histórica, basada en los hechos fehacientes que se suscitaron en el año de 1900.

Así que quise llegar al autor de la nota periodística lodo. Moisés Pinchevsky, con una carta aclaratoria, la misma que no tenía el afán de poder ofender a nadie, pero si el poder aclarar los hechos y el derecho al respecto de la memoria de los jamaicanos, varias veces ultrajada por gran parte de los historiadores ecuatorianos, a lo que se suma la desidia o las 4 letras que se suele mencionar en alusión a su trabajo en *La nariz del diablo*.” (Portocarrera www.blogspot.com).

Indeed, this letter earned the following response:

Estimado Ab. Eleodoro Portocarrero:

Acuso recibo de su comunicado, a propósito de los comentarios relacionadas a los jamaíquinos que trabajaron en la construcción del tren ecuatoriano.

Carlos Ycaza, editor de *La Revista*, considera que esta es una buena oportunidad para abordar de manera más profunda este tema, para lo cual esperamos publicar un artículo al respecto para septiembre.

Ya me comunicaré con usted para solicitar su testimonio y punto de vista en este tema, a propósito de la investigación que ha realizado para la publicación de su libro.

Lamentamos que los comentarios vertidos en el tema anterior le hayan resultado injustos. Por mi parte, le ofrezco disculpas como redactor del tema, quedándome solo indicar que en mi redacción fui fiel a las descripciones realizadas por los guías del ferrocarril.

Con ese nuevo tema esperamos hacerles justicia a los jamaíquinos y a su participación en la historia del Ecuador.

Saludos cordiales,

Moisés Pinchevsky

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Portocarrero conducted extensive research into the history of his Jamaican ancestors to establish that the touristic/mythic version provided by tour guides about them was outrageously incorrect. On his blog, he established that the Jamaicans had come to Ecuador of their own free will, not as slaves, since slavery had been abolished in 1836 and the Jamaicans arrived in 1860 because they were considered as being ideally suited for the job as people with the experience and skill in building railway lines, as speakers of English, and as hardworking people. We might conclude too, that in the literary and creative realm, Luz Amparo Chiriboga, writes this powerful, fictional representation to explode many of the myths that have existed about the people who built Ecuador's important Railway Line. This perhaps, explains the potent portrayals of the individual struggles of different characters as they weigh the benefits and disadvantages of choosing to leave behind their families to travel to an unknown land. Equally, the respected highlighting of the efficiency of the Jamaicans and their support of the fellow workers would belie the claim that they killed each other to make more money.

Furthermore, the Jamaicans are characterised as extremely "haughty", with a clearly defined identity. Despite the labourers' economic status, they possess a profound understanding of their cultural and ethnic roots. They believe in an honourable representation of not only their distinct family units, but their homeland Jamaica. Hence, the Jamaican workers are eager to leave an indelible mark on the host country, Ecuador. Their innate self-pride and self-assurance motivate them to view themselves as future heroes. It is, therefore, this reason for which they muster the courage to complete the railway line, despite the palpable dangers and risks to which they are exposed. Many die as a result of the high, slippery, mountain ranges on which they have to work as well as from exposure to frequent mudslides and deadly diseases such as malaria. In sum, the pride of successfully completing an arduous and 'impossible' feat energizes them to anticipate the light at the end of the tunnel. This is true in the case of Gregory:

"...Gregory piensa solo en el éxito, sus hijos estarán orgullosos de él y aleja de su mente todo pensamiento negativo: olvida el peligro. Extrae fuerzas, quiere convertirse en héroe, pero un héroe vivo. Estas reflexiones le dan valor"

(Chiriboga 85)

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A post-colonial reading of this text is applicable as Chiriboga depicts what may be regarded as anti-colonialist resistance, in a manner that seems to suggest that it is justified, so as to disrupt the unfair ruler/ruled /oppressor/ oppressed binary which characterises the relationship of the supervisors and the Jamaicans. While the American contractors might have perceived the Jamaican workers as simple, content, and malleable, the abuse of their labour elicits much discontent and anger among the workers. The arduous labour to which they are beholden, coupled with unsafe working conditions, creates untold death and suffering. It is not uncommon for multiple deaths to occur at a given moment, with their bodies buried underground –without any period of mourning, or any plans of improving on the wage offer and providing a safer working environment.

Despite the treachery of their working conditions, the Jamaicans are seen to band together for support. They find solace and emotional therapy in their compatriots. This is evidenced in the frequent gatherings, games, gimmicks and recounting of stories that are employed by the Jamaican workers to soothe the tension and fear among their fellow compatriots. Music, in the form of traditional work songs, is yet another excellent method used to release built-up anxiety of the unknown:

“...El recuerdo de sus familiares y de Jamaica llega como algo grande, querido próximo. Están ligados a ese conjunto de aventura que tienen que enfrentar y deben esperar o sufrir como una gran familia. Esa experiencia constituye un lazo íntimo entre todos los que se han enrolado para trabajar en los Andes. Tienen la obligación de sentirse fuertemente vinculados por el recuerdo de su patria” (Chiriboga 21).

The suggestion though that the treatment they received is unjust, is seen in their protests.

More of Jamaican Railway workers launch a protest action against the huge deaths, and injuries sustained by fellow colleagues. It is interesting that the protest action takes place under a brief change of government, from President Alfaro to President Plaza Gutiérrez. Security personnel are rapidly dispatched, at the request of President Plaza Gutiérrez, to quell the strike, and order the labourers back to work, demonstrating the contempt with which the workers are held, without any rights and privileges of safe and secure working environment.

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“Ante el temor de una huelga, decide buscar la ayuda del presidente Plaza Gutiérrez, quien dispone duplicar la vigilancia policial para conservar el orden y obligar a los peones a volver a sus puestos de trabajo. Desde entonces, el presidente acostumbra realizar periódicas visitas para constatar personalmente los avances de la obra” (Chiriboga 93).

Finally, the most powerful anti-colonist argument that can be advanced seems to lie in the paradoxical situation in which the well-intentioned Jamaicans are presented. Their commitment to the project is unmistakable, but it is not their dream. The achievement is regarded as Ecuador's. Eloy Alfaro, the liberal President who was determined to build this railway as a means to achieving economic liberation and geographical accessibility for the country:

El Ferrocarril Transandino será una Gloria para el país, pero los obreros no tienen a nadie que asuma la responsabilidad de los percances que sufrirán. Están enlistados al servicio de una causa que no es de ellos; sin embargo, a pesar de si mismos, están dispuestos a sacrificarse por servir al Ecuador (Chiriboga 37).

The construction of the railway line represents one of the greatest challenges and achievements in the political history of Ecuador. Much political wrangling and rancour characterised the major setbacks that were encountered. The conservative party greatly opposed the disruption of the traditional order in Ecuador. Many of the conservatives were also members of the business elite, ecclesiastical order, among other professional classes who opposed the building. However, Alfaro persisted and praised the benefits to be gained from the railway:

“Sin un ferrocarril entre la costa y el interior del país, de nada sirven los esfuerzos y los sacrificios republicanos desde el nacimiento de nuestra nación. Sin el ferrocarril, soberano e incesante motor del progreso positivo – Sin el ferrocarril la fuerza individual no encuentra ocupación productiva – Sin el ferrocarril, sin comodidades, sin bien común, ¿cómo podemos hablar de libertad real y dignidad real?

La revolución liberal en el Ecuador debe ser esencialmente social, y sin el ferrocarril [...] no podemos concebir las transformaciones morales,

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intelectuales y físicas que la ley del progreso requiere para el triunfo de la vida radiante de verdadera democracia. Sin un ferrocarril, yo siempre he pensado que cualquier revolución es efímera, ineficiente y risible, cualquier camino al progreso, y mis sueños, mi delirio, mi único programa está concentrada en una sola palabra: FERROCARRIL!” (Durán et al. 262)

Indeed, Chiriboga subverts the notion that there was any inclusiveness involving the workers from the beginning of their work. The celebration of the success is unmistakably for the President. The Jamaicans are ironically portrayed as being successful in destroying nature, — blasting through rocks previously seen as indomitable:

“Gritan de júbilo, todos han salido de sus casas para conocer a don Eloy y al ferrocarril. Permanecen absortos al observar el tren. No comprenden lo que ven, algunos piensan que debe ser un invento del diablo; contemplan por primera vez la locomotora que arde su ponderosa hoguera, más los hombres negros que la tripulan” (Chiriboga 102).

The suspicion of modernity displayed by the church invariably suggests the conflict between the old order and the new and casts the Jamaicans, the dynamite users who blast rocks and destroy nature as evil. They are presented by the author as being demonised, as people who must have a pact with the devil since the mountain was not conquerable. In the eyes of the church this arrival of a railway line in Ecuador would usher in atheism, scepticism and worldliness. President Alfaro, and members of the Liberal Party, however, view the construction of the railway line as the introduction of modernity— economic prosperity and the upward social mobility of all Ecuadorians. So in fact while the railway improved travel and movement across Ecuador it created a conflict between the church and liberal political ideologies. According to the narrator

“La iglesia oculta su miedo, pero una serie de voces excitadas y susurras inquietos desde los pulpitos. Se insinúa cada vez con más precisión y claridad la campaña contra Alfaro: EL Demonio, le dicen. A la iglesia le preocupa el triunfo de las montoneras” (Chiriboga 114).

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Ironically, it is this demonised image of a people who could only have an association with the devil, that would enable them to conquer the devil's nose that persists in Ecuador. The Jamaicans are simultaneously loved for the success and vilified for the perceived source of their skill – the devil.

As a strategy on the part of the author to reject this specious position, the narrator makes it clear that the achievement of the workers is due to their will power, their determination and their God – referred to as Yemaya:

“Al atardecer, los peones se detienen a observar complacidos el avance de la línea férrea; comprenden que van derrotando la injusticia social y que no hay tiempo que perder, que algún día recordarán los ecuatorianos sus sacrificios y que fueron peones de nervios de acero” (Chiriboga 93).

Undoubtedly, besides the literal name of the book that marks the second phase of the railway, the inclusion of the devil in the title has multiple symbolisms in the work. In the first place, the great economic difficulty experienced by the Jamaican workers in their native Jamaica is, in their religious world view or context, attributed to the devil – the creator of suffering and impoverishment. This is evidenced when Leona Cuebute, the self-disguised woman, who acts as a man, begins to question the hardships evident in her region. She looks pensively in the sky, and wonders why life in her country has to be so challenging. Moreover, the rough terrains, implacable weather conditions, fatal diseases, and the many deaths that occur during the trajectory of the construction evoke a sense of the presence of evil. As the workers dig the terrain, the earth would open, in an ominous manner due to the soft texture of the earth caused by the frequent torrential rains. Additionally, all the problems of bad luck – sickness, death, injury, setbacks – seem to be attributable to the powerful evil force.

This essay has served to underline the entrepreneurial and adventurous spirit of Jamaicans, which is still evident among them today as many seek to explore possibilities for economic advancement in other countries. Moreover, the many roles that Jamaicans have played and continue to play in the development of other nations are indicated in the novel's delineation. Jamaicans worked hard to construct the most expensive railway line in the world, among other massive tasks such as the Panama Canal and the railway line in Costa Rica.

At the same time, we cannot help but consider the cost to the natural environment in which the political gains and economic advancement and expansion of

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Ecuador resulted. This is a small representation of broader agendas of economic expansion by powerful European and other countries in search of positions of governorship. Chiriboga furthermore highlights a dilemma that points to the repeated sacrifice of black lives for the benefit of others – while not being adequately recognised for their role in building the very nation that then excludes them. Indeed, too few in Ecuador know today that Jamaicans were the labour force that helped an American engineer and an Ecuadorian President to construct the most difficult railway line of the world without receiving appropriate credit for completing a task once considered impossible.

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On Color, Race, and Agency in Maryse Condé's Autobiography's *La vie sans fards*

In 2012, renowned Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé published *La vie sans fards* (*Life Without Embellishment*), which she called “the most universal of her books.”¹ Thomas (2013) asserts that the publication of what she calls Condé’s “autobiographical narrative” reveals her “preoccupation with self-understanding,” and her attempt “to recount her life without resorting to self-aggrandizement.”² Soon after the book was released, it engendered a variety of reactions, both in literary circles as well as from the general educated reader. Therefore, I became very interested in reading this particular book in order to understand why it was generating so much controversy. Like most of the readership of *PALARA*, I know who Maryse Condé is, and I know that she is a celebrated Caribbean writer from Guadeloupe, who occupies a very privileged space in Francophone letters, having produced an impressive body of work comprised of novels (20 or so), essays, interviews, and scholarly articles and books. In addition, I am well aware that she received various important literary prizes and taught at some of the most prestigious American universities, including UC-Berkeley, UCLA, the University of Virginia, Harvard University, and Columbia University, among others. Thus, it was with great eagerness that I purchased a copy of *La vie sans fards* and began my reading. I also endeavored to read critical texts about her, as for example, Migraine-George (2013), Sansavior (2012), Carruggi (2010), Fulton (2008), Simek (2008), Bongie (2008), Fernandes (2007), Barbour and Herndon (2006), Cottenet-Hage and Moudileno (2002), Araujo (1996), and Pfaff (1996), among others. Everything written about her attests that she is, indeed, in the words of Bongie (2008: 294), “the doyenne [dean] of francophone studies.”

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Ten pages into *La vie sans fards* (21-23), the reader learns that Maryse Condé had an amorous liaison in the late 1950s in Paris with Haitian intellectual Jean Dominique, who made his career in Haiti as a well-known journalist and advocate for human rights until he was assassinated on April 3, 2000. From this liaison, Condé had a son: Denis Boucolon.

What caused the “brouhaha” or *polémique* about this “revelation,” particularly in Haitian literary circles, was the fact that Condé claimed that Dominique abandoned her and went back to Haiti, after she informed him that she was pregnant. Her only explanation was that she was deserted because of the color of her skin. In Condé’s view, she was rejected because she was a black woman, and therefore not good enough for a Haitian mulatto man. To many, it is troubling that Condé chose to inform the public of her cruel abandonment some fifty-six years later, when the main “actors” of her tragedy are deceased, and cannot add their voices to her “auto-biographical” account. Indeed, her son Denis Boucolon died from AIDS in 1997 (Condé 2012: 313); Jean Dominique was assassinated in 2000, as mentioned above.

By analyzing Maryse Condé’s *La vie sans fards*, the article discusses the powerful hold that color and race ideology still have in the Caribbean. When one least expects it, this ideology, a painful legacy of the colonial past, surfaces to define how people of African descent choose to interpret even the most personal and painful events in their lives.

Maryse Condé: La grande négresse

Maryse Condé (14-16) describes herself as a member of the *petite bourgeoisie* of Guadeloupe, belonging to a social class called “*Les Grands Nègres*.” Her mother Jeanne Quidal, as the writer herself tells us, was the illegitimate child of a mulatto woman. But the mulatto family of the mother had allowed her to be schooled and educated. Thus, Maryse Condé’s mother became one of the first Black teachers of her

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generation. Her father Auguste Boucolon was a ward of the state because he was an orphan. Recipient of several scholarships, he became the founder of a small bank, which loaned money to government employees. Once her parents got married, they led the good life of the *Grands Nègres*: They were the first Black couple to own a car, to build a two-story house, and to have a vacation home on the bank of the Sarcelles River. Very cognizant of their material success, the Boucolons raised their seven children, Maryse being the youngest, away from the plight of the ordinary folks in Guadeloupean society, whom we can call the *Petits Nègres*, as opposed to the *Grands Nègres*. As she told Françoise Pfaff (1996: 2) in an interview with her: "We could not mix with just anybody. We were not allowed to speak to the other Negroes living on the same street, of course." As was customary in the Caribbean of the time, the Black bourgeoisie, the *Grand-Nègres* (in the case of the French Caribbean: Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Haiti), sent their children to the French metropolis to pursue their education. Thus, when she was sixteen, Condé, who did not speak a word of Creole and did not even like Caribbean food (by her own admission in the book, pp.15-16), arrived in Paris to complete her *lycée* (high school) and attend the University. In fact, she said in an interview with Trinidadian-American writer Elizabeth Nunez, published in UNESCO's the *Courier* in 2000 (volume 53, 11: 47), that growing up in Guadeloupe she felt no different from a French girl. For all intents and purposes, she was a fine young sheltered *grande négresse* accustomed to the finer things of life; she was a French girl.

Knowledge of Caribbean societies tells us that in the Caribbean (regardless of the region), money whitens. It is not by accident that the Haitian Creole proverb highlights that *Nèg rich se mulat; Mulat pòv se nèg* (a rich Black person is a Mulatto; a poor Mulatto is a Black person). As Nancy Foner, authoritative scholar of West Indian immigrants into the United States, correctly notes, in Caribbean societies "education, income and culture partially erased one's blackness" (1987: 11). Did Maryse Condé

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arrive in France at sixteen thinking that she was not only a “*grande négresse*,” but perhaps a “*grande mulâtresse*” as well? Did she arrive in France thinking that as a member of the French bourgeoisie of the Antilles, she would automatically be accepted as a member of the French bourgeoisie of the metropolis? Did she ever mingle with the French students in France? After all, Condé in the book tells the reader that she spoke French *comme une parisienne* (as a Parisian); and moreover, we all know that Martinique was and still is a *département français d’outre-mer* (overseas French department). However, she really does not tell the reader how she imagined her life in France would be *before* disembarking on metropolitan shores to begin her higher education. Did she experience indifference or outright rejection on the part of the French, as they did not recognize her as a member of their own? As the story of her life in Paris unfolds, Maryse Condé, in spite of her social standing in Guadeloupe, her French connection or, more importantly, her French citizenship, was not perceived as a *grande négresse*, a *grande mulâtresse*, a *bourgeoise*, or *une française de couleur* by the French.

Speaking French well—presumably like the French, without any regional/Antillean characteristics—seems to have been a matter of great importance in the Boucolon household. Louise Hardwick (2010: 46-47), who studied the question of childhood in Condé’s writings, in particular in *Le Coeur à rire et à pleurer: contes vrais de mon enfance*, writes that in this particular novel Condé mentioned that the Boucolon family every year would spend its summer vacation in Paris, at a time when a Black bourgeois family was not a frequent sight, consequently not part of the French traditional landscape. Therefore, coffee shops’ waiters would never fail to remark to the family: “You speak French so well.” Condé’s parents would respond: “However, we are as French as them”; or even “more French,” as her mother would add. What do

statements like these contribute to the identity formation of an adolescent? Confusion? Alienation? Rebellion? Transgression? The list of resulting possibilities is endless.

Négritude in Paris

The educated readers who have some familiarity with French colonial and imperialist history, and know something about the experiences of Francophone Caribbean and African intellectuals in Paris *circa* 1920-1950 know too well that Blacks suffered discrimination in France, and were relegated to the bottom rungs of the social ladder. Let us briefly recall here that the Négritude Movement, which was founded in the 1930s, did NOT originate either on Caribbean or African soil. It originated in PARIS with Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor, Martinican Aimé Césaire, and French Guyanese Léon Gontran Damas, as they experienced in France the full impact of French colonial racism, hegemony and domination. Let us also recall that it was in the 1920s and 1930s that a group of young Black students and scholars, primarily coming from France's colonies and territories, met in Paris. There, they were introduced to the writers of the Harlem Renaissance —Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, and Richard Wright, among others, who had migrated to France to escape the yoke of racism and discrimination in the United States—by Paulette Nardal and her sister Jane, two Martinican young women sent to Paris for their education, as was the custom (Sharpley-Whiting 2000: 8-17). As Irele (2011: 17) asserts: “The Negro renaissance in the United States was of capital importance in the development of Négritude. The writings of American Negroes were known outside of the United States and commented upon by Negro intellectuals in France and the Caribbean.” These American Black “expatriates” in France influenced to a great extent the development of a Black consciousness movement in Paris on the part of French-speaking Africans and Antilleans. Additionally, it is important to recall that the Pan American Congress

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organized by African American W.E.B. Du Bois was held in Paris in 1919 and that, ten years earlier in 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in the United States.

The Nardal sisters contributed invaluable to the Négritude Movement with their writings. Moreover, by opening the salon of their Clamart apartment and the teashop they owned to the French-Black intelligentsia, they allowed that movement to flourish. It was from their Clamart Salon that Paulette Nardal and Haitian Dr. Leo Sajous founded *La revue du monde noir* (1931–32), a literary journal published in English and French, which attempted to be a mouthpiece for the growing movement of African and Caribbean intellectuals in Paris.³ This group of Blacks were concerned with issues of oppression, colonialism, imperialism, race, and identity. This Harlem connection was shared by the closely parallel development of *Negrismo* in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean; and it is documented that there were many influences between the two movements, which, in spite of language differences, were in many ways united in purpose. In the words of Aimé Césaire (2004: 81-82), “*elle [la Négritude] s’est constituée en communauté; d’abord, une communauté d’oppression subie, une communauté d’exclusion imposée, une communauté de discrimination profonde.*”⁴

Therefore, it is fair to say this is the Paris of the Black intellectuals confronting, and reacting to, racism that Maryse Boucolon encountered in the 1950’s, not a Paris that was welcoming to, and accepting of, overseas Blacks, *Grands Nègres*, French citizens of color, or whatever French characteristics they gave themselves at the time. In fact, Condé in her book reveals to her readers that when she was in the French metro, Parisians would comment: “She is cute, the little Black girl;” and French children would say to their mothers: “*Maman*, she has a completely Black face, the lady” (286). Those comments convincingly suggest that Paris at the time was a very divided city where Blacks and Whites did not mingle. Moreover, it is also fair to say that Maryse

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Boucolon, prior to arriving in Paris in the 1950s, had never heard of the Négritude Movement that had flourished twenty years earlier, or of the presence of Black Antillean and African intellectuals in Paris. Pfaff (1996: 38) supports my claim, when she makes reference to a 1982 interview, in which Condé commented that: “our people [West Indians] do not read,” and that they only have a “vague idea” of materials published in Paris by West Indian writers.⁵ It is, therefore, doubtful that the Boucolon family would have heard of, or read about, such developments. All evidentiary accounts point to the fact that the world in which Maryse Boucolon lived in France in the 1950s was not that of the White Parisians. In fact, she says from the very beginning of *La vie sans fards* that her circle of friends was composed of the African students who lived at la *Maison des Étudiants*. This is where she first met Guinean Mamadou Condé, who was to become her husband and the father of her three daughters. Let me say that in the book of 334 pages Maryse Condé never had anything positive to say about the father of her daughters, by any stretch of the imagination. I will return to this point later.

The négresse and the mulatto

Somehow, somewhere, perhaps in this milieu of Black intellectuals, Maryse Condé met Haitian Jean Dominique. She says that she does not remember in what circumstances she happened “to meet this man whose behavior was to have such consequences in her life” (21). Jean Dominique was a member of a wealthy Haitian mulatto family; he was a well-known Haitian agronomist by profession, opponent of the Duvalier regime, a strong advocate for human rights, the founder of the first Haitian independent radio station, and a journalist. He studied agronomy in Paris in the 1950s. When he returned to Haiti, he assisted local farmers and peasants in developing their crops in order to be self-sufficient and not be at the mercy of powerful landowners. He was always under the watchful eyes of the authorities that saw in him an *agent provocateur* that incited farmers to stand up for their rights. Under the Duvalier regime,

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Dominique lived in exile in New York from 1980 until 1986, when Baby Doc was overthrown. On the day of his return, Dominique was greeted at the airport by 60,000 people, as the Haitian Press reported. Subsequently, Dominique joined Jean-Bertrand Aristide's party known as the *Lavalas* party. In 1991 when a coup d'état ousted Aristide, fearing for his own safety, Dominique fled the country and went back into exile again. He returned to Haiti in 1994, when President Aristide came back. On April 3, 2000, at the age of 69, Dominique was shot four times in the chest as he arrived for work at his own radio station, Radio Haiti Inter. The station's security guard was also killed in the attack. President René Prével (Aristide's successor) ordered three days of official mourning, and 16,000 people attended his funeral at a sports stadium. Dominique's wife fled to the United States in late 2003 after repeated death threats. American filmmaker Jonathan Demme produced the acclaimed documentary depicting his life, *The Agronomist*, in 2003. The movie has been screened at various universities, including my own. It was shown in May 2004 at the UN headquarters in New York for World Press Freedom Day.

In the mid-1950s in Paris, Maryse Condé tells us that she and Dominique shared *un remarquable amour intellectuel*, and through him she learned a great deal about Haiti, about Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and the birth of the first Black republic. Dominique introduced her to Haitian literary writers, such as Jacques Roumain, the author of *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (Masters of the Dew), and others. Not so surprisingly perhaps, she also tells us that Jean Dominique *l'avait déniaisée physiquement* (21), which literally could mean "taught her a thing or two in the physical sense," or "took away her innocence." Was she a virgin at the time? Her "confessions" do not go as far. It is up to the reader to take away the ambiguity of the word *déniaiser*, based on what we know of the upbringing of the *jeunes filles de bonne famille* of Caribbean society of the time. Had she used the French words "*dépuceler*"

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or “*déflorer*,” perhaps all the truth would have been unveiled. Indeed, Condé manipulates with great dexterity “*les saveurs et les mots*” (flavors and words) or *la saveur des mots* (flavor of words).⁶ Irony put aside, this particular word choice, *sous la plume* of such a talented writer who understands extremely well the nuances of meaning, to inform the reader of her amorous liaison is perplexing. The root of the word is *niais*, which literally means “naïve,” “stupid,” “dumb,” “silly,” and “dull;” by reasonable semantic extension it could even mean “unattractive.” Those are clearly not positive attributes. Did Maryse Condé in the physical sense think of herself as being “dull,” not particularly attractive? Did the fact that a mulatto man made love to her, at a time (the 1950s) and in a place (Paris), where the color “Black” was not so beautiful convey to her a certain sense of physical attractiveness that she did not think she had in the first place? Those reasonable questions certainly come to my mind as a reader. Whatever the case, in those “teachable moments” both in the physical and intellectual sense, a child was conceived.

Maryse Condé took her courage in her own hands, and informed Dominique that she was pregnant. She tells the reader that the following day she went to his place and found him packing his bags. Dominique, as she goes on, explained to her that François Duvalier was a candidate for election, and, in his view, had no qualifications for this position. Therefore, opposition forces had to mobilize (22). In that context, Dominique told her he had to rush back to Haiti. About this painful moment, Condé writes:

Jean Dominique took off, and did not even send me a post card. I stayed alone in Paris, unable to believe that a man had abandoned me with “a belly.” It was unconceivable. I refused to accept the only possible explanation: my skin color. Being a mulatto, Jean Dominique had treated me with the scorn and the irresponsibility of those who stupidly proclaimed themselves to be members of a privileged class. (23)

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She did not believe a word of his story, and his anti-duvalierist leanings. Dominique was just a hypocrite. Her dream at the time to pass the entrance exams for the École Normale Supérieure was shattered. On March 13, 1956, Denis Boucolon, the son of Maryse Boucolon and Jean Dominique was born. She was barely twenty-one years old. This event marks the beginning of a most miserable life in all regards, full of traumatic events, that lasted until she was in her forties, when she wrote her first novel in 1976, *Heremakhonon*, which means “Waiting for Happiness.”

Waiting for happiness

Two years after her son’s birth, in August 1958, Maryse Boucolon, in order not to remain “*une mère célibataire*,” (an unwed mother)—something that was so stigmatized in those days, certainly in Caribbean societies—married Mamadou Condé, an aspiring comedian, who had no real talent. As she “confesses” in the novel, she never loved this man. Her descriptions of him are pitiful at best, revolting at worst. They suggest that she clearly considered him to be way beneath her, as after all she was a *grande négresse*, who had academic abilities and was destined to accomplish great things. As she writes in the book: “Let’s be frank! In different times, I would not have spoken to him.” But for different reasons, she writes, both of them were in a hurry to go to the courthouse and get married: Her, because she needed to have the title of *Madame* (or Mrs.) in order to have some sort of standing in society; and Monsieur Condé, because he wanted to show off his new wife who was a University student, “*visiblement de bonne famille*,” and let’s not forget, who spoke perfect French (30). The reader learns that Mr. Condé barely completed grade school, and was raised by “a poor mother” who sold cheap (low quality) goods in open markets. Incidentally, one can note here the inferior connotation of the French original: “*pauvre de mère*.” Just as Condé exploits *la saveur des mots* (flavor of words), she masterfully exploits as well *la dureté des mots* (harshness of words). As Mr. Condé was a “nobody” and had no

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standing in society, whatever ambition he had to become “somebody” (in the Marlon Brando sense) had no chance of materializing (35). When Madame Condé married Monsieur Condé, she never mentioned to him that she already had a son out of wedlock by a Haitian man. In fact, it was not until 1960 when Maryse Condé, who by that time had given birth to her first daughter, that her husband met Denis and knew of his existence. This was when his wife Maryse, daughter Sylvie Anne, and Denis arrived for the first time in Conakry. Monsieur Condé asked no questions; he accepted Denis. Maryse Condé states that her husband understood very well that had it not been for her difficult past, she would have never married him (66). Their silence toward one another said it all. Indeed, the untold (*les non-dits*) can be a powerful form of communication.

In the aforementioned interview published in UNESCO’s *Courier* in 2000 (53, 11: 47), Condé reveals to interviewer Elizabeth Nunez that she made many discoveries in Guinea: She did not speak the language of the Guineans; she did not eat the same food as the Guineans; she did not dress like the Guineans; she did not enjoy the same music as the Guineans; she did not share the same religion as the Guineans. She, therefore, came to the realization that: “race is not the most important factor. Culture is fundamental. Because I did not share the Guinean culture, or the African culture, I left Africa. This decision ended my marriage.” In 1981, she married British translator Richard Philcox whom she had met in Senegal. She tells the reader that Philcox brought her back to Europe and to Guadeloupe, and he encouraged her to truly pursue her career as a writer. Incidentally, Richard Philcox is the translator of many of Maryse Condé’s books into English. Thus in time, as Condé ends her novel, “Africa would only be the subject of numerous fictional accounts” (334). However to this date, one notes that Maryse Condé has never abandoned the African name Condé. She never chose to return to her birth name Maryse Boucolon, or to take the British name Philcox. Questioned about her name by Françoise Pfaff (2006: 32), she explained:

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I kept it because I first began to write under that name and divorced only much later, since Condé did not want a divorce. I somewhat regret my name, I was not getting along with Condé when I began to write, and I should have taken back my maiden name, Boucolon, then. But I didn't think about it at the time.

Indeed, this is a very convenient explanation given by a very inconvenient writer, whom Cottenet-Hage and Moudileno (2002) called "*une nomade inconvenante*."

At the beginning of the book, paraphrasing French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Condé tells us that in writing *La vie sans fards* she proposed "to set before my fellow-mortals a woman in all the truth of nature; and this woman shall be me" (12). Who is Maryse Boucolon Condé Philcox? Do we know her in "all the truth of her nature"?

In this "universal" book, it is unarguable that Maryse Condé wanted to "*réveiller le chat qui dort*," "wake up sleeping dogs," or sleeping demons. After all, this woman who, in spite of all the hardships she endured and all the abandonments she experienced at the hands of many lovers, became a celebrated writer. Writers often tell us, the non-writers, that writing is therapeutic, that it cleanses the body and the soul, and that it gives birth to a new life. After reading *La vie sans fards*, one cannot help but ask whether Maryse Condé has really left the past behind, and feels reborn.

She surely revisited the painful past with an abundance of vivid details and explanations, which seem to suggest that this past is very present in her memory and even continues to haunt her. The passage of time, fifty-six years, has not made lighter the baggage of things past, and has not abated her "raw" emotions. It seems that race still does not mean much, or is not that important. What about color: most specifically the distinction between black and mulatto, so prevalent in her autobiographical account? Has she surpassed issues of color? Are race and color "secondary" questions for her, as she tells Pfaff (2006: 32)? Those "secondary" questions are certainly front and center in *La vie sans fards*. She still thinks that Jean Dominique ruined her life.

Indeed, she discloses that whenever she would meet Haitians and others who called him the “champion of the oppressed,” she wanted to scream. She reveals that in 2003, with the release of the documentary *The Agronomist*, she lost “patience.” She confesses to having written a protest letter to a newspaper where she used to publish in a column called “*Opinions*.” She wanted the letter to be published. In the letter, she argued that a man, who had behaved in such a reprehensible manner toward women, should not be portrayed as a hero. Several days later, the editor told her that the newspaper decided not to publish the letter, because what she was saying about Dominique was of a private nature, and that he did not want to be sued for libel. However, he advised her to publish a book if she wanted revenge (314-316). Although Condé claimed that she was “stupefied” as a book is not a means to take revenge on people or on life (316), *La vie sans fards* reads more as a posthumous revenge on Jean Dominique and also on Mamadou Condé, *le pauvre homme* (in the Molière sense) than as some *confessions à la Rousseau*. Only Maryse Condé can tell us her motivations for writing *La vie sans fards*. But, she certainly laid bare her “truths,” and exposed the complexities of her *états d’âme*, the torments of her soul, and multiple emotions. Indeed, emotion, like passion, does not analyze: it burns, it sets the soul on fire, it ravages.

Toward Describing Maryse Condé: the flavor and the harshness of words

Because the personal events described in *La vie sans fards* happened so long ago and that the main protagonists are deceased, the account presented by Maryse Condé would probably remain the only *son de cloche* (side) about those personal matters. The dead do not speak. It is perhaps to offer another reasonable *son de cloche* (side) that Haitian-Canadian writer, Jan J. (J.J.) Dominique, the daughter of Jean Dominique, wrote a piece published in the Haitian newspaper *Le Nouvelliste* titled “*Ce que j’en sais*” (What I know, October 30, 2012).⁷ In fact, to date it is the only statement she provided in response to questions she received from curious readers after the

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publication of *La vie sans fards*. As J. J. Dominique learned from her father, "*les écrits restent*" (what is written remains). Therefore, whatever Maryse Condé says about those particular events involving real individuals (as opposed to fictional characters) may well become the "official" version. J. J.'s intention is to call to mind "certain facts."

First, J.J. informs the reader that her father went to France in late 1952, having been awarded a scholarship from the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The scholarship expired in 1956; therefore, he could not stay in France, as he had no personal fortune. Moreover, J.J. adds that, when her father went to Paris in 1952, he was already married. In January 1953, his wife gave birth to a baby girl; it was Jan. J. In 1957, Mrs. Dominique gave birth to a second daughter. Since Maryse Condé does not disclose anything about Jean Dominique's marital status at the time, it is reasonable to infer that she may not have known that he was a married man with a child when they first met in Paris in the mid 1950s. Thus, she came to the conclusion that Dominique abandoned her because of the color of her skin. Condé also laments the fact that, although she was destined to have a brilliant future, now that she was "knocked up, then abandoned like a waitress," her life was ruined (27). Again, her statement is troubling: Would she have found Dominique less guilty or less dishonorable for having abandoned *une serveuse* (a waitress), *une petite négresse*, as opposed to a *grande négresse*? Fifty-six years later, does Maryse Condé still "stupidly proclaim herself to be a member of a privileged class," just as she accused Jean Dominique?

Second, J.J. goes on to say (in the same Haitian newspaper) that she was "flabbergasted," when she heard about the Black-skin explanation advanced by Condé, "because she did not recognize the man with whom she had spent a significant part of her adult life." She recalls her father's views on the color prejudice that plagued Haitian society and that he condemned so forcefully. She states that, never in her entire life, had

she heard her father manifest racism or color prejudice toward anyone either in words or in deeds. On the contrary, she asserts, he was committed to changing the lives of the Haitian poor. As she puts it, “this commitment, he paid for it with two exiles and with [his] assassination.” In *La vie sans fards*, Condé never tells the reader whether or not Denis met his father. However, J.J. reveals that her father told her, while she was a teenager, that one day he received a letter informing him that he had fathered a son some seven or eight years earlier. Subsequently, she learned from her father that, in the 70s, Denis came to Haiti to meet him. While J.J. has never recovered the letter in the personal effects of her slain father, she nevertheless recovered a picture of her father and Denis taken in the courtyard of the Sans-Souci Palace in the town of Milot, near Cap-Haitian.⁸ The picture was released in the aforementioned Haitian newspaper, *Le Nouvelliste* (October 30, 2012).⁹ Did Denis keep any pictures of him and his father? Were any pictures recovered by his mother and sisters after his death in 1997? *La vie sans fards* makes no mention of those details.

The last important fact that J.J. mentioned in the *Nouvelliste* article was Maryse Condé’s trip to Haiti in July 1987. During her stay in Haiti, Condé was invited by Dominique to give an interview on his radio station, Radio Haiti. J.J. asserts that she was there, and that she did not detect any tensions between these two individuals, or any “animosity on the part of the novelist.” *La vie sans fards* has nothing to say about this reunion.

Condé begins *La vie sans fards* by asking a fundamental question: “Why do all attempts to tell about one’s self always end up in a pack of half-truths?” (11). Therefore, she seems to imply that she would tell the reader the entire truth and nothing but the truth, and not reduce her autobiographical account to a pack or a hodgepodge of “half-truths.” Instead, we would see “a woman in all the truth of nature.” Has she accomplished this goal in *La vie sans fards*?

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It is clear that Maryse Condé's version of her liaison with Jean Dominique, which engendered a son, and her explanation for his abandonment differs from the facts advanced by his daughter Jan J. Dominique. Where does the "truth" about such a private matter lie? Does it reside with *La vie sans fards* of the scorned writer? Or does it reside with "*Ce que j'en sais*" of the flabbergasted daughter seeking vehemently to defend her father's honor and reputation? Obviously, the daughter will never know as much as the abandoned woman and the slain father. Thus, it might well be that these *confessions à la Maryse Condé*, the writer and the victim in pain, will remain.

Since the publication of her first book, *Heremakhonon*, in 1976, Maryse Condé has always been excoriated (*fustigée*), as Fernandes (2007: 144) notes. Indeed, literary critics who have analyzed Maryse Condé's previous works find her to be "politically incorrect," "troubling," "provoking," "stubborn," "intransigent," "insolent," "impertinent," "arrogant," "anti-establishment" (*contestataire*); and "rebellious." It has been said over and over that she is a "writer of her own," who does not write to "please any audience," and who might even derive some pleasure in displeasing (Barbour and Herndon 2006: 8). She is described as having a penchant for provocation, that she has a need to disturb, and that she relishes controversy (Cottenet-Hage and Moudileno 2002, Pfaff 1996). In a similar vein, Fulton (2008: 5) contends that: "provoking discomfort has become her hallmark." She adds that Condé believes that the function of the writer is "not that of comforting, but that of disheartening and irritating at all costs" (20). Likewise, Araujo (1996: 46) defines her as being "*du genre risque-tout, se plaisant à défier les gens bien pensants.*" In an interview she gave at Princeton University in November 2004, Condé was asked the question: "Would you say that one writes for oneself"? Her answer is mind boggling, although not altogether surprising:

But given that we are social beings, you begin to see that while you were thinking of yourself, you were thinking a little of others. When you reread yourself, you realize to your astonishment that you wanted to shock people, to

hurt them. In general, that's what writing is—a kind of revenge against those around you . . .
(Broichhagen, Latchman, and Simek 2006: 3)¹⁰

La vie sans fards provides ample evidence that everything that has been said about Maryse Condé, the writer, is absolutely true. Indeed, for a reader *bien pensante* (right-thinking reader) the book appears to be an act of revenge, perhaps not against the living, but against the dead. She seems resolved to criminalize them, by portraying herself as victim, with no sense of agency and responsibility for the events of her life. While she might be preoccupied with self-understanding, she certainly recounts her life by resorting to self-victimization. With a “writer’s badge,” everything appears permissible. Indeed, it seems that the *profession d'écrivain* does not discourage writers from writing libelous things, as the line of demarcation between fiction, imagination, and reality is always blurred, thus providing a powerful line of defense, not afforded to us, non-writers. In the words of Migraine-George (2013-126), Maryse Condé exhibits “a deliberate consciousness of the ‘fungible character’” of the power of creative writing. *La vie sans fards* could read as a creative writing piece, where concepts such as fiction, invention, emotion, falsehood, half-truths, facts, reality, and truth are synonymous and mutually interchangeable. McCusker (2013: 83) alludes to the “*intimiste* dimensions of her work,” and notes that her writings frequently act “as a space of autobiographical exploration.” Sansavior (2012: 31) makes a similar observation but goes farther when she writes that:

Condé therefore appears to distinguish between ‘intimacy’ associated with the representations of her ‘feelings’ in fictional works and ‘autobiography,’ the distillation of biographical facts of her life, a distinction that is richly suggestive of the complex relationship between the two unstable sites of ‘the fictional,’ and ‘the real’ in her work.

Indeed, due to the lack of witnesses, the reader and critic will always be hard pressed to separate the fictional from the real in *La vie sans fards*. It does not appear that the standard of revealing “a woman in all the truth of nature” can be met, as the very death

of the witnesses (Jean Dominique and Denis Boucolon) “throws into doubt the very possibility of telling a true story” (Simek 2008: 163).¹¹ Does autobiography as a literary genre require authors to subscribe to the standard of “truth?”

Autobiography: The Clash Between the Art of Subjective Truths and Agency

The simplest definition of literary autobiography is the art of writing about one’s self; it is a narrative of a person’s past written by that very same person. Lejeune’s oft-cited definition of this genre is “a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality” (1989: 4).¹² To what extent does the “truth” apply to authors of autobiography? Anderson (2011) concedes that autobiography is full of controversies about a variety of concepts, among them the representation and the division between fact and fiction; and she makes allusion to the “slipperiness” of the genre. In their discussion of “autobiographical truth,” Smith and Watson (2010: 15) ask similar questions: “What is the truth status of autobiographical disclosure? How do we know whether and when a narrator is telling the truth or lying? And what difference would that difference make?” Their discussion suggests that there is a degree of understanding that it is acceptable for live narrators “to perpetuate acts of deliberate deceit to test the reader, or to ‘hint’ at the paradoxical ‘truth’ of experience itself.” In consequence, the reader needs to adjust his/her expectations (16), and perhaps enter into a “pact” or contract with the author. They assert that: “autobiographical truth resides in the intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of a life” (16). Along the same lines, Porter and Wolf (1973: 5) state that: “truth is a highly subjective matter, and no autobiographer can represent *exactly* ‘what happened back then,’ any more than a historian can definitely describe the real truth of the past.” They go on to say that the “self” that the autobiographer presents can be an “artistic construct,” which does not

have to be a factual or true representation of one's actual past self. In a similar vein, Nadel (1988: 24-25) asserts that: "biographers, however, seem increasingly aware of the distortions implicit in the so-called facts, in the linguistic and narrative transformations that occur in the retelling of a life." They go on to admit that: "no fact, we now understand, is without its fiction," and that biographers manipulate, alter, or forget facts in the telling of their lives.¹³ With regard to Caribbean autobiography specifically, Paquet (2002: 4) writes: "conflicts between representations of public and private aspects of the self, between representations of the community, between self and native space, between lyrical evocation and factual annotation are the elastic substance of an autobiographical culture . . ." Does "elasticity," "artistic construction," "distillation," "manipulation," or "alteration" allow an autobiographer to reduce the "truth" to emotional, lyrical, and subjective renditions, particularly when *real* individuals as opposed to fictional characters are involved? Where does the critical reader draw the line?

While any reasonable reader can certainly understand that the passage of time (56 years, in the case of Condé) would have caused many details of one's life to have faded, it is not unreasonable to question the place of agency in an autobiographical work, especially when the autobiographer makes a *conscious* decision to reveal prominently in the work the names of *real* individuals, living or dead. Moreover, when the actions of these *real* individuals are interpreted in the most subjective, unilateral, negative fashion, can ethical responsibility, agency, or conscience be completely ignored in autobiography? How much can a writer shield herself behind her *license autobiographique* and be exempt from these fundamental principles of conduct that apply to all of us, members of society? This is a most unsettling question. In fact, Barbour (1992), in his insightful book, *The Conscience of the Autobiographer*, laments the fact that the topic of conscience in autobiographical works has not been given

adequate scrutiny. He concludes that: “our understanding of the nature of the autobiography, our view of the possibilities of ethical criticism, and our conception of conscience as ethical and religious reflection may all be enriched by the study of the conscience of the autobiographer” (182).

Concluding Remarks

I am aware that critics have pointed to the “humanistic” character of Maryse Condé’s works. Thomas (2010: 78), for example, said that Condé’s writings, by drawing extensively on her own life experiences, convey “different aspects of humanity.” Will her new autobiographical book, *La vie sans fards*, be considered a “humanistic” work that presents the human condition *à nu* (naked) and *sans fards* (without embellishment)? The jury is still out. But one thing is certain: Between the vengeful tone of the book and the manifest disregard for any form of agency on the part of its author who masterfully paints herself as a victim, the critical reader must engage in an interpretive process, and remind the writer that humanism (irrespective of the literary genre) requires an ethical sense that always focuses on the value of responsibility and agency. When that ethical sense is absent, I submit that the “pact” between the autobiographer and the reader needs to be rescinded. In conclusion, I offer the sagacious words of French writer François Mauriac (1959), “the author of an autobiography is condemned to all or nothing. Do not say anything if you must not say all: your monologue must be the expression of a magma.”¹⁴

Notes

¹ As stated in the back cover of *La vie sans fards*. See also the Éditions JC Lattès’s website at: <http://www.editions-jclattes.fr/livre-la-vie-sans-fards-maryse-conde-395227>.

² Those quotes appear on page 1 of the online version of the *Journal of International Studies* 10.2, July 2013. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5130/portal.v10i2.3023>.

³ For more on the contributions of the Nardal sisters and other women to the Négritude Movement, see Sharpley-Whitting (2002).

⁴ Césaire delivered his authoritative speech on Négritude in 1987 at the University of Florida-Gainesville. The full text was republished in 2004. Here the excerpt's translation: "Negritude organized itself as a community; first as a community of endured oppression, a community of imposed exclusion, a community of profound discrimination."

⁵ See also Bongie (2008: 296), and Chancé (2000: 196).

⁶ My own expression, *la saveur des mots*, is a play on the title of Maryse Condé's book, *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots*.

⁷ Jan J. Dominique has written several books: *Mémoire d'une amnésique* (1984); *Évasion* (1996); *Inventer. . . la Célestine* (2000); and *Mémoire errante* (2008). In 1986, she worked as a reporter for Radio Haiti Inter, and served as its executive director from 1995 until 2003, when the radio shut down after the assassination of her father, Jean Dominique. Jan. J. currently lives in Montreal.

⁸ The Sans-Souci Palace is a national treasure in Haiti, located in the northern town of Milot, near Cap-Haitien. It was built around 1810 by Henri Christophe who crowned himself King of Haiti. Situated above the Sans-Souci Palace is the renowned Citadelle Laferrière.

⁹ See the following website: <http://www.potomitan.info/conde/vie4.php> (retrieved, September 15, 2014).

¹⁰ The interview was translated by Kathryn Lachman and Nicole Simek. See Broichhagen, Lachman, and Simek (2006: 1-28).

¹¹ I borrow these words from Simek (2008) who makes a similar observation in her critical analysis of the "story" depicted in Condé first novel *Heremakhonon*. See in particular chapter 3, "Writing Violence."

¹² Philippe Lejeune (1975, *Le Pacte autobiographique*). Those ideas are taken up in a later work, *On Autobiography*, 1989.

¹³ In addition to Nadel's essay aptly titled "The Biographer's Secret," see others in the same volume, *Studies in Autobiography*, edited by Olney (1988).

¹⁴ François Mauriac was elected to *l'Académie française* in 1933, and received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1952. Here is the French original quote: "*l'auteur d'une autobiographie est condamné au tout ou rien. Ne dis rien si tu ne dois pas tout dire: ton monologue doit être l'expression d'un magma.*"

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The Dark Side of Francoism – Revisionist History, Moroccan Voice and the Spanish Civil War

Directly and indirectly the theme of the Spanish Civil War has been dominant in contemporary Spanish literature, cinema and television. As Spanish historian Sebastian Balfour notes in his book *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War*, “[t]he Civil War, for its part, has given rise to more volumes than any other event or historical process in Spain’s history” (x). This conflict, whose ramifications devastated Spain physically, socially, economically and psychologically, was the result of years of political and social unrest and the determining factor for years of oppression under Francisco Franco. By revisiting this event and its aftermath through literature, cinema and television, the healing process has begun for the Spanish nation. Novels such as *Soldados de Salamina* (2001) by Javier Cercas, *La voz dormida* (2002) by Dulce Chacón and *El lápiz del carpintero* (2008) by Manuel Rivas; films such as *¡Ay, Carmela!* (1990) directed by Carlos Saura, *La lengua de las mariposas* (1999) directed by José Luis Cuerda and *Las 13 rosas* (2007) directed by Emilio Martínez Lázaro and the first season of the television series *Amor en tiempos revueltos* shown on RTVE (Radio Televisión España) are but a small sampling of the prolific literary and cinematic production that has been used as a tool to revisit history, define national identity/identities and envision the future. Although fiction, these works search for historical truths that were silenced during the Francoist dictatorship. This revisionist approach to history, using literature and cinema, problematizes the notion of *history* as truth. Traditionally, history is presented as a totalizing discourse, that is, a singular and coherent narrative that is not tainted by subjectivity, but rather is an “innocent” discipline based on fact: “... a single narrative truth that was ‘simply’ the closest possible representation of events” (*Post-Colonial Reader* 317). In the case of Spain,

that post-war single narrative truth reflected Franco's ideology and interpretation of events and suppressed all other possible versions. Now, by revisiting these events through a different lens, their representation suggests a new narrative that is not necessarily singular nor coherent but rather multifaceted and incomplete, waiting for other voices to claim their place. What has been recovered is immense but there are still voids to fill.

While most of the contemporary Spanish literature and cinema that uses the theme of the Spanish Civil War to examine its impact on Spain and on a lesser scale the Western world, there are very few texts that extensively study its impact on a prominent group of people who participated in the war – Moroccans. As mentioned before, there is no dearth of texts dealing with the war nor is there a lack of literature and cinema that deal with the contemporary Hispano-Moroccan relationship, especially around the theme of immigration. However, when searching for texts that deal with the participation of Moroccans in the war, very little exists. One such text that attempts to bring attention to this important group of people is *Actitud de los moros ante el alzamiento: Marruecos 1936* (1997), a book edited by Mohammad Ibn Azzuz Hakim which introduces the manuscript of Mekki Ben Mohammad Redondo, the son of a Moroccan soldier who died in the Spanish Civil War. This text not only questions the official history's account of the Moroccan presence in the war, but also creates a space in order that historical facts be presented from an alternative point of view – that of the Moroccans. Through interviews with family members, persons that were acquainted with his father and important people in the war and Moroccan nationalist movement, Redondo relates another version of history to the reader. Unlike the majority of revisionist historical literature and film, Hakim's work is not a fictional narrative based on historical events, but rather a historical narrative that attempts to reveal the other face of history through the words of its protagonists, which in the case are Moroccans.

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This book brings a unique perspective to an otherwise well-known event by using testimony and anecdote as an alternative source from which history is recounted. That is to say, the stories of Redondo and others who participated in the Spanish Civil War challenge the official historical account creating a kind of *counterhistory* or “a spectrum of assaults on the *grands récits* inherited from the last century... Counterhistory opposes itself not only to dominant narratives, but also to prevailing modes of historical thought and methods of research (Gallagher and Greenblatt 52). The *counterhistory* presented in Hakim’s *Actitud de los moros ante el alzamiento: Marruecos 1936* attempts to rescue the forgotten voices of the Spanish Civil War. By searching for the “true (his)story” of the Moroccan participation in the Spanish Civil War, Mekki Ben Mohammad Redondo essentially subverts the official historical account created by Spain. The rescue of a marginal voice is at the same time the deconstruction of the dominant voice.

The parallel task of creating a space from which an oppressed voice can be heard and deconstructing the official historical narrative has its beginnings in understanding the role that history has played. From a post-colonial perspective, “the emergence of history in European thought is coterminous with the rise of modern colonialism, which in its radical othering and violent annexation of the non-European world, found in history a prominent, if not the *prominent*, instrument for the control of subject peoples” (*The Post-Colonial Reader* 317). With this statement, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin clearly define history’s role as a tool of colonialism. How Moroccan soldiers become involved in the Spanish Civil War is deeply rooted in Spain’s effort to colonize Morocco in the early twentieth century. According to Sebastian Balfour in *Deadly Embrace*, colonizing Morocco had more to do with Spain’s own insecurities within the European political framework than Spain’s desire to create a colony: “[t]en years after the 1898 Disaster, the year of Spain’s defeat in the

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Spanish-American War, when it lost the last remnants of its old empire, Spanish troops began to invade Morocco from Spain's two historical enclaves on the north Moroccan coast... The new adventure in Morocco was a direct result of the insecurity felt by the Spanish political elites after the Spanish-American War" (3-4). Spanish historian María Rosa de Madariaga concurs, "Spain had to have a colony because at that time a European country without a colony was nothing" (*The Moroccan Labyrinth*). This along with Spain's already negative image of the Moorish "infidel" that invaded the Iberian peninsula in the eighth century and that was forced out by the Reconquest, made Morocco an especially appealing target. Creating a historical discourse in which the Moroccan is the perpetual enemy, connects Spain and Morocco's pasts with their futures and thus in a sense brings the Reconquest full circle. Unfortunately, after the defeat in the Spanish-American War, Spain's military was in no shape to invade any territory. After two major military disasters in the colonial campaign, the Barranco del Lobo in 1909 with more than one thousand casualties and the Anual in 1921 with between twelve and fourteen thousand dead, and growing anti-war sentiment and political unrest in Spain, the Spanish military more than ever seek revenge against the "infidel." A small elite and ambitious group of soldiers within the Spanish Army of Africa known as the Africanists emerges as leaders with a mission, which according to Balfour was: "to correct, to redeem Spain, a corrupted country" (*The Moroccan Labyrinth*). The coup d'état of July 18, 1936, the official start of the Spanish Civil War, initiated by their leader, Francisco Franco essentially makes the Spanish Civil War the last campaign of Morocco. It is within this historical context that Mekki Ben Mohammad Redondo searches for another truth.

In his work, *Actitud de los moros ante el alzamiento: Marruecos 1936*, Mohammad Ibn Azzuz Hakim presents a *counterhistory* divided into three parts: "Estudio preliminar," Redondo's "Manuscrito" and "Apéndices." The purpose of

“Estudio preliminar,” which is written by Hakim, is first to provide a historical background from the Moroccan point of view, second to denounce Spanish historians who have intentionally omitted the Moroccan version and lastly to recognize Redondo’s achievement. The “Estudio preliminar” establishes Hakim’s disaccord with the Spanish version of history and his desire to set the record straight. His treatment of history demonstrates the problem of history from a post-colonial perspective:

For not only are there questions of truth and fiction, of narrativity and indeterminacy, time and space, of pressing importance because the material ground, the political dimension of post-colonial life impresses itself so urgently, but the historical narrativity is that which structures the forms of reality itself... The post-colonial task, therefore, is not simply to contest the message of history, which has so often relegated individual post-colonial societies to footnotes to the march of progress, but also to engage the medium of narrativity itself, to reinscribe the ‘rhetoric’, the heterogeneity of historical representation... (*The Post-Colonial Reader* 318)

In other words, for the “Estudio preliminar” to be effective, Hakim must relate his version of history in such a way that it creates its own separate reality and that this reality is formidable enough to stand up to the European version. Hakim states that the agenda behind the publication of his text is to inform the Spanish people of the truth about the Moroccan presence in the Spanish Civil War. He knows that his version will challenge the official Spanish version but he wants to correct the negative image and present an alternative reality.

The first part of “Estudio preliminar” is dedicated to explaining the historical background between Spain and Morocco. Hakim recognizes that his Spanish audience has a preconceived notion of Morocco:

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... y por otro el hecho de que para la mayoría de los españoles Marruecos ha sido y es el “gran desconocido”, y de sus habitantes la memoria colectiva del pueblo español guarda la imagen que la “leyenda negra” forjó contra el “moro” en épocas pretéritas, en el que el antagonismo religioso tuvo a los pueblos español y marroquí entretenidos en una serie ininterrumpida de “guerras santas” y “santas cruzadas”. (8)

The acknowledgement of the Spanish interpretation of the relationship between the two countries allows Hakim to show his understanding of that interpretation and at the same time invite his Spanish audience to consider another, although very different, valid point of view. By choosing a subtle attack on the dominant historical narrative, Hakim has produced a small fissure in that narrative where he can begin the process of filling it in with the voice of the *other*. In the rest of the first part of the “Estudio preliminar” the author provides a brief history of the Reign of Morocco from its beginnings in the eighth century to the twentieth century. He names several dynasties and how long each lasted:

En efecto, la mayoría de los españoles no saben que el reino de Marruecos existe desde hace doce siglos, durante los cuales se sucedieron en el trono las dinastías: Idrisí (788-985), Zeneta (986-1062), Almorávide (1062-1147), Almohade (1147-1269), Merinida (1269-1470), Wattasida (1471-1549), Saadita (1549-1659) y la Alauita actualmente en el trono desde 1659. (9)

While this information is not directly related to the Spanish Civil War it serves a crucial purpose in his text. Hakim establishes Morocco’s identity as a sovereign state long before Spain’s official date of unification, 1492. He also establishes Morocco’s pre-European “history,” that is, its history before it becomes important to European nations and thus recognized by said nations. Hakim’s *counterhistory* creates a space for a civilized Morocco existing long before colonization efforts by Europe and therefore

establishes Morocco as an equal with Europe. When he begins his discourse on the twentieth century he describes in more detail the various interventions by other countries:

Durante sus doce siglos de existencia, Marruecos ha sido un estado independiente, cuyo soberano ostentaba el título de Sultán hasta el año 1956 en que adoptó el título de Rey. Fue 1912 cuando perdió su independencia y su unidad territorial, en virtud de una serie de convenios secretos concluidos por las potencias europeas entre sí, a espaldas de Marruecos, ...Como consecuencia de tales convenios se impuso a Marruecos el protectorado por el tratado franco-marroquí del 30 de marzo y el franco-español del 27 de noviembre de 1912. (9)

Here Hakim clearly states that Morocco's present state is the result of unwelcomed European intervention and not because of a need to be "civilized" from the outside. It is important what Hakim does here because besides providing many facts unknown to the vast majority of the readers of his text, Hakim situates Morocco in the reality of the reader. It is no longer the "great unknown" of the uncivilized and barbarian that has been illustrated through the language of European historiography. Hakim subverts the traditional role of language in history which has been "... the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established" (*The Empire Writes Back* 7). It is now the Moroccan text that establishes "truth," "order" and "reality." The second part of "Estudio preliminar" focuses on the errors committed by the Second Spanish Republic and the consequences that inadvertently made Morocco a pawn in the plans of the Spanish Nationalists (those on the side of Franco). Hakim quotes Miguel Martín (pseudonym of Fernando López Agudín, Melilla born journalist): "si la República hubiese elaborado una política de autonomía y en julio de 1936 los

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marroquíes hubiesen gozado de los mismos derechos que los españoles, la rebelión fascista habría fracasado, pues los árabes se hubiesen enfrentado como un solo hombre contra quienes iban a arrebatarles dichos derechos” (qtd. in Hakim 20). Taking advantage of the strained relationship between the Second Republic and the Spanish military, the poor economic situation in Morocco at that time and the propaganda that the war of the Spanish Nationalists was a “yihad” or holy war, the Nationalists did not have much problem recruiting Moroccan soldiers as is confirmed in Redondo’s manuscript. As he ends “Estudio preliminar” Hakim recognizes the importance of the Redondo’s manuscript. He says that it is “la única obra escrita, en español, por un marroquí sobre el levantamiento franquista y viene a llenar un vacío que ha durado más de medio siglo” (45). The fact that a Moroccan utilizes the Spanish language in order to deconstruct the official Spanish discourse is an example of counter discourse which “involve[s] a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified ‘local’” (Tiffin 101). Redondo and Hakim subvert Spanish history with the same tool that the Spanish used to create their discourse in the first place. At the end of the “Estudio preliminar,” Hakim states:

Quiera Dios que la publicación de este manuscrito contribuya, por un lado, a que los españoles conozcan la verdadera versión marroquí de los hechos acaecidos en el norte de Marruecos, a raíz del Alzamiento franquista y que han sido hasta ahora deliberadamente silenciados, desfigurados o manipulados, y por otro, sirva para que la leyenda negra que presenta la imagen del “moro” desfigurada, difamada, denigrada e incluso odiada y aborrecida, sea sustituida por la verdadera imagen del marroquí, con sus defectos y sus virtudes. (55)

He wants the text to be a validation of the Moroccan version of what happened in the Spanish Civil War and also be a tool used to help destroy the negative images that

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Spaniards have of the “moros.” In its totality, the “Estudio preliminar” prepares the reader for the task of reading Redondo’s manuscript. The reader now has an idea of which point of view will be expressed in the manuscript. The reader also has enough background information to situate the text historically and socially to be able to make critical observations about Redondo’s proposal.

The “Manuscrito” is an autonomous text that relates the first-hand experience of Redondo and his search for what really happened to his father. Through the testimonies of several people, Redondo begins to better understand the Moroccan attitude towards the Spanish Civil War as well as the unique story of his father. Redondo’s main preoccupation is finding the true story of his father and other Moroccan soldiers, that is to say, the history that is not mentioned in the official Spanish version. The main source of his information is oral testimony and anecdote from family members and people who personally knew his father or participated in the Spanish Civil War and/or the Moroccan nationalist movement. These anecdotes are subversive in nature because they turn the idea of history on its head by focusing on the “personal.” New Historicists Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt state:

When modern historians write about individual lives or small events, they usually stress their broad historical significance or generalizable typicality. Such people and events usually come into view historically only at a distance from the trivialities and intricacies of daily life, in a cognitive retreat where reliability of the data of experience can be weighed and proportional significance assigned... historians have been more interested in making an epistemological break with the past to create the protocol of objectivity than producing “the touch of the real.” (49)

In other words, the traditional historical narrative focuses on the “big picture” with little if any real focus on the personal stories of individuals. Their stories in of themselves are

not perceived as history but rather, as a trivial segments of the historical narrative. Because Redondo's whole history of the Moroccan attitude toward the Spanish Civil War is mostly comprised of anecdote, his "Manuscrito" challenges the notion of history and the value of personal testimony in the role of history. The idea of the anecdote as a valid historical source is explored by Joel Fineman when he states: "[t]he anecdote ... as the narration of a singular event, is the literary form or genre that uniquely refers to the real... given its formal if not its actual brevity, as a *historeme*, i.e., as the smallest minimal unit of the historiographic fact (56-57). Each interviewee of Redondo's "Manuscrito" provides the small "personal" pieces of history that participates in "the disruption of history as usual ... and chip away at the familiar edifices and make plastered-over cracks appear ... [where] the cracks themselves were taken to be recovered matter" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 51, 52). Each anecdote deconstructs the official historical narrative, filling in the cracks with the recovered Moroccan voices.

In the "Presentación" of the *Manuscrito*, Redondo introduces himself to the reader, "Mekki es mi nombre. Mi padre (q.e.p.d) se llambaba Mohammad y mi madre responde al nombre de Fadila" (69). The introduction sets the tone of the "Manuscrito." The reader already feels comfortable with Redondo through the information that Hakim provides in the "Estudio preliminar." By using his first name "Mekki" Redondo does not appear to be a threat. However, this is a clever disguise because he is indeed a threat. His search for the truth also will help destroy the images that the reader presumably already has about Moroccans in general and Moroccan soldiers in the Spanish Civil War in particular. Redondo's story threatens the validity of official history. It is interesting that even though he utilizes the Spanish language, he uses it in a style that is culturally Moroccan. For example, it should be noted the way that he presents dates not only in the "Presentación" but also in the testimonies of the people he interviews. Instead of using the numerical year, he associates the year with an important

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person or event: “Sé que nací el ‘año de Abdelkrim’. Mis otros tres hermanos nacieron: Ahmad, el ‘año de Jordana’, Aicha, el ‘año de la República’, que debe ser el año 1931; Sel-Lam, el ‘año del temblor de tierra’” (69).

He does not lose his Moroccan identity even though he uses the language of the oppressor.

The purpose of the “Presentación” is twofold. On a practical level, it sets the tone of the rest of the manuscript. It explains who Redondo is and why he is writing this text. On a more critical level, the “Presentación” begins the task of erasing the negative image of the “moro” that he assumes the reader has. He shows that the Moroccan soldiers are men with families and, like Spaniards, they want to take care of and protect them. Redondo’s father takes his family to another place when the drought destroys his farm. He looks for employment in a construction site that does not pay well. When he can no longer care for his family with his salary, he looks for something else. He enlists in the *Fuerzas Regulares* of the Spanish army because he knows that with the provisions that the army gives him, his family will be able to eat:

El único recuerdo que conservo de mi padre (q.e.p.d.) data del día en que le ví [sic] llegar a casa, en Xauen, vestido de uniforme de “askari” [generic name for Moroccan soldiers] de Regulares tocado con un gorro encarado y calzando unas alpargatas. Le acompañaba un recadero que portaba una lata grande de aceite y una espuerta en la que había tres pilones de azúcar, un paquete de té verde y varios chuscos de pan...No cabe duda de que en aquella tarde de verano del año 1936, mi madre se sentía dichosa de ser, entre sus amigas del barrio, la única mujer de un “askari de Majzen.” (70)

The image that Redondo presents of his father is that of an ordinary man who loves his family and who will do whatever necessary in order to take care of it. When his mother finds out about the death of her husband, Redondo shows that the Spanish Civil War

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did not only affect Spaniards but also Moroccans. Sebastian Balfour shows that in the dominant discourse, the attitude toward the “moros” is that they are not really human beings but rather soulless beings that steal from Spaniards: “As in the colonial war, the main objective of the Regulares and Legionnaires appeared to be loot... ‘You can get the most extraordinary bargains ... You only have to go to a company of Moors...’” (254). Redondo’s father is not just another “moro.” He is a father, a husband and a human being. His death devastates his family. Redondo’s mother returns to her hometown with her children and the family suffers great humiliation because her husband had fought in a foreign land for a foreign war as if he were a mercenary. Fortunately, Redondo goes to live with his uncle who is a teacher in a Hispano-Arabic school. At the age of twenty, Redondo decides to dedicate his life to searching for the truth behind the Francoist military uprising for which his father lost his life. The deciding factor is that four years after the death of his father the Spanish army stops paying his mother the small death benefit pension. As final payment she receives a nominal sum (cuarenta y cinco mil duros españoles), “lo que significaba que la vida de mi padre solo valía, a los ojos de los militares españoles, la mísera suma de doscientas veinticinco mil pesetas” (76). This corroborates the theory that for the Francoists Moroccans were nothing more than “carne de cañón” (24).

In the first three anecdotes of the “Manuscrito,” Redondo continues the personal line begun in the “Presentación.” In “Relato Primero,” the testimony of Redondo’s uncle, Hach Mojtar Ben Enfeddal, the reader sees a wealth of knowledge about the Hispano-Moroccan relationship. The uncle, who is a teacher, reviews the history between Morocco and Spain in great detail. He explains that the hatred is nothing new and has roots in antiquity. Official history focuses on the Christian Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula embraced by los *Reyes Católicos*, Isabel de Castilla and Fernando de Aragón, and the mission to cleanse Spain of the impure, that

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is, Jews and Muslims. Enfeddal, however, emphasizes the role of the “moros” in the Reconquest. The idea of “reconquering” the peninsula does not actually become a reality until the descendants of Tariq (the “moro” from which the Arabic name for Gibraltar, Yebel Tariq, is derived; literally Tariq’s mountain) decide to extend farther into the peninsula. He also adds that Isabel de Castilla, the queen that stated the “conquista de África” should not cease, is also the same queen that stated that Gibraltar belonged to the “moros.” According to Enfeddal, because this second statement is not favorable to the dominant discourse, it was simply omitted. At the end of “Relato Primero” Enfeddal closes by saying “las relaciones hispano-marroquíes han sido caracterizadas por una serie de guerras ... y fueron la causa de ese odio que todavía hoy sienten los españoles hacia los moros” (80).

“Relato Segundo” is the testimony of Redondo’s mother, Fátima Ben Enfeddal and parallels what Redondo says in the “Presentación.” The purpose of her story is to humanize Redondo’s father and deconstruct the idea that the majority of Moroccan soldiers in the Spanish Civil War were mercenaries. She describes her initial encounter with her future husband and describes him as “un hombre diligente y trabajador, por lo que en poco tiempo se convirtió en la mano derecha de tu abuelo, quien no tardó en ver en él al marido idóneo para su única hija” (82). She admits that because of famine and lack of supplies, many Moroccan men enlisted in the Spanish army to save their families: “se listó, presentándose en casa con su uniforme puesto y con una lata grande de aceite de ‘La Giralda’, varios pilones de azúcar de ‘La Rosa’ y un paquete de té verde” (83).ⁱ At the end of her story, Redondo’s mother states that she had a premonition that her husband would not return from the war and that it was confirmed two months after his departure that he had been killed. From her story, the Moroccan truth is that the majority of soldiers were victims of economic circumstances and Francoist propaganda.

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“Relato Tercero” is the last of the “personal” anecdotes that deal directly with Redondo’s father. In this section of the “Manuscrito” Redondo presents the testimonies of two soldiers that fought in the same battle in which Redondo’s father died, Teniente de Regulares Laarbi Hihí and Alfaquí Radi Lemmagui. Hihí explains that Redondo’s father did not actually die on the battlefield in Talavera but rather in a nearby hospital. He reveals that in the first battle in which they fought “murieron aquel día más de cien ‘askaris’” (86) and that there were more than three hundred wounded Moroccan soldiers including Redondo’s father. Lemmagui relates Redondo’s father’s dying moments. The importance of his contribution is that it shows that “moros” also have religious rituals for their dead. Although they are Muslim and not Christian, they too are concerned about the fate of their souls:

Fui inmediatamente a su lado y lo encontré expirando, al mismo tiempo que trataba de pronunciar la ‘chahada’ [profession of faith] sin conseguirlo, por lo que tuve que inculcársela hasta que entregó su alma al Creador, que Él lo tenga en Su seno y Se apiade de él... En este día, viernes 17 de yumada segundo, del año 1355 correspondiente al 4 de septiembre de 1936, el siervo de su Dios Radi ben Mustafa Lemmagui, imam de los musulmanes en el campamento situado en las afueras de Talavera, en tierra de los cristianos, asistió, lavó, amortajó y enterró al siervo de Dios el ‘askari’ llamado Mohammad ben Adeslam Redondo, hijo de Abdeslam y de Jadixa, natural de Tagassa, en Gomara, muerto en la madrugada de este mismo día de resultas de las heridas graves recibidas en la batalla habida en el día de ayer. (89)

Redondo’s father, as well as the other two Moroccan soldiers, is shown as human and not as a barbaric savage, the image that is most commonly used to describe them within the dominant discourse. Together the first three “relatos” challenge the Spanish audience to rethink its attitude toward Moroccans. By telling his father’s story, which

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probably mirrors that of many others like him, Redondo humanizes him. This tactic makes it much more difficult to harbor hate towards these Moroccan soldiers for now they are no longer nameless, faceless killing machines, but rather, men with families that do what is necessary to take care of them.

While the purpose of the first three “relatos” is to humanize the Moroccan soldier and give him voice, the remaining ten “relatos” in Redondo’s “Manuscrito” expand his search from the personal to the national and become the *counterhistory* to the Francoist historical discourse about Morocco’s role in the war. It must be stated that Morocco played an extremely important part in the creation of the *Caudillo*, the name most associated with Francisco Franco, and his idea of nation. The very fact that Franco and the other Africanist soldiers in the Spanish army chose to call themselves “los nacionalistas” is revealing because it suggests that their mission, or better said, crusade, was to rescue the true nation of Spain from the soulless “republicanos.” Their crusade would begin in Morocco.

To understand how Franco defined national history, David K. Herzberger in *Narrating the Past: Fiction and Historiography in Post-War Spain* explores the relationship between Francoist historiography and several post-war novels written by Spanish authors. Upon describing Francoist historiography, Herzberger emphasizes that it was necessary for Franco to have a “useable past,” one that served his role as leader: “for the Francoist regime, this means that the State used the past both to underpin its existence as the fulfillment of Spain’s historical destiny and to give moral legitimacy to its claim of authority in the present” (16). In other words, Franco had to create a historical past that would support his present efforts to rescue the true Spain from its captors, the “republicanos.” Francoist historiography did not have as its goal to present the facts of the past, but rather establish various strategies in order to define a particular concept of history:

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To a large degree, Francoist historiography does not aim to dispute the knowledge collectively possessed about the past of Spain (the so-called facts of history), but rather seeks to establish a normative set of strategies that define a particular *concept* of history...The intent became to convert what in reality was a cultural and political proposition about the past into what appeared to be a wholly natural fact. The most persistent strategy used to achieve this goal was to dress the principle of "truth by assertion," which shaped the tautological fabric of Francoist historiography (i.e., the past is how we say it is because we say so) with the objectifying clothing of science. (16, 17)

As Herzberger notes, Franco's concept of history is a carefully crafted narrative that supports his endeavor and which ultimately becomes the propaganda used to recruit Moroccan soldiers and defeat the Second Republic. In a sense, his idea of nation is the mythical narrative he creates:

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation – or narration – might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. (Bhabha 1)

Franco's nation/narrative does not necessarily reflect the reality that is around him but rather the reality that he has imagined, and, in that imagined reality he has the power to determine who will be *other* and therefore his enemies (Republicans) and his pawns (Moroccans). Although written outside of Spain, but within the same historical context, Redondo's "Manuscrito" changes the dynamic created in Franco's nation/narrative. With that said, the objective of the last ten "relatos" in the "Manuscrito" is to subvert the Francoist historical discourse in order to recuperate the power and identity lost

during colonialism. To find an alternative truth, Redondo interviews men who held important positions within the Moroccan nationalist movement that emerged during the same time as the Spanish Civil War. Each person gives his version of how Moroccans found themselves as pawns in a war that had nothing to do with them. Through their testimonies, reports, correspondence between Spanish army officials and Moroccan leaders and newspaper clippings, Redondo constructs his *counterhistory*. The three common themes in the last ten “relatos” of Redondo’s “Manuscrito” are neutrality on the part of Morocco, the reimagining of the Moroccan soldier and the grave mistakes made by the Second Republic creating a space for Franco and the Africanists to plan a coup d’état. In “Relato Sexto” Redondo asks Profesor Sidi Tayeb Bennuna, the secretary general of the Agrupación Nacionalista if it were true that Moroccan nationalists willingly supported Franco’s attack on the Second Republic. He responds:

Eso de que los nacionalistas acogieron el levantamiento acaudillado por Franco con los brazos abiertos no es verdad. La postura adoptada por los dirigentes del movimiento nacionalista desde el primer momento, fue la de observar la más estricta neutralidad en la pugna suscitada entre los dos bandos españoles, por considerar que la cuestión del régimen hispano era asunto exclusivo de los españoles. (113)

In “Relato Décimo” Cherif Sidi Tuhami Wazzani, vice president of the Partido Reformista Nacional confirms by providing the minutes he recorded at a meeting of Moroccan nationalists:

Decisiones que se acuerdan:

Primera, adoptar la más estricta neutralidad frente a la pugna existente entre los militares y el gobierno de la República del Frente Popular, no inclinándonos ni a favor ni en contra de ninguna de las partes enfrentadas, no hacer declaración pública o privada, ya sea individual o colectivamente, a fin

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de evitar, por un lado, que nuestras palabras sean interpretadas erróneamente por cualquiera de los dos bandos, y por otro, que el pueblo marroquí crea que estamos al lado de uno de los bandos, ya que se trata de un pleito propio de los españoles en el que no debemos intervenir para nada. (146)

Both men emphasize that the Spanish Civil War is just that, a war between two groups of Spaniards. Allying themselves with either group does not benefit Moroccans because both the Spanish Republic and the Africanists see Morocco as inferior and destined to be a Spanish territory. Another more important reason, however, is religion. More than once Redondo's interviewees adamantly declare Morocco's lack of interest in the war because it is against Islam: "... y por otro, nuestra santa fe prohíbe al musulmán que sacrifique su vida en defensa de una religión, de un credo y de unos intereses que no sean del Islam... Yo me opongo a la cuestión del alistamiento porque nuestra Ley prohíbe al musulmán luchar bajo una bandera que no sea la suya y en defensa de unos intereses que no son los de su país" (146, 158). This quote again raises the issue of Franco's use of propaganda and historiography. Besides taking advantage of the poor economic situation in Morocco, Franco also sold his war as a *jihad* or holy war. According María Rosa de Madariaga, "... the *kaid*s [local leaders], whether obeying the instructions of their Spanish advisers or on their own initiative, sustained an intensive propaganda campaign among the tribesmen, mainly focusing upon Franco's holy crusade against the 'infidel' and the sacred duty to assist him in this struggle to liberate both Spain and Morocco from the yolk of the unbeliever (God's enemies or 'los sin Dios')" (79). In the "Presentación" Redondo reflects upon the repercussions that his family suffered because his father fought in the war:

... ese sentimiento de compasión que la gente abrigaba hacia nosotros se fue convirtiendo en una especie de desprecio hacia la mujer y los hijos del "askari" que fue a morir en tierra de cristianos, no como un "xahid" [martyr]

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musulmán que muere luchando por una causa del Islam, sino como un simple mercenario que no tendrá recompensa alguna en el otro mundo. (71)

This version of how Moroccans became involved in the war disavows the Spanish official version that portrays all Moroccans as mercenaries that embrace violence and are willing to fight for any cause. Even more calculating is why Franco wanted to use Moroccan soldiers.

Franco's use of Moroccan soldiers is related to the second recurring theme in the last ten "relatos" which is that of the reimagining of the Moroccan soldier. Relying on Spain's negative image of who the "moro" really was, Franco used Moroccan soldiers as a sort of psychological weapon in addition to their excellent training:

Perfectly aware of the terror caused by the "moros" among Spanish soldiery, Franco used the Moroccan troops not only as cannon fodder but also as psychological weapons against the Spanish people. It was a question of demoralizing Republican soldiers; the more numerous the misdeeds and savage acts committed by Moroccan troops, the less would be the courage of Spanish soldiers the face them. (Madariaga 87)

The Moroccan soldiers always populated the front lines in battles as part of "fuerzas de choque" first as a way to instill fear in the Republican soldiers by conjuring up images of a second invasion of the "moros" who would be the natural enemy. More importantly, however, occupying the front lines, they would be the first to die, thus saving more Spanish Nationalists lives, "[e]n los primeros días de agosto empezaron a llegar noticias alarmantes del frente de guerra, en el sentido de que los primeros 'askaris' llevados a España morían allí como moscas" (Hakim 150). After the battles, the psychological war is its most brutal. According to Spanish anthropologist Gustau Nerín in *The Moroccan Labyrinth*, Franco and the Africanist soldiers trained Moroccans who joined the *Regulares* (branch of the Spanish Army of Africa consisting

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of Moroccan soldiers) to be as ruthless as possible. The Africanists encouraged them to raid, loot, rape and mutilate in the colonial wars in Morocco. When they arrived in Spain and did the same things, it was widely publicized even though these same acts were committed by Spanish and other European legionnaires:

If the propaganda concerning atrocities by Moroccans was more extensive, it was because, according to the prevailing image of the "moro", acts of cruelty could only be committed by "savages." These actions, although entirely reprehensible, were regarded as almost "normal" when committed in Morocco, since the victims were themselves "savages", but as unacceptable when committed in Europe against "civilized" Europeans. Atrocities were treated differently when the victims were Rifian villagers than when they were peasants from a village in Castile. (Madariaga 89)

Perpetuating this barbaric image of the savage and cruel Moroccan mercenary as *other*, was a deft strategy on the part of Franco in his defeat of the Republic. It is this image that the men in Redondo's "Manuscrito" want to correct. As seen in the humanization of Redondo's father in the first three "relatos," the "relatos" of the leaders of the Moroccan nationalist movement also deconstruct the Spanish discourse about their identity. In "Relato Décimo" Redondo asks Cherif Sidi Tuhami Wazzani about the difference between the soldiers in the *Regulares* and the soldiers who were part of the Moroccan army and defended the Majzen (Moroccan state during colonial period) and the Jalifa (Caliph, or ruler). Wazzani responds by saying the *Regulares* were considered mercenaries that served a foreign government just like any opportunist that joined the Foreign Legion. However, the *Mehal-las*, the soldiers that defended the Moroccan state and Caliph were a different story: "[a]hora bien; las 'Mahal-las' jalifianas son unas fuerzas militares genuinamente marroquíes, cuyo sostenimiento corre a cargo del presupuesto del Majzen jalifiano" (149). Cherif Mohammad Mustafá Ajailal in "Relato

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Undécimo” concurs as he quotes the words of Profesor Abdeljalak Torres, leader of the Moroccan nationalist movement:

Torres le respondió [to General Orgaz of the Spanish army]: “Mi general, cuando el reclutamiento se hacía en las filas de las fuerzas Regulares que pertenecen al ejército español, nosotros no dijimos nada, por considerar que se trataba del reclutamiento de unos mercenarios marroquíes en las filas de un ejército extranjero, ya que para nosotros las fuerzas Regulares son una especie de Legión Extranjera integrada exclusivamente por mercenarios marroquíes. Pero cuando el alistamiento se hizo extensivo a las ‘Mehal-las’ jalfianas, que son fuerzas genuinamente marroquíes, entonces hemos tenido que expresar nuestro punto de vista, por considerar que la participación de esas fuerzas en una Guerra entre cristianos está formalmente prohibida en nuestra religión”.

(157)

The remarks from both men begin to deconstruct the image that all Moroccan soldiers who fought in the Spanish Civil War were professional mercenaries. According to these men, it is a fact that there were Moroccan mercenaries, who like other mercenaries, joined armies for profit and adventure. However there was also fierce resistance against the recruitment of other Moroccans who were either Mahal-las or had no military affiliation. Although only alluded to in Redondo’s “Manuscrito,” closely related to this stance is the fact that many Moroccans were forced into service. Soldiers like Redondo’s father were forced to fight because of economic circumstances and others were essentially kidnapped or tricked:

According to the evidence of Moroccans captured by the Republicans, many had been taken from their fields and confined in military camps in Ceuta or Tetuán before being taken to Seville and later to the front. Other prisoners or deserters claimed that Franco’s authorities had tricked them with false

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promises, making them believe that they were going to Spain, as un 1934, to repress an insurrection against the legal Republican government, and that once this had been done, they would be rewarded with lands in Andalusia or Valencia. (Madariaga 81)

Together all of these statements comprise a strong challenge against the official image of the Moroccan soldier. Redondo's "Manuscrito" gives voice to Moroccans allowing them to clarify their stance and therefore define their participation in the war.

The final common theme in the last ten "relatos" is that of grave mistakes made by the Spanish Republic that ultimately gave Franco the advantage. Hakim prefaces this theme in his "Estudio Preliminar" by mentioning the use of Moroccan soldiers in the *Regulares* to quell the miners' uprising in Asturias in 1933, an event corroborated by Balfour and Madariaga. These "relatos" also reveal that the Republic's refusal to compromise with Moroccan officials early in the new Spanish government and its attack on Tetuán were other factors that further fueled Moroccan resentment. The July 18, 1936 bombing of Tetuán by the Republic, which resulted in numerous civilian casualties, including the death of eleven Moroccans and five Spaniards, came as a much too late answer to Franco's coup d'état. Again, Redondo gives voice to the once oppressed. According to Ulema Sidi Hasan Ben Abdelwahhab in "Relato Cuarto," if the officials in the Republic had listened to the Moroccan nationalists and heeded their warnings of unrest amongst the Africanists, there would have been a possibility that the Spanish Civil War would have never happened. After suffering under the monarchy of Alfonso XIII, Moroccans were hopeful that things would change under the Second Republic in 1931. Unfortunately, some of the actions by the Republic angered the military and soon it became the target of coup attempts. Feeling constantly threatened, it decided to make drastic reforms to the military which were interpreted by the military as retribution: "[d]espite his perennial fatigue, Azaña [first president of the

Spanish Republic] threw himself into the task of restructuring the army... Rather than wait for the lengthy processes of parliament, he issued a series of decrees in rapid succession that set out to transform the military" (Balfour 239). These reforms along with turning a deaf ear to Moroccan nationalists' petitions for more freedoms created resentment from both groups. Abdelwahhab claims that Moroccans not only warned the president of the Republic but that the president of the Moroccan national movement, Profesor Abdeljalak Torres provided Spain with a detailed account of the impending dangers presented by the disgruntled Africanists. His conclusion was that the gravest mistakes on the part of the Republic was its underestimation of the Africanists and its dismissal of the warning it received from the Moroccans:

Como ves, nosotros los nacionalistas no podíamos desear la caída de la República, como algunos afirman ahora; al contrario, hicimos cuanto pudimos para advertir a los republicanos de los errores que cometían con su nefasta política seguida en la Zona y del peligro que corría el régimen republicano con el mantenimiento de elementos antirrepublicanos en la misma. Los acontecimientos registrados a mediados del año 1936 vinieron a probar que teníamos razón... Desgraciadamente, los dirigentes republicanos no hicieron caso de nuestras advertencias, sin que nosotros acertáramos a saber el por qué, aunque, eso sí, había dos hipótesis: la primera, que creyeran imposible un golpe de estado iniciado en tierras marroquíes, y la segunda que prefirieran correr el riesgo de un golpe de estado antes que acceder a las reformas y las libertades que nosotros pedíamos a voz en grito. (96-97)

Abdelwahhab clearly places the blame for the Spanish Civil War on the Republic's refusal to recognize the Moroccan nationalist movement as a group of adroit negotiators who could have been important allies and not as simply uncivilized brutes. For him, had the Republic recognized the importance of having a Moroccan ally, it would have been

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more difficult for Franco and the Africanists to plan and execute the coup. “Relato Cuarto” ends with Abdelwahhad’s haunting words:

Los hechos ocurridos en Julio de 1936 nos dieron la razón, y la República pagó caro el hecho de haber echado en saco roto nuestras advertencias y nuestras reivindicaciones. El día en que se escriba la verdadera historia del Alzamiento franquista en nuestra Zona, sabrá todo el mundo que nosotros los nacionalistas hemos hecho todo cuanto podíamos hacer en nuestro intento de salvar a la República española, por lo que nadie podrá acusarnos entonces, como lo hacen ahora, de haber preferido el Protectorado de un régimen dictatorial al Protectorado de un régimen democrático. Y si hoy soportamos el régimen dictatorial franquista es porque la República no ha sido capaz de defenderse y defendernos a su debido tiempo. (97)

This final statement is empowering to Moroccans because Redondo’s “Manuscrito” is essentially “la verdadera historia” that Abdelwahhad mentions. The power dynamic is redefined between Spain and Morocco and it is the Moroccan voice that prevails as the one of truth.

With each “relato” Redondo deconstructs the official Spanish historical narrative and does something that had never been done in the Spanish language at the time he collected this information: he rescues the Moroccan version of the events of the Spanish Civil War. Although his initial mission is personal, it can be said with some certainty that the history of his father could represent that of thousands of Moroccan soldiers that fought, something that is not lost on Redondo, “[t]enía la experiencia no solo de mi padre (q.e.p.d), sino también de los cientos de soldados marroquíes que murieron durante la guerra española” (73). His “Manuscrito” is a *counterhistory* that serves as a vehicle that brings the Moroccan voice out from the margins into the dominant discourse.

Following Redondo's "Manuscrito" is perhaps the most important part of Hakim's text – the section "Apéndices." Up until this point in the book, the reader must choose to trust Hakim and Redondo and what they write. The "Apéndices" prove the authenticity of the "Estudio preliminar" and the "Manuscrito" with facsimiles of many of the documents such as letters, newspaper clippings and memos referred to in the previous sections. By providing hard proof, Hakim legitimizes his text. Together, the three sections complement and support one another and thus present a convincing stance. Upon finishing the complete text, the reader should have a clear understanding of the Moroccan point of view of the Spanish Civil War.

In conclusion, history like any discourse has its faults because "...history as an institution is itself under the control of determinate cultural and ideological forces which may seek to propose the specific practice of history as neutral and objective" (*The Empire Writes Back* 80) but often only relates a narrative that shows those cultural and ideological forces in a favorable light. As a tool of colonialism, history has been used to validate the colonizer's version of events and to dismiss those versions that contradict it: "what it means to have a history is the same as what it means to have a legitimate existence: history and legitimation (sic) go hand in hand; history legitimates us and not others" (*The Post-Colonial Reader* 317). Legitimizing one's history is necessarily a violent (psychologically, culturally, emotionally) process because it simultaneously erases the legitimacy of the *other* leaving vacancies in the historical narrative, intentional or not. For this reason, official historical narratives must always be scrutinized and challenged to fill those vacancies by "practitioners of 'history from below' who professed to counter the history of the victors with that of the vanquished" (Gallagher and Greenblatt 53). This is what Mohammad Ibn Azzuz Hakim and Mekki Ben Mohammad Redondo have achieved. Despite the recent great strides that have been made in revisionist history about the Spanish Civil War, there was still a void that

demanded attention. By discovering and publishing Redondo's "Manuscrito," Hakim has started a process to fill that void. Redondo's "Manuscrito" is a remarkable text because, not only does it allow the voices of those who actually experienced that part of history to verify, deny and correct what was considered the "absolute truth," it does it in the oppressor's language, the same language that had silenced the Moroccan version of history for so long. It is also remarkable that Redondo was able to gather his information during the particularly difficult decade of the 1940s in the immediate aftermath of the devastating war. His text recovers valuable historical information and more importantly redefines the Moroccan identity in terms from the Moroccan perspective. Although he has accomplished a major feat with his work, there are still some things that remain troubling. At the end of his "Manuscrito" Redondo does not come to any conclusions about any of the information he has learned about his father or the Spanish Civil War. His text abruptly ends with the last "relato" leaving the reader to wonder if there is more. As successful as Redondo is by recovering the Moroccan version of history, his text is still subject to being judged by European standards because:

... 'history' as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university – is concerned, 'Europe' remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian,' 'Chinese,' 'Kenyan,' and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe.'... Third-world historians feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate. (Chakrabarty 1, 2)

This is the plight of all post-colonial writers for once colonialism/imperialism occurs, it leaves its imprint on everything of the colonized well after political independence has

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been achieved. Finally, the most troubling aspect of this text is that it remained hidden for over a half century until Mohammad Ibn Azzuz Hakim recovered and published it in 1997. In spite of all of these final observations, there is no doubt that the efforts of both Redondo and Hakim have resulted in a powerful text that suggests a valid alternative historical narrative empowering the *other*.

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Note

ⁱ This is corroborated in *The Moroccan Labyrinth* by combatants Amar Nboukhar Ilaj Selam, “men enlisted because there was famine and they were very hungry” and Mouth Benaissa, “when you are hungry you can’t see.” Madariaga in her article “The Intervention of Moroccan Troops in the Spanish Civil War: A Reconsideration” also confirms, “The poor harvests of the previous years (1934 and 1935) and of the first two years of the war, especially 1937, rendered the task of recruitment easy for the *kaid*s... The conditions offered to those who enlisted were two months’ pay in advance, four kilos of sugar, a five-litre tin of oil, and daily loaves according to the number of children in each family, until they embarked for Spain” (78).

**La familia como cuerpo enfermo:
el discurso patológico y la herencia cultural en *Geographies of Home***

En su ensayo "Cultural Identities and Diaspora" Stuart Hall argumenta que la reconstrucción del imaginario del Caribe a través de la experiencia de la diáspora africana forzada sirve para imponer un sentido de coherencia a una experiencia hasta entonces dispersa y fragmentada (394).¹ Para Hall, África sirve como eje para la construcción de una identidad cultural caribeña a la vez establecida y dinámica (en constante movimiento) (394). África, entonces, sirve como la aporía y el centro que le da el sentido que la historia cultural de la región caribeña carecía hasta el momento (Hall 394). Del mismo modo, Hall subraya que al reconocer la relevancia de ese pasado histórico-cultural a la luz de la transportación, la esclavitud y la migración, no queda más que admitir que la "pérdida de identidad" que ha sido integral en la experiencia caribeña sólo podía ser sanada una vez se reconocieran y se devolvieran a su respectivo lugar estas conexiones históricas olvidadas (Hall 394-6). La producción artístico-cultural que alude a estas conexiones del Caribe con África restaura una plenitud imaginaria frente a la "rota rúbrica del pasado" (Hall 394-6). Hall entiende que estas expresiones artísticas son "recursos de resistencia e identidad, con las que se confronta a las formas patológicas y fragmentadas en la que esa experiencia ha sido reconstruida ..." (Hall 225); esta expropiación interna de la identidad cultural tulle y deforma (Hall 226). Por una parte, las expresiones de Hall reflejan que el carácter traumático de la experiencia colonial marca la identidad caribeña, la cual sólo puede ser rescatada mediante una revalorización de su historia. Hall utiliza metáforas corpóreas para referirse a una población caribeña que no reconoce parte de su pasado como un cuerpo enfermo que debe ser sanado. Silenciar segmentos y piezas en sus narrativas históricas no sólo enferma a la población caribeña, sino que la deforma desde lo más

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visceral. El silencio familiar sobre el pasado de una cultura o familia tiene el poder de convertirse en el ambiente ideal para que sus integrantes más jóvenes se autodestruyan al sentirse disfuncionales. La cultura enferma que resulta de dicho proceso de silenciamiento se materializa sobre los cuerpos que dan vida a una historia de constantes desplazamientos y violencia.²

Parto de la postura de Hall para analizar las representaciones textuales del cuerpo inmigrante caribeño construidas a base del discurso de la enfermedad. Propongo revisar las imágenes patológicas empleadas en narraciones literarias sobre las experiencias de la inmigración dominicana en Estados Unidos, tomando como objeto de estudio la novela *Geographies of Home* de la autora (afro)dominicana-americana Loida Maritza Pérez. Con imágenes patológicas me refiero a aquellas representaciones literarias de cualquier tipo de enfermedad física o mental. El objetivo es demostrar cómo la relación que establece el sujeto caribeño con su pasado cultural determina su estado psicosomático.³ Es decir, para que un cuerpo caribeño pueda representarse como mental y físicamente saludable, y para que sea considerado socialmente funcional, el sujeto (en este caso un personaje literario) debe reconocer su historia familiar y valorar su historia cultural. Como productos culturales, las narraciones literarias son un reflejo de la sociedad real en la que se contextualizan y de la cual surgen, ya que representan una dimensión de la sociedad: actúan como válvulas de escape. El reconocimiento de esta memoria histórica le facilita entender su propia identidad y ubicarse en estas narrativas, venciendo el discurso patológico que le precede.

Al referirme al “cuerpo,” incluyo tanto la dimensión física, como la emocional y la psicológica, las cuales no existen de modo separado. Es decir, entiendo el cuerpo como la suma de estas partes que trabajan juntas. Mi acercamiento evita el dualismo cartesiano desmentido por la antropología y las ciencias sociales. Mientras que para

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referirme a una sola de estas áreas por motivos de especificidad en una cita, o porque el texto mismo haga la salvedad, utilizaré los términos “físico,” “emocional,” “mental” y en ocasiones “psicológico.”

Como se demostrará en este análisis, el movimiento transitorio en la novela corresponde a una familia dividida geográficamente y culturalmente en la que algunos de los hijos han regresado a la República Dominicana y los padres sueñan con regresar a la isla. El hogar, en este caso fragmentado y dinámico, generalmente se percibe como el espacio en donde el cuerpo se siente más a gusto y suele asociarse con el hogar en donde han crecido junto a su familia. Sin embargo, estos cuerpos en constante tránsito (de la República Dominicana a Estados Unidos y viceversa) desafían el concepto convencional del hogar, para trazar sus propias geografías. Cuando los personajes en la obra logran integrar las partes silenciadas de su pasado, entonces el cuerpo y la identidad se representan satisfactoriamente a través de estas prácticas culturales y las relaciones familiares se proyectan en una luz más positiva.

Por ende, las preguntas principales que dirigen el análisis son: ¿cómo la relación de estos sujetos caribeños con su cultura y su pasado familiar influyen su estado mental y físico? ¿En qué medida el discurso religioso y el psicosomático dan forma a estos cuerpos? ¿Se identifican estas voces con la historia colectiva que marca sus cuerpos o intentan ellos desconectarse de su pasado para crear una individualidad alternativa? Para responder a estas preguntas discutiré cómo se esboza la identidad de los personajes inmigrantes en *Geographies of Home*.

Inmigración, corporeidad y trauma

Mary C. Waters discute el modo en que los inmigrantes establecen su identidad frente a una nueva sociedad. Según Waters, las identidades sociales que adoptan o que les son asignadas pueden tener enormes consecuencias (44). Del mismo

modo, ella define la identidad como una autoconcepción, y como una selección de atributos físicos, emocionales o sociales de individuos particulares (Waters 44). La obra de Pérez sugiere una construcción identitaria similar del inmigrante dominicano como respuesta a un nuevo contexto social en Estados Unidos, distinto de la República Dominicana, ya que en *Geographies of Home* los personajes sólo pueden comprenderse cuando se relacionan conscientemente a su pasado familiar y a su historia cultural. Desconectarse de su comunidad y de su familia significaría negar partes de su cultura o "silenciar el pasado" (Michel Rolph Trouillot), lo que provoca represiones y ansiedades que desequilibran física y mentalmente al inmigrante caribeño.

El psicólogo Robert C. Scaer explica los efectos fisiológicos de la experiencia traumática, e indica que en muchas instancias, las víctimas del trauma no guardan memoria de los diferentes eventos asociados con el evento traumático (45). Scaer sugiere que uno de los métodos terapéuticos psicósomáticos para tratar el trauma es la estimulación de los sentidos (visual, táctil, vestibular o auditivo) a través de los cuales usualmente se imaginan los eventos traumáticos pasados (45). De esta interpretación médica sobre los métodos para sanar psicósomáticamente a aquellos cuerpos que sufren los efectos de un trauma se desprenden dos conclusiones principales: el individuo necesita primero reconocer el evento o los eventos del pasado que provocan el trauma para poder recobrar su equilibrio mental y físico. El potencial que según Scaer tiene la víctima del trauma para autosanarse abre una nueva dimensión analítica de la novela. La elección de prácticas religiosas como la santería ayuda a los personajes en su sanación.⁴

Gay Wilentz propone que para que estos cuerpos se sanen deben entender que su bienestar personal está asociado con la aceptación de sí mismos y de toda su herencia cultural y familiar (6). Por lo tanto, en el caso del Caribe, los cantos, conjuros y demás prácticas religiosas como la santería y el espiritismo que forman parte de la

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identidad cultural sirven como métodos terapéuticos. Gran parte de su poder cultural para sanar proviene de haber sido erradicados o suprimidos en la historia colonial, o sustituidos por otras prácticas institucionalizadas. Esta supresión del conocimiento popular, por ejemplo, forma parte de la raíz histórica del trauma en estas culturas.

Wilentz explica que para las personas de culturas históricamente oprimidas esta curación significa reclamar su bienestar personal a través del autoestima y del conocimiento de las prácticas culturales de sanación que han sido desacreditadas (3). Nuestras enfermedades y nuestros malestares no son únicamente individuales, culturales, nacionales y globales (Wilentz 2). También, existen conexiones entre la nación, la cultura y el individuo, y las enfermedades que contraemos, lo que provoca desórdenes mentales y físicos, y hasta el quiebre del equilibrio entre el cuerpo y la mente (Wilentz 2). Wilentz llama a esta interconexión "cultural self-loathing" (2).⁵ La relación entre nuestro estado físico y mental depende entonces de la manera en que entendamos, aceptemos y negociemos con nuestra identidad cultural y el pasado histórico. Por ejemplo, en *Geographies of Home* todos los componentes de la identidad de los personajes deben reevaluarse, convirtiendo los aspectos raciales, de clase, de sexualidad y de género en parte integral de este diagnóstico. En este sentido hablamos de un proceso psicosomático, ya que lo mental y físico van unidos por esa interconexión discutida por Wilentz.

En *Geographies of Home*, los sujetos de la novela no logran sanar sus traumas en el presente mediante la exploración de su pasado, y por lo tanto no pueden reafirmar su identidad; estos se enferman y yacen en un estado de permanente confusión, negación y enajenamiento. Es decir, caen en un estado abyecto permanente que permea en la estética narrativa a lo largo de todo el texto. Esto que llamo "estética abyecta," basado en las teorías de Julia Kristeva, es la representación literaria del efecto más negativo del trauma irresuelto⁶. En el caso de *Geographies of Home*, ésta se localiza en

múltiples escenas aberrantes, como un vómito en el fregadero, la necrofilia, la violación entre hermanas, la podredumbre física y el mal olor, entre otras imágenes grotescas de la novela. Esta consideración probará que, al final, la manera en que el sujeto se relaciona con su pasado y con su comunidad definirá su sanación.

Loida Martiza Pérez: *cultural self-loathing* y abyección

Pérez nace en la República Dominicana en 1963 y se traslada a Nueva York junto a su familia a los 3 años de edad. *Geographies of Home*, publicada en 1999, es su primera novela.⁷ Esta obra narra la historia de una familia dominicana que se traslada a Nueva York. Rebecca, una de las hijas mayores, es la primera en dejar su casa en la República Dominicana, abriendo así las puertas para el resto de su familia compuesta de sus padres, Aurelia y Papito, y sus catorce hermanos. La novela abre con un prólogo en el que Bienvenida, madre de Aurelia, está en su lecho de muerte y clama la presencia de su hija, quien debe encargarse de preservar las creencias y las memorias de los muertos de la familia. Pero Aurelia decide dejar atrás el legado y las costumbres de su madre, y comenzar una nueva vida según la religión adventista de su esposo Papito.

Al mudarse a Nueva York ambos esperan darles una mejor vida a sus hijos, y refuerzan sus enseñanzas morales religiosas, pero esto se da tan estrictamente que logran todo lo contrario. La represión en la que viven los miembros de la familia suprime los aspectos corporales y sexuales, al igual que les prohíbe actividades sociales seculares como ver programas de televisión y escuchar música que no sean cristianos (Pérez 282).⁸ La familia tampoco conversa sobre temas que puedan crear una imagen contraria a la que deben proyectar los integrantes de la familia según su religión adventista, incluyendo las prácticas religiosas de su abuela Aurelia. La represión y supresión del pasado sume a la familia en un silencio que afecta irreparablemente sus relaciones, y en el cual nadie conoce la verdadera historia de nadie. Dichas limitaciones terminan por convertirse en una locura colectiva.

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La trágica pérdida de un viejo amor hace que Papito se aferre a la religión protestante aún más y llegue a un fanatismo que impone en Aurelia y que comienza a crear las condiciones para un ambiente patológico en su hogar. La supresión del pasado, de las emociones, de los deseos y hasta de la espiritualidad que la religión de su esposo impone en Aurelia provoca daños irreparables en los cuerpos y las mentes de los personajes principales. La interrupción de la memoria y de la transmisión cultural es el germen que va creciendo en la familia cuando emigran a los Estados Unidos.

En una conversación de mesa redonda entre la autora (Pérez) y otras tres importantes escritoras de La Española, Nelly Rosario, Myriam J. A. Chancy y Edwidge Danticat, ésta expresa que es la manera selectiva de transmitir historias y la retención voluntaria de ciertas historias lo que conduce a la mayoría de los conflictos (Candelario, *Voices* 70). La autora confirma claramente la importancia del asunto que trato como causa particular de la condición que asecha a esta familia dominicana en Nueva York:

That Aurelia, the mother, silences her past and is ambivalent about her relationship with her own mother is what leaves her daughters at a loss. Any of them, whether it be Iliana, Rebecca, Marina, or any of the other daughters, would have fared better had they been armed with certain truths rather than shielded from them. (Candelario, *Voices* 70)

Los conflictos familiares que comienzan con Aurelia y su madre, Bienvenida, son la raíz de los problemas que sufre el resto de la familia. Pérez sugiere que el desconocimiento de la historia del pasado produce conflictos y afecta los cuerpos. En la medida que el silencio perdure los problemas familiares y la situación enfermiza que los afecta se vuelven un ciclo.

El primer capítulo narra la historia de Iliana, una de las hermanas que decide cursar estudios universitarios lejos de casa sólo para alejarse del infierno que vive en su

hogar: "...the university would be the ideal place to escape her parents' watchful eyes" (Pérez 1). La universidad logra poner distancia física entre Iliana y su familia, pero ésta decide regresar al escuchar la voz de su madre continuamente. Cuando regresa se encuentra con una situación mucho peor de la que había dejado. Iliana se enfrenta con la escena de que Marina, otra de las hermanas, ha enloquecido y cree tener poderes especiales para ver espíritus y demonios, y juzgar las acciones impías de los demás. Su locura la lleva, entre otras cosas, a atentar contra su vida en más de una ocasión y a incendiar la cocina de sus padres a causa de sus alucinaciones.

Rebecca, la hija mayor, también lleva una vida traumática. Su primer matrimonio fue una relación tormentosa, ya que su esposo abusaba físicamente de ella. En su nueva relación con Pasión (su nueva pareja) la historia se repite. Éste también le pega y abusa de ella sexualmente en las maneras más viles, y cría gallos dentro de la casa que empeoran las condiciones salubres del hogar. Sin embargo, Rebecca reanuda sus relaciones continuamente, poniendo en peligro las vidas de sus hijos Esperanza y Rubén, quienes ya viven en extremo descuido. Entre los otros hermanos, cuyas vidas pasan a un segundo plano, hallamos una hija que se marcha y de la cual no se vuelve a saber nada, y dos hermanos con una agresiva disputa a causa de una mujer que ha engañado a uno de ellos siéndole infiel con el otro.

La novela incluye una conversación con la autora al final del texto, en la cual Pérez explica las razones que la inspiraron a escribir *Geographies of Home*: "While making through the street in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and even Manhattan, I have on occasion heard roosters crowing in neighborhoods where I knew for a fact there were no livestock markets. (Pérez, *A Pinguins Guide* 5)".⁹ Aunque el contexto extraliterario en el que surge la obra no está marcado por ningún acontecimiento político o histórico en especial, éste sí se sitúa en el diario vivir de una comunidad predominantemente latina en Nueva York. Pérez subraya la importancia en su obra de

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un espacio urbano estadounidense en el que se mezclan elementos de la cultura rural latinoamericana y caribeña. Sin embargo, a nivel intertextual las historias individuales se entretajan con la historia del Trujillato en la República Dominicana, cuyas referencias aparecen continuamente y sirven como punto de comparación para las situaciones que viven como inmigrantes en Nueva York. El trasfondo político de la novela traza uno de los principales hechos traumáticos de la obra. Esta tal vez sea una de las pocas referencias históricas que nos ayudan a ubicar cronológicamente la historia en un momento histórico específico. El texto sí nos revela que Papito y Aurelia vivieron la dictadura del General Rafael Leonidas Trujillo y salieron de la isla en el curso de la misma, lo cual ubica la parte de la historia que se desarrolla en la República Dominicana entre el 1930-1960. Hallamos una de las más claras referencias cuando Aurelia recalca la incertidumbre que siente como inmigrante en tierra ajena y sobre todo la poca familiaridad del espacio que habita (Pérez 23).¹⁰ Aurelia afirma que ni tan siquiera el Trujillato en la República Dominicana logró hacerle sentir la inseguridad y la vulnerabilidad que ahora sentía en el exilio (Pérez 23). De esta manera, se establece claramente el impacto emocional que tiene la inmigración a los Estados Unidos en el cuerpo migrante de esta familia, y este es tal, que sus efectos son mayores a los de la dictadura misma en el país natal.¹¹

Aunque alguno/as académico/as, entre los que resalta Lapétra Rochelle Bowman en su análisis de esta novela, reconocen el cuerpo como un agente y como un espacio para la inscripción de la historia colonial en la inmigración, ello/as no se detienen a examinar el vocabulario empleado por Pérez en la novela, relacionado al cuerpo, el trauma, y lo patológico. Estos son claves para comprender la imagen de la República Dominicana que se construye en su obra desde el espacio de la diáspora y explican las relaciones entre el trauma causado por el Trujillato, la religión, la enfermedad, y la historia cultural. Tanto el tema de la religión en Nueva York y en la

República Dominicana, como el del patriarcado y de la política sirven para representar las consecuencias de la represión en la novela y a la vez buscar formas alternas de narrar las dinámicas de una familia de raíces dominicanas, generalmente representada como católica. La autora establece paralelos entre las prácticas culturales y religiosas, y las dinámicas en una familia dominicana. Ésta subraya sus intenciones de indagar a través de su narración formas alternas de espiritualidad y religiones que no correspondan al modo tradicional en el que se han representado anteriormente. Por ejemplo a las imágenes estereotipadas de la familia latina generalmente vista como católica, y las estrictas restricciones de una religión como la de los Adventistas del Séptimo Día frente a otras tradiciones espirituales menos convencionales y marcadas socialmente como lo son el espiritismo, el gagá, el vodún y la santería. Según el antropólogo David Howard, en la República Dominicana el hogar es un espacio importante para la expresión de las religiones afro-sincréticas, practicadas principalmente en privado y fuera de la visión católica (90).¹²

En la República Dominicana estas religiones son sólo algunas de una gran variedad de afro-religiones. Muchas de ellas constituyen en mayor o menor medida una mezcla de elementos del catolicismo y religiones de descendencia africana.¹³ No obstante, las religiones cristianas protestantes tales como la pentecostal han adquirido un gran protagonismo en el país.¹⁴ En un informe titulado *Dominican Republic: A Country Study*, preparado por el historiador Richard Haggerty, éste menciona que la población general de la República Dominicana considera la práctica de las religiones afro-descendientes como paganas. Haggerty también demuestra en su informe una idea históricamente popular en la República Dominicana que asume que los haitianos y sus descendientes son quienes se adhieren al vodún, el cual se practica secretamente. Sin embargo, las manifestaciones dominicanas del protestantismo también contienen elementos africanos que se deben a las prácticas de posesiones espirituales que ambas

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corrientes religiosas comparten como parte de sus creencias y prácticas (Perkinson 569-70).

La religión y la historia se mezclan en la novela constantemente. Así por ejemplo, vemos que Papito sostiene gran parte de su fe protestante en acontecimientos que atan la religión con la historia del Trujillato, ambas igualmente represivas para la familia (Pérez 147). Para Papito la religión fue la que lo salvó de la dictadura; haberse salvado de la violencia del gobierno de Trujillo fue para él un acto de Dios (Pérez 147). Esto confirma que las condiciones políticas fueron una de las razones principales para que Papito dejara su país, y que Papito no simpatizaba con el régimen trujillista, por lo cual podía ser considerado un disidente y tanto él como su familia corrían peligro (Pérez 147). Haberse librado de la pesadilla y la incertidumbre de la dictadura para él, por lo tanto, logró afianzar y fortalecer su fe cristiana: "It was also God Who had provided them with visas for him and his entire family at a time when throngs of Dominicans had been denied exit from their country" (Pérez 147). Mientras que para Aurelia estar en Estados Unidos le hacía sentir más inseguridades que el mismo Trujillato, para Papito haber emigrado había sido el paso necesario para disipar el peligro que corrían en la isla y sólo había sido posible gracias a su fervor cristiano. En un momento en que el gobierno dominicano bloqueaba las salidas de sus ciudadanos, ellos habían logrado algo que de otra manera, hubiese sido considerado casi imposible. La familia, como metáfora del pueblo dominicano guiado esta vez por el padre, se ve forzada a aferrarse a la religión y a la emigración para poder salvar un cuerpo nacional amenazado por el gobierno.

De la misma manera en que sus padres emigraron y utilizan la religión para escapar del régimen de Trujillo, Iliana huye de una institución a la que considera represiva y atemorizante, para lo que utiliza la misma religión y la enfermedad. Sus deseos de escapar de ese ambiente represivo la llevan a estudiar fuera de casa. Sin embargo,

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termina regresando y volviendo a una situación peor de la que dejó. Al regresar de la universidad, Iliana teme que la voz que ha logrado desarrollar durante estos años sea nuevamente silenciada una vez que regrese a casa. Su educación y la distancia de su familia le habían dado la libertad y las herramientas necesarias para desarrollarse de modo separado (Pérez 10). Pero esa voz incorpórea e insistente que la llamaba en su dormitorio universitario, y que ella identificaba como su madre, comenzaba a deshacer lo que Iliana había conseguido hasta entonces y evitaba que siguiera adelante, provocándole un sentimiento de culpa por haber dejado su casa en donde ella creía que la necesitaban.

La descripción del momento en el que Iliana escucha esta voz recalca las funciones físicas que comienzan a fallar ante la ansiedad provocada por la experiencia espiritual con su madre (Pérez 2-3). Debido a que ella no posee el conocimiento necesario sobre su pasado histórico y los poderes espirituales supra naturales que su abuela le había transmitido a su madre, Iliana sentía que era el mismo demonio quien le estaba reprochando por no seguir los preceptos de la religión de sus padres mientras asistía a la universidad. Es decir, Iliana no tenía las herramientas para entender su experiencia esotérica de otra manera. El miedo que se apoderaba de su cuerpo, la falta de conocimiento sobre la historia de su madre y la represión moral en la que había sido criada, hacen que los órganos de ésta comiencen a responder de manera alarmante a la voz que la perseguía y que se identificaba con su madre (Pérez 2-3).

La descripción del narrador nos brinda un acercamiento visceral casi médico que nos lleva al interior mismo del cuerpo físico de Iliana, haciendo la intensidad del momento aún más vívida y mucho más visual para el lector. Su corazón, sus costillas y hasta su espina dorsal respondían con miedo y confusión al llamado incomprensible de la madre (Pérez 2-3). En este momento los ojos perdidos de Iliana en la oscuridad representan por una parte su extrañamiento ante lo que creía presenciar, y de manera

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metafórica, la oscuridad y la falta de información para poder entenderse a sí misma y a su entorno, y para poder comprender el bagaje familiar y cultural de su familia. Su miedo y su culpa se revelan tanto en su mente (emociones y pensamientos), como en su cuerpo físico; manifestándose la experiencia psicósomáticamente.

La conexión que Aurelia establece con Iliana en la distancia ocurre a través del cuerpo. Aurelia se transporta al dormitorio de su hija y le habla, al igual que Bienvenida lo hacía con ella. La diferencia entre ambos casos es que para Aurelia los poderes y las creencias espirituales de su madre no eran un secreto, y por esa razón tenía una mejor comprensión de la sensación que experimentaba cuando su madre la contactaba. En cambio, para Iliana la presencia espiritual de Aurelia la mortificaba, la atemorizaba y le congelaba todo el cuerpo.

La confusión entre la religión, la locura y la experiencia corporal que experimenta Iliana se repite cuando Marina, luego de regresar de su estadía en el hospital por haber intentado suicidarse, huye de los brazos de sus sobrinos quienes salen a recibirla en la casa. Los detalles en la trama y en la descripción de ese momento comparten muchas similitudes con la experiencia de Iliana. Aunque, a diferencia de Iliana, la reacción de Marina es causada por su esquizofrenia, los detalles fisiológicos y emocionales de la narración en cuanto a la contracción de la garganta, sus movimientos, un intento fallido de hablar y la final inmovilización se reproducen en ambos casos (Pérez 243-5). La presencia de su familia oprimía a Marina, como lo hacía su madre con Iliana. En ambas descripciones hallamos por lo tanto una descripción psicósomática (lo que experimenta la mente lo refleja el cuerpo físico) mediante la cual la realidad y hasta la capacidad de distinguirse a sí mismas se vuelven borrosas. Este desconocimiento experimentado por los cuerpos enfermos y las mentes atormentadas de los integrantes de esta familia inmigrante dominicana en la novela provienen del desconocimiento de sí mismos. En el caso de Marina, ésta había crecido obsesionada

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con transformarse espiritualmente en la guardiana del cristianismo en su hogar, y físicamente en un cuerpo con rasgos diferentes a los heredados de sus padres. Del mismo modo, la narración de la transformación corporal de Marina hace hincapié en aspectos médicos, tales como los narcóticos que le habían administrado en el hospital, que sirven para enfatizar ese momento de dudas y de perplejidad causada por aquello que ésta vive pero no logra comprender.

Cuando Marina huye de su casa la representación de lo abyecto se subraya aún más. Así por ejemplo, en las escenas en que ella sale de su casa bajo los efectos de las medicinas y de la ansiedad, escapando de la familia que entiende como una impostora, la trama subraya su deplorable aspecto físico, su incapacidad de auto-reconocerse y su autorechazo.¹⁵ Ambas, Marina y Rebecca, deciden abandonarse a todo y a sí mismas al extremo de una inadvertida putrefacción corporal y una inminente enfermedad mental. El tema de la huída de su familia y de sus circunstancias, aparece constantemente relacionado en la novela con el discurso de la enfermedad, para marcar los momentos de histeria y abyección que las tres hijas sufren.

Todo lo que sucede en la trama se refleja en las funciones corporales y cada pensamiento es ilustrado con una vívida descripción de las funciones biológicas, los movimientos de los órganos, el flujo de la sangre y las respuestas del sistema nervioso de los personajes (Pérez 301). Cada una de las reacciones físicas y mentales descritas minuciosamente por el narrador responde directa o indirectamente a un caos y a un ambiente enfermizo creado por la supresión del pasado histórico familiar que Aurelia y Papito han querido dejar enterrados en la República Dominicana. La supresión de su cultura e historia consume a los inmigrantes dominicanos que integran esta familia y hace que sus cuerpos se conviertan un espacio vivo y en una geografía alegórica de la República Dominicana en donde la supresión busca una válvula de escape y activa todos los organismos, pero es un escape tronchado.

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Por esta razón la mayoría de los capítulos comienzan con una descripción del cuerpo enfermo o doloroso. Por ejemplo, el momento en que Rebecca y Marina están internadas en el hospital, la primera ocurre luego de haberla hallado inconsciente por los golpes de Pasión y la segunda por intentar suicidarse. Por una parte, la descripción con la que abre el capítulo recurre a un símil clínico, ya que el dolor se expandía como un cáncer, y por otra parte el recuerdo en esta familia duele. Esto último ocurrirá en más de una ocasión y con más de un integrante. El cuerpo parece tener memoria propia, y guarda la información de sus experiencias previas y especialmente de sus maltratos (Pérez 244). Por lo tanto, la novela asigna una importancia especial a la narración clínica de las memorias, de las experiencias, y de los sentimientos, y esta manera de narrar atraviesa casi todos los capítulos y se convierte en la característica principal del lenguaje de la obra.

El texto también destaca el rechazo y la confusión que Marina e Iliana sienten por sus rasgos físicos. En el caso de Marina, como señala la escena anteriormente mencionada: "The knowledge gathered from the eyes of others had carved a path into her brain to become a part of her very being, unreconcilable as the color of her skin and the texture of her hair" (Pérez 87-88). Este pasaje nos recuerda que más allá del hecho que Marina no pueda aceptar su olor y su apariencia en algunos momentos de la novela; dichas escenas no ocurren de modo aislado, sino en relación a un rechazo a nivel racial ya internalizado pero incomprendido por los hijos. Este rechazo afecta todos los aspectos de su vida. En varias escenas de la novela se subraya que Marina no puede aceptar su condición económica y étnica, y sus rasgos físicos la desconciertan, ya que no puede entender su relación con el color de su piel "amarillenta" o la textura de su pelo que era "corto y rojizo... y ensortijado debajo de las puntas" (Pérez 40-1). Sin embargo, sus facciones representan los rasgos físicos que comúnmente se relacionan con "la raza negra": "una nariz ancha, y unos labios rellenos" (Pérez 41).

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Iliana, por su parte, exhibe una situación similar, pero aún más directa, ya que la novela abre con una escena en la que ésta es acosada en la universidad por su aspecto físico: “The ghostly trace of “NIGGER” on a message board hanging from Iliana’s door failed to assault her as it had the first time she returned to her dorm room to find it” (Pérez 1). La vida de Iliana ha sido marcada por su constitución física y su nacionalidad, dominicana y negra. Ella era rechazada en los Estados Unidos por dos grupos diferentes. Los latinos la veían como negra por el color de su piel, mientras que los afro-americanos la rechazaban por su origen étnico y cultural. El rechazo y la estigmatización a la que la sometía más de un grupo por no corresponder del todo a lo que para ellos constituía la identidad racial o cultural de cada uno de ellos traumatiza a Iliana y la lleva a envidiar los rasgos y atributos de sus compañeras de comunidad: “She would have traded her soul to have the long, straight hair and olive skin of her Spanish-speaking friends or to wear her hair in cornrows and have no trace of a Spanish accent like the Johnson girls down the street. She used to hate the question “Where are you from?” (190). Además de sufrir la persecución racista en la universidad por ser negra, Iliana tenía que soportar el rechazo de los diferentes subgrupos en su comunidad. En más de una ocasión pusieron en duda que hablase español como primer idioma, lo cual el narrador adjudica a la falta de contacto con otros dominicanos en el área que residían en Brooklyn, ya que las culturas predominantes eran la afro-americana y la puertorriqueña. El rechazo de la negritud entre las hermanas llega a ser tal que las hermanas envidiaban la nariz de Marina por ser “de blanca,” mientras que Iliana vivía acomplexada por su “baboon nose and nigger lips” (Pérez 42). Por esta razón, y por querer obtener más información sobre la herencia racial y cultural de su familia que la ayudara a entender mejor el origen de sus rasgos y de los de sus hermanos, Iliana solía analizar aquello que sí tenía a su alcance en busca de respuestas, así como las pocas fotografías familiares en la República Dominicana (Pérez 44).

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En esta casa no sólo se suprime una historia racial familiar, sino también una historia dominicana colectiva. La familia mantiene en secreto las prácticas culturales asociadas con la negritud en el Caribe y las religiones consideradas como una mezcla criolla (sincretismo) de creencias africanas y europeas (santería, vodún, el gagá y el espiritismo). Más específicamente, la familia reproduce las acciones del régimen trujillista, el cual impuso una campaña de blanqueamiento en la República Dominicana para borrar a la población negra y su herencia cultural. Esta campaña correspondió a un esfuerzo del gobierno dominicano por diferenciarse de Haití, construyendo la identidad dominicana a través de la herencia indígena para blanquear cultural e históricamente al país y relegar la negritud como parte de la identidad haitiana.¹⁶

Similar a estas campañas de blanqueamiento el silencio de Aurelia sobre su vida antes de Papito esconde una herencia cultural que en la República Dominicana es vista como negra y consecuentemente haitiana. Howard explica que los dominicanos asocian la piel oscura y la haitianidad con las religiones afro-sincréticas, incluyendo el vodún y la "brujería". (90). La identidad racial, la sexualidad y la religión que la familia había escondido se expresaba en los rasgos físicos de Iliana y en las apariciones espirituales que había experimentado, las cuales provienen de religiones como el vodún. Es una creencia popular dominicana que las mujeres haitianas pueden volar como los espíritus" (Howard 92). Por lo tanto, la familia reproduce en menor escala las actitudes raciales y religiosas desarrolladas durante la era de Trujillo. Por ejemplo, Iliana preferiría identificarse como hispana antes que como "negra." Según la socióloga Ginetta Candelario, muchos dominicanos en Estados Unidos, a quienes suele confundírsele con afro-americanos o negros, se inclinan por lo hispánico (Candelario, *Black* 13). Las actitudes sobre la raza en esta familia corresponden a las actitudes generadas históricamente en la República Dominicana, por lo que al ser inmigrantes en Estados Unidos esta diferenciación se complica porque están en contacto con otras

culturas con sus propias ideologías raciales desde las cuales se ve al dominicano como negro.

Todos estos casos (el de Marina, el de Iliana, del de Rebecca, el de Aurelia, el de los nietos de Aurelia), aunque diferentes, son síntomas o variaciones de una misma enfermedad provocada por el silencio en la familia y la falta de información sobre su pasado. De esta forma, cada miembro de la familia equivale a una parte del cuerpo convaleciente, de aquí que en unos se repitan las condiciones ya vistas en otros, con variaciones en sus manifestaciones y sus motivos, pero con las mismas situaciones generales: falta de aseo, mal olor, violencia, obsesión, autorechazo, aparentes alucinaciones, ansiedad, desespero y culpa. En la novela la familia emigrante dominicana que se desprende de su pasado histórico-cultural se convierte en un cuerpo enfermo colectivo con diferentes síntomas mentales y físicos que afectan a todas las partes por igual. Sobre todas estas circunstancias el hilo que une a todas las protagonistas principales de la novela son la baja autoestima y la inseguridad que proviene de la desvalorización de su origen étnico-racial: Aurelia rechaza el legado de su madre para ser aceptada por Papito; mientras que Marina se torna violenta al ser rechazada por los abogados. En el caso de Rebecca, ésta se somete a los abusos de sus esposos, mientras que Iliana se siente fea. Dicha situación delinea la familia como cuerpo en metástasis, con efectos psicológicos y físicos que se desplazan recíprocamente, y que son aún más visibles en los cuerpos de Marina, Rebecca e Iliana. El desconocimiento y rechazo de aquello que marca sus vidas es visible e innegable, más carece de explicación. Esto hace que la novela desemboque irremediamente en una expresión estética de aversión por la cultura propia (*cultural self-loathing*) en donde los protagonistas rechazan y desean dejar en el pasado todo aquello que los relacione a su familia y muchas veces a su herencia cultural. Esta supresión los enferma

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física y mentalmente, por lo que tenemos cuerpos inmigrantes enfermizos, débiles, esquizofrénicos, desaseados y sumamente afectados.

La novela termina con conjuros que matan a Pasión, el esposo abusivo de la hija mayor (Rebecca), necrofilia con el cadáver sucio de un esposo abusador y finalmente, violaciones entre hermanas. Aurelia y Papito habían querido suprimir todo pasado histórico familiar que relacionara al cuerpo de la familia con una cultura afro-descendiente según las creencias dominicanas (la sexualidad, el espíritu de Bienvenida y sus prácticas religiosas de influencia africana, y su herencia racial negra). Sin embargo, la composición familiar vista como un cuerpo colectivo estalla por todas partes y deja brotar con mayor fuerza todo aquello que habían tratado de contener mediante el silencio y la represión religiosa. Por este motivo el concepto de sentirse *home-sick* y regresar a casa (lo cual ocurrió al inicio de la novela) cobra un nuevo significado, y ahora obliga a Iliana a irse de la casa para escapar del cuerpo infectado de la familia.

La locura parecía haber contagiado a todos en la casa e Iliana temía estar experimentando las mismas visiones que su hermana Marina y hasta considera suicidarse. Después de todo, Iliana también es una parte del cuerpo de la familia. Papito también teme haber perdido la cordura por unos momentos y le pega a Iliana, luego de ésta haber sido violada por Marina. Todo parece indicar que ya no hay vuelta atrás. Sin embargo, Aurelia salva a la familia porque su conjuro contra Pasión logró acabar con él y así rompió el ciclo de abuso contra Rebecca. También rompe la enfermedad que corroe al cuerpo de la familia en el momento que decide contarles a sus nietos la verdad sobre la situación de Rebecca y hablar con ellos abiertamente. Es su nieta, precisamente llamada *Esperanza*, la que abre nuevas y mejores posibilidades para su familia con su respuesta: "If someone hit me, you wouldn't find me going back."

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Inmediatamente, aparece un polvo que vuela hacia la luz en las ventanas, similar al de los cuentos de hadas cuando se rompe la maldición.

Para sanar a la familia era necesario que Aurelia regresase a las costumbres religiosas de su madre, que procediera de la manera prohibida hasta el momento por Papito, que dejara a un lado la cultura de silencio. Aurelia decide usar las prácticas espirituales de Bienvenida y en ese momento evoca la memoria como terapia de cura, enfrentando sus miedos y sus fantasmas; mediante la figura de su madre recobra la fuerza para vencerlos (Pérez 135). Ella debía aceptar la herencia que su madre había intentado dejarle si quería el bienestar de su familia, y si deseaba emplear sus poderes para solucionar las situaciones. Estos cambios le recordaron a Aurelia las palabras de su madre: *"To remind you that in our blood we carry the power of the sea, she heard Bienvenida say. To quell your fear of darkness and teach your spirit it can soar"* (Pérez 299).

Las tragedias sufridas y las enfermedades habían servido para comenzar a devolver al menos la posibilidad de una vida saludable sobretodo para Iliana y para los hijos de Rebecca. Aunque Iliana decide repetir el patrón de formar su hogar aparte de todo y olvidar lo que pasó, contrario a Aurelia, ella había hecho las paces con su historia y no dejaría sus memorias en el pasado. Iliana ahora entendía que:

Everything she had experienced; everything she continued to feel for those whose lives were bound to hers; everything she had inherited from her parents and had gleaned from her siblings would aid her in her passage through the world. She would leave no memories behind.

All of them where herself. All of them were home. (Pérez 321)

Sin embargo, las experiencias le sirven para encontrar las verdades perdidas y encontrarse en ellas. El hogar para ella ahora es la suma de los recuerdos y el conocimiento de su familia, y sólo así puede recobrar su equilibrio mental y físico.

Observaciones finales

El acercamiento que hace Pérez en *Geographies of Home* a la historia colectiva dominicana y a la familiar en la diáspora abre nuevas posibilidades narrativas, rompiendo con el discurso patológico. La decisión de Iliana, como una de las mujeres principales de la familia, contribuye a la sanación del cuerpo familiar. La voz narradora muestra que la salud del cuerpo de la familia dominicana migrante depende de sus conexiones con su historia familiar y colectiva, especialmente como miembros de una cultura nacional y étnicamente diversa. El lenguaje patológico utilizado a lo largo de la narración surge cuando estas conexiones desaparecen y son silenciadas por los miembros de la familia, lo cual va ocasionando el detrimento mental y físico de los integrantes. Simultáneamente, la narración alude a una relación de dependencia entre el cuerpo sano y migrante del pueblo dominicano, y su memoria histórica. Mediante la narración, Pérez presenta la historia y la memoria como un instrumento de terapia para el cuerpo traumatizado de la familia inmigrante cuyo tránsito a los EE.UU. lo paraliza en una situación agobiante.

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Notas

¹ Todas las citas de Stuart Hall traducidas al español son de mi autoría.

² Con "historia de constantes desplazamientos y violencia" me refiero sobre todo a los acontecimientos que se desprenden de la experiencia colonial: la esclavitud, las inmigraciones forzadas y libres de los europeos, indígenas y africanos, el hambre, la aniquilación de las comunidades indígenas, las violaciones sexuales, etcétera.

³ El diccionario en línea *Merriam-Webster* define el término "psicosomático" como lo relacionado al cuerpo y a la mente, y los síntomas físicos ocasionados por disturbios mentales o emocionales. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/spanish/psicosomático>

⁴ La elección de prácticas religiosas como la santería ayuda a los personajes en su sanación. Michael Solomon también alude a la metáfora de las prácticas culturales como método de sanación en su libro *The Literature of Misogyny in Medieval Spain*.

⁵ En *Trauma, cultura e historia: reflexiones interdisciplinarias para el nuevo milenio*, Fernando Ortega Martínez, explora el campo de estudio que ocupa esta investigación: el trauma cultural. En este volumen editado se establece un análisis y una historiografía

esclarecedora y completa sobre cómo se ha desarrollado este campo, y en qué manera el trauma y la memoria explican fenómenos sociales en culturas específicas.

⁶ Julia Kristeva presenta el concepto de lo abyecto en su ensayo "Powers of Horror: An essay on abjection."

⁷ Loida Maritza Pérez actualmente se encuentra trabajando en su próxima novela *Lamentations*, la historia gira alrededor de un líder religioso dominicano.

⁸ Las traducciones del inglés al español de Loida Maritza Pérez son de mi autoría, a menos que se indique lo contrario.

⁹ Esta entrevista a Pérez aparece como apéndice de la novela. La edición no incluye el nombre del entrevistador ni el motivo de su inclusión. Sin embargo, el apéndice también incluye una serie de preguntas para discutir la novela, lo que sugiere que la entrevista puede tener el mismo objetivo pedagógico.

¹⁰ El gobierno dictatorial del general Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930-1961) en la República Dominicana, también conocido como "la era de Trujillo," ha sido considerado como uno de los más sangrientos en América Latina.

¹¹ Jill Toliver Richardson explica que antes de que llegara la tercera gran oleada de inmigrantes a Estados Unidos en 1965, y durante la dictadura trujillista, un pequeño número de dominicanos emigró a los Estados Unidos en una época en la que la dictadura militar dominicana no permitía la salida de sus ciudadanos. El éxodo masivo comenzó después de 1962, una vez asesinado Trujillo y bajo el gobierno de Joaquín Balaguer, dando comienzo a un flujo migratorio que continúa hoy. Duany añade que el modo en que los mismos dominicanos se refieren a las distintas olas migratorias sugiere el desarrollo de comunidades transnacionales e identidades diaspóricas múltiples (*Blurred Borders* 170).

¹² El sincretismo religioso se refiere a la unión de dos o más prácticas religiosas con credos diferentes.

¹³ Muchas de las religiones protestantes llegaron a la República Dominicana desde América del Norte en los 1820s. Ya para el 1920, los Adventistas del Séptimo Día se encontraban entre los grupos religiosos más populares

¹⁴ En *Dominican Republic: A Country Study*, Haggerty también narra lo siguiente sobre la progresión histórica de la religión protestante en la República Dominicana: "By the 1920s, the various Protestant groups had organized nationally and had established links with North American Evangelical groups. The main Evangelical groups included the Seventh Day Adventists, the Dominican Evangelical Church, and the Assemblies of God. Protestant groups expanded, mainly in the rural areas, during the 1960s and the 1970s; Pentecostals made considerable inroads in some regions. With minor exceptions, relations between Protestants and the Roman Catholic majority were cordial."

¹⁵ Del mismo modo vemos que esta escena se repite en otra de las hermanas cuando Rebecca deja a Pasión y se echa al abandono, huyendo de él, en casa de Aurelia (Pérez 212). En ambos casos, la decadencia y olor a putrefacción tanto de Marina como de Rebecca equivalen al "excremento" para Julia Kristeva, el cual siempre se relaciona los "orificios corporales," que a su vez son los "bordes de cuerpo" debido a que representan el peligro de identificar lo que viene del exterior: el ego amenazado por el no-ego, la sociedad amenazada por su exterior, y la vida por la muerte (Kristeva 71).

¹⁶ Según Ginetta Candelario, la institucionalización de "indio" como una clasificación racial llegó a su punto máximo durante el Trujillato a través de mecanismos como la cédula de identidad, la cual a partir de 1947 se le comenzó a exigir a los ciudadanos que cargaran con ellos todo el tiempo (13). Esta política se instaura diez años después de la masacre de decenas de miles de haitianos (1937) a manos del gobierno de Trujillo, el

incidente más violento de la campaña para enblanquecer la identidad dominicana. El historiador Eric Paul Roorda explica los motivos detrás de esta agresiva campaña en contra de la negritud y del haitianismo. Según Roorda, el ejército dominicano asesinó miles de haitianos que residían en la República Dominicana porque el nacionalismo dominicano promovido por el gobierno enfatizaba la cultura hispánica y demonizaba la haitiana y la afro-descendiente (*Black* 129).

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