



# PALARA

Publication of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association  
Fall 2020 » Issue 24

# Publication of the Afro–Latin/American Research Association (*PALARA*)

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## Call for Essays *PALARA* 25 (Fall 2021)

The Publication of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association (*PALARA*) is a multi-disciplinary journal that publishes research and creative works relevant to African Diaspora Studies in the Americas. Currently, the journal is a partnership between the University of Texas at Arlington and Mount Holyoke College.

### *Publication Guidelines for PALARA:*

1. Effective November 1, 2017, all articles for review must be submitted through the open access system at <https://journals.tdl.org/palara/index.php/palara/index>.
2. In order for your manuscript or book review to be considered for publication with *PALARA* in the fall, then that manuscript or book review must be submitted by July 1 of that same year.
3. Manuscripts must include an abstract of 100-200 words. The abstract should provide the major objectives, methods used, findings, and conclusions. The abstract should not include references or footnotes.
4. The minimum number of text pages for a manuscript is 18 and the maximum is 25. In addition, the manuscript should follow publication guidelines of the latest edition of the Modern Language Association (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>) or Chicago Manual of Style (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/>)
5. Use endnotes and not footnotes.
6. Book reviews should be 1500 words and follow MLA or Chicago style.

# Editors' Note

Sonja Stephenson Watson • Texas Christian University

Dorothy E. Mosby • Mount Holyoke College

This year, 2020 marks the centennial year of Afro-Colombian writer Manuel Zapata Olivella's birth in Santa Cruz of Lorica, Córdoba on March 17, 1920. Zapata Olivella is the quintessential African Diaspora writer who fought against the violence, oppression, and invisibility of African descendants in the diaspora as referenced in his epic saga, *Changó, el gran putas* (1983), and especially in Colombia, a country with a long history of invisibility of its black descendants on the Pacific Coast. Zapata Olivella's *lucha* echoes that not only of the past, but reverberates in the present as we deal with the continued aftermath of the diasporic enslavement of African descendants and its global legacy. It is no coincidence that 2020 is also the year of the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the wake of the continued historic oppression of black lives globally. Black Lives Matters not only protests the contemporary extra-judicial killing of Black men and women at the hands of police and white vigilantes in the United States, but also the diasporic ones in the global south such as João Pedro Matos Pinto (Brazil), Giovanni López (México), and Anderson Arboleda (Colombia), to name a few.

Founded in 2013 in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer, Black Lives Matter has become a global hashtag (#BlackLivesMatter) to combat the systemic abuse of black citizens along with racism, discrimination, and social injustice. The movement resurfaced as a result of the unjust killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020. In many ways, this issue is also a tribute to remember the victimization, discrimination, and oppression of Black bodies globally. These themes of systemic oppression will be dominant at the next ALARA conference, which was postponed to August 2021 due to the health and safety concerns caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Next year will be the celebration of another historic event, dear to many who have been a part of ALARA since its founding, the 25th anniversary of the first ALARA conference that began in 1996 by Marvin A. Lewis and Lawrence Prescott and a host of others. At ALARA 2021, we will continue to celebrate the legacy of Manuel Zapata Olivella and other Afro-Latin American literary trailblazers who make our work possible.

This issue pays homage to Manuel Zapata Olivella and commences with three literary tributes to the author: "Homenaje a Manuel Zapata Olivella" by Yvonne Captain

Hidalgo; "La grandeza del pensamiento de Manuel Zapata Olivella" by William Mina Aragón; and "Manuel Zapata Olivella: de vagabundo a combatiente por la libertad y la igualdad en la afrodiáspora" by George Palacios. Each of these literary critics has published extensively on Afro-Colombia and the works of Zapata Olivella. Captain Hidalgo's *The Culture of Fiction in the Works of Manuel Zapata Olivella* (University of Missouri Press, 1993) "analyzes the work of contemporary Colombian novelist Olivella, focusing on his continuing humanization of the socially or economically dispossessed as his style and ideology evolved from 1947 to the 1980s." William Mina Aragón is a celebrated national and international literary critic of African Diaspora and Afro-Colombian literature and culture having penned critiques such as *La imaginación creadora afrodiaspórica* (Universidad del Cauca 2014) and *Manuel Zapata Olivella: Humanista Afrodiaspórico* (Universidad del Cauca 2014), to name a few. George Palacios is author of the forthcoming and much anticipated manuscript, *Manuel Zapata Olivella (1920-2004) pensador político, radical y hereje de la diáspora africana en las Américas* (Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana).

PALARA 24 also includes reprinted articles from previous PALARA issues that aimed to continue the legacy of Zapata Olivella's works. They include "Of Cocks and Boxers: [Black] Masculinity and National Belonging in Manuel Zapata Olivella's *Chambacú, corral de negros*" (2009) by Ligia S. Aldana, "La creación de una cultura nacional negra en *Nochebuena negra* de Juan Pablo Sojo y en *Chambacú, corral de negros* de Manuel Zapata Olivella" (2001) by Antonio D. Tillis, and two articles by author Manuel Zapata Olivella, published respectively in 1998 and 2000, "Hemingway, el cazador de la muerte: Kenya en la novela de un afrocolombiano" and "Omnipresencia Africana en la civilización universal." These articles represent a continuation of the foundational literary critical pieces on author Manuel Zapata Olivella that can only be found in PALARA.

The issue culminates with original articles and a book review that span the Spanish-speaking African diaspora: Spain, Cuba, Colombia, and Perú. Miguel A. Valerio's "Black Dancers and Musicians Performing Afro-Christian Identity in Early Modern Spain and Portugal", argues that

“afrodescendants adapted their African cosmologies and festive customs in the diaspora, rather than totally assimilate to Iberian culture.” Elizabeth Vargas’ “A Post-Occidental Ontology of Desire and Subjective Return in Gregorio Martínez’s *Crónica de músicos y diablos*” (1991) provides a reading of the late afro-Peruvian author Gregorio Martínez’s relatively unknown work *Crónica de músicos y diablos*. In her reading of *Crónica*, Vargas “reconsiders the surviving colonial co-relation between race and labor, which in the novel promotes on-going divisions between subjective and material existence.”

Paulette Ramsay’s “Constructions of Cultural Identity in the Poetry of the Afro-Colombian Ángela Castro Garcés’ *Ramillete pacífico*” (2013) argues that Ángela Castro Garcés “explores her history and various aspects of her distinctive cultural heritage to firmly construct and preserve what she embraces as her own unique cultural identity.”

Darrelstan Ferguson’s reading of *Plácido* in “Mestizaje/ Hybridity (Mesti-bridity) as Struggle, Contest and Subversion in *Plácido* (1982) by Gerardo Fullea León” returns the reader to the Hispanic Caribbean and provides an additional literary critique of the play (*Plácido*) which reconstructs the life and death of poet Gabriel de la Concepción del Valdés. Further, Ferguson illustrates that “Plácido’s execution *La Escalera*, was a most perverse show of white hegemony—a testament to the toxicity of the colonial hybrid space.”

Brandon Blakeslee’s review of Erika Denise Edwards’ *Hiding in Plain Sight: Black Women, the Law, and the Making*

*of a White Argentine Republic* reveals “that it is not that black Argentinians passively disappeared but rather they actively sought to and eventually did attain whiteness” and that “African descendants ‘ascended’ to whiteness by forming partnerships with civic and ecclesiastical authorities.”

The editors would like to welcome our new managing editor, Tyra Lewis, who has been a longstanding member of ALARA since 2004. Lewis received a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and minor in Black Studies from Boston College and a Master of Arts in Spanish and Spanish American literature from the University of Missouri. As managing editor, Ms. Lewis will assist the editors with copyediting, receipt of articles, and other managerial tasks to ensure a timely publication of the digitized journal. Welcome to the team Tyra!

#### The Editors

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# Homenaje a Manuel Zapata Olivella

Yvonne Captain PhD • George Washington University

**I**t is difficult to fathom that my mentor and friend left us more than sixteen years ago. Manuel Zapata Olivella was a great talent and an honorable man—albeit a bit rakish! Reflecting on my precious time with him and through our correspondence brings me great joy.

I first “met” Manuel as a 17 year-old college student when discovering in the library his 1963 novel *Chambacú, corral de negros* (*Chambacú: Black Slum*). It was my first inkling that there were black people in Latin America outside of Brazil. After I mustered the courage to write to him, he wrote me back! Thus began a mentor relationship and later friendship that lasted a lifetime.

A psychiatrist, by profession, Manuel was the inquisitive type never ceasing to acquire knowledge. He took it upon himself to learn-by-doing ethnography and anthropology, all the while maintaining a cheerful intellectualism that would tug at the heart of any reader or listener of his words. Psychoanalysis and reflections on the human spirit are evident in both his fictional works as well as in his memoirs and essays. Radical before it was chic, there was a type of urgency in his works that to this day resonates. It boggles the mind why the world does not know about him—as they do the other great global talents.

His literature, although worthy, somehow never made it to the classroom of most universities. I studied under some of the most progressive scholars of the period when the “boom” writers were just coming into prominence. Moreover, we could count on maybe four women writers—all poets—to form part of the curriculum: Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and the trinity of Latin American women—Juana de Ibarbournu, Gabriela Mistral and Alfonsina Storni. Except for the lone Nicolás Guillén, no writers who claimed African descent formed part of our readings. We read the criticism of Pedro Henríquez Ureña without any mention of his Afro-Dominican background. This was a period when focus changed from novels of the land and protest novels—which were part of Manuel’s repertoire. However, he also wrote short stories and novels that kept pace with the varying characteristics of the writers in classroom focus. Yet, few if any departments of Spanish would include his magnificent works. By the time of his 1983 masterpiece *Changó, el gran putas* (*Chango, the Biggest Badass*), those of us “in the know” were certain that Latin American intellectuals and

their counterparts in the United States would embrace him uncategorically. Like a few of his earlier novels, *Changó* had a clear new-narrative style that was equal to the authors we studied in school, including most of the boom writers. There was even talk about nominating him for the Nobel Prize for literature. Alas, this was not to be, as his death foreclosed on such aspirations.

As someone working on her dissertation by the time *Changó* appeared in publication, I was certain that he would soon be among the elite cadres of Latin American novelists. The anticipation of his inclusion was not for the sake of vanity, although what artist prefers to produce work after work without recognition? One primary reason for wishing him publishing success to coincide with his aesthetic genius was to achieve commercial success. One characteristic that the boom writers ushered into Latin American culture was the ability of a writer to live from his literature, without having to work in other jobs. Even the Argentine Borges, the most recognized literary talent before the boom and whose works precede the boom writers by a generation, had to work for a living. He simply did not earn enough from his publications to work at his craft. Zapata, a psychiatrist by training and a self-taught anthropologist, earned money from the former and sought grants for the latter. And what a considerable contribution his anthropological studies made. Even though we assumed he would join the pantheon of the continually read whose literature reached other cosmopolitan areas as well as the classroom, that has yet to be. Individual professors take it upon themselves to include his works in their syllabi, but there has been no movement toward adding Manuel to what we still think of as a canon of necessary works that students need to read before graduation. At least, not until now.

Fortunately, within Manuel’s native Colombia there are celebrations of his centennial that will eventually radiate outward to other countries of the world. The documentary by Director Aguado, the gradual publication of all of his works under one editorial house, and a flurry of activities that will culminate in a symposium should assure this. Consult “Año Centenario de Manuel Zapata Olivella”: <http://zapataolivella.univalle.edu.co> and the digital library on Zapata at Vanderbilt University: <https://mzo.library.vanderbilt.edu>. These are two marvelous breakthroughs that give Zapata’s followers the

sense that he will finally reach the large audience that needs to find him. African Diaspora Studies in the United States will probably be the first to marvel at this “new” genius. However, as has been the case often in Latin America, once the rest of the world praises a great figure, Latin Americans claim him or her as their own. Moreover, as one sees lately, countries are awakening to their own deeply rooted prejudices of all kinds during the protests over the murder of George Floyd. It is clear the part of the inability to recognize Manuel as a formidable writer is due to his Afro-centric stance. Fortunately, people are genuinely asking how they can make life better for all their citizens. It is possible to see this in Colombia and the whole of Latin America.

Within African Diaspora thought, there is movement toward recognizing the great intellectuals who lead us to where we are today. Thankfully, there is a cadre of Afro-Latin scholars who are able to bring to the table a discussion about Manuel’s contribution to a sense of Diaspora culture and thought. However, the age-old issue of translation continues to be a problem, even though younger scholars typically know more than one language before receiving the Ph.D. Several of his novels receive translation, and two of those often make it into scholarly works. Consider his groundbreaking *Changó*, as well as *Chambacú* that I mentioned above. However, little of his writing beyond the novels that manifest his worldview receive translation or receive study. The difficult, brilliant work and organization by Dean Darío Heno of Universidad del Valle in Medellín, Colombia as well as the equally impressive body of work by Dr. William Mina go a long way in sharing Manuel’s talent with the Spanish-speaking world. However, Zapata needs to be among the intellectuals regularly appearing in scholarly treatises about the Diaspora’s makeup. In order for this to happen, translations into English of his essays must occur.

Essential to understanding Manuel’s writings is the truth that this wonderful human being constantly referred to himself as a vagabond. Indeed, throughout his adult life, he could not resist the urge to travel. Throughout Latin America, all over the United States, to Senegal, China, Russia and other places, Manuel made himself at home. He made friends along the way, many of them famous, but others were the ordinary people he so loved to befriend. It is no wonder that I ran into my parapetetic buddy twice in separate airports. Once he was returning from a country in Africa to El Dorado Airport in Colombia as I was entering to do some research. No surprise there. The second time, I was so shocked to see him at my hotel in Caracas, Venezuela that the jolt of seeing him was so genuine that people around me thought I would faint. We chatted for a while, and he gave me my first copy of *iLevántate mulato!* with a playful inscription as only he could write.

There is a final personal observation about my friend the writer and psychiatrist, even though I have no background in psychology to back up my comments. Manuel must have been affected by the occasional struggle with the all-too-familiar

polemic in U.S. black America—not black enough. Colorism in reverse. Born in Lorica, a small town not far from Cartagena, he was not from Chocó where over 90% of the population is black; nor was he from the Palenque de San Basilio—a maroon community in the Atlantic coast region and still very much alive in the twenty-first century. Instead, his indigenous pre-Columbian and white Spanish roots run deep—as it does for many in the area from which he hails. Rather than deny those roots, Manuel embraced them. One often reads in his work the term “tri-ethnic”. His black critics—by no means all of Afro-Colombia—wanted him to address only those issues that affect black people. Yet, no one should deny the brilliance in his artistic rendering of peasants’ belief in the saintliness of a young acolyte whose body somehow never decays years after his death. The depiction of the missing indigenous boy sensitizes even the most cynical reader as the psychiatrist tries to piece together the fragmented observations about his disappearance. The working poor and street dwellers who awaken to their plight and rebel, albeit to an unfavorable end, forces the reader to consider the plight of the poor. A short story that mocks his fellow upper class colleagues for their lives without moral anchors leaves anyone pondering what it means to have an education, but not use it towards the betterment of the country’s citizens. All of these works that do not have black people at the center of the narrative come from the same author. What they have in common with Zapata’s black works is his unique style. It also ties him to the pantheon of writers who continue to be classroom musts in academia. Yet, thematically, the above works also say what others say. It is through his works with a decidedly black focus that Zapata makes an indelible mark on Colombian, Latin American and world letters.

We the academics, students and activists need to ensure his place in global letters. For those who have yet to read his works, now is the time to do so. Not all of what he writes appears in English translation—so far. Especially his essays and memoirs do not reach a wider audience outside of Spanish speakers. One option is for the reader to brush up on the college-level Spanish, and read the brilliance that awaits.



# La grandeza del pensamiento de Manuel Zapata Olivella<sup>1</sup>

William Mina Aragón PhD<sup>2</sup> • Universidad del Cauca

Este merecido homenaje a MZO surgió como idea en Cartagena de Indias en el año 2013 en un diálogo con Marcelo Fajardo - Cárdenas, amigo cubano que enseña en la universidad Mary Washington, le exprese que quería organizar un congreso internacional para conmemorar el decenio de la “muerte” del escritor, novelista, ensayista y pensador de la afrodiáspora MZO. Me dijo con entusiasmo, ¡iátrévete! Porque eso no se ha hecho. Le pedí que me diera fuerzas a la distancia que yo sacaré la inspiración, la porfía y la abnegación en las profundidades de mi ser para materializarlo. De modo que lo que los lectores tienen aquí es un cúmulo de esfuerzos personales, institucionales, grupales y de colegas altruistas para enaltecer la vida y obra del médico, antropólogo, ciudadano, militante, periodista, vagabundo y uno de los intelectuales más prolijos de la afrocolombianidad y uno de los escritores más grandes del pensamiento diaspórico en todos los tiempos; comparable con Diop y Senghor en el África, con Du Bois en los Estados Unidos, con Fanon, Césaire y Edouard Glissant en el Caribe, con Rogerio Velásquez en Colombia, con Abdías Do Nascimento en Brasil, con Nicomedes Santacruz en el Perú, Nelson Estupiñán Bass en Ecuador y Quince Duncan en Costa Rica.

MZO se movió en muchas prácticas discursivas, en muchos saberes, siendo él mismo una red para que autores, escuelas, pensamientos y tendencias establecieran un diálogo multi-inter-pluri-cultural de Colombia para América-Indo-afro-ibero-América, vía el Caribe, camino a Estados Unidos y desde allí para el África Sub-sahariana; el África como padre y madre donde la aventura humana del antropos-homo sapiens-demens-ludens en su manifestación física fuese un hecho. Allí “empezó todo”, es por ello que titulamos a estas memorias de este coloquio internacional *Un legado inter cultural. (Perspectiva intelectual, literaria y política de un afrocolombiano cosmopolita.)*, pues lo más característico de él fue hacer dialogar y entrecruzar los saberes, desde donde MZO ejerció, maestría, inteligencia y creatividad. Un novelista universal y un literato cosmopolita, pues, “todo le interesaba” como cierto día dijo Ernesto Sábato de sí mismo, un cosmopolita como Edgar Morín o Enrique Dussel. El mensaje de su obra, de su pensamiento y reflexión a la humanidad y del destino del hombre en su conjunto con sus valores y cosmovisiones es lo más palmario y característico en él y fue esa la razón porque le llame un Humanista

de la diáspora afro<sup>3</sup> llevando mensaje de fraternidad para la especie desde la filosofía del muntu. Lo anteriormente dicho debe extirpar de raíz los malentendidos que han visto en MZO a un folclorista interesado sólo por los temas de la africanía en Colombia. Su pasión por el conocimiento del pensamiento diaspórico y del continente africano estaba apuntalado por dar a conocer sus logros como humanidad, la creatividad de los miles de descendientes de africanos- que no esclavos a secas- que llegaron a las Américas que desde tiempos emergentes – que no primitivos- que desde tiempos milenarios nutrieron el acervo cultural de la humanidad con toda su sabiduría de filosofía, de arte, de derecho, de ciencia, de literatura, de políticas pero también de mitos y leyendas. A todo ello debemos llamarla “la imaginación creadora afrodiaspórica”.

Si a esto los críticos le quieren llamar “esencialismo, afrocentrismo, esteticismo, lo afro sobrevalorando lo afro, epistemología afrodiaspórica”, bienvenida toda esa terminología, pues para mí también y para quienes asistieron al congreso la finalidad y proyección era exaltar un pensamiento lúcido, inteligente, original y creativo pero que ha sido invisibilizado, marginalizado o *fronterizo* para utilizar la bella metáfora de Walter Mignolo (2005: 35,80); pero que hoy en adelante ha de ser universal, valorado y visibilizado no porque sea hecho y escrito por un hombre afro del Caribe colombiano, sino porque su obra recoge herencias, tradiciones, legados, memorias de las tres grandes civilizaciones: la Europea, la Africana y la Amerindia. De modo que no nos aferramos a lo afro por lo afro, a lo diaspórico por lo diaspórico, a la africanidad por la africanidad, a la negritud por la negritud, a la diáspora por la diáspora; buscamos y acogemos lo inventivo, lo creativo, lo novedoso no en tanto que es moda si no lo que es hecho, tallado, y fabricado como obra, discurso, argumento penetrante, explosivo y que tiene todos los atributos, dones, méritos de la psique e inteligencia humana; creo que todas estas virtudes estaban presentes en el pensamiento de MZO. Tengo certeza que los lectores de estas memorias redescubrirán ello al asumir su interpretación de modo crítico y de ninguna manera ortodoxa. Y entonces, tiempos nuevos para nuevas estéticas, perspectivas ontológicas otras, discursos poéticos alternativos, lenguajes narrativos diferentes, pues ya es hora de que occidente, su academia, su universidad, haga un verdadero diálogo

intercultural escuchando la música diaspórica de las palabras de la polifonía de un “canto general”, de un pensamiento universal, plural, planetario como la obra hecha arte y vida en MZO. Quienes conocimos a MZO podemos decir que era una persona sencilla, humilde, despojada de los bienes materiales y desapegado de casi todo. Su risotada era lo más característico, pues a todo le sacaba el “coco”. Sólo pedía y exigía a sus amigos, a sus receptores, a la sociedad Colombiana que su obra fuera leída para que los jóvenes y las futuras generaciones de la diáspora tuvieran una esperanza de diálogo fraterno e intercultural en plenitud de igualdades con el diferente en religión, idioma, etnia y cultura en general.

Los lectores de estas memorias se darán cuenta que la obra más trabajada aquí por los ponentes es *Changó*, justamente por los indistintos frentes epistemológicos desde donde la obra se deja interpretar. Ella es el alma y vida de la reflexión madura llena de filosofía y poesía y lenguaje imaginativo de don MZO. Creemos que si se hubiese conocido a su debido tiempo en inglés o por la academia sueca, *Changó, El gran putas* hubiese sido un digno candidato a nobel de literatura, pues, está escrita a la altura a nivel estilístico, de imaginación con la que escribieron Soyinka, Morrison y Achebe. La novela está a la altura de las grandes proezas de la literatura latinoamericana del siglo XX y MZO a la altura del pre-post-boom de la narrativa de América mestiza, ni inferior ni superior, al nivel de Gabo, de Vargas Llosa, de Fuentes, de Octavio Paz, de Asturias, de Carpentier, y en el mismo panteón de los grandes ensayistas americanistas como José Enrique Rodó, José Martí, Pedro Enrique Ureña, Jorge Luis Borges, Jorge Amado, Leopoldo Zea, Alfonso Reyes y Fernando Ortiz. Tenemos en MZO un gran colombiano del siglo XX y el libro *El Hombre Colombiano (1974)* es un buen ejemplo para ello. Desde su obra el pensamiento de-post-colonial tendrá que llamarle “compañero de viaje”, de des-alienaciones históricas y des-enajenaciones sociales. Esta misma corriente tendrá que volver a él porque muchas de sus ideas, lenguajes, discursos y conceptualizaciones ya habían sido estudiadas por él. Nos referimos a cuestiones como: la etnicidad, la conciencia intelectual afro diaspórica, la africanidad como legado cultural, la conexión del Atlántico con el pacífico, la dicotomía y unidad entre identidad y diversidad, la ocultación - subvalorización de la historia de África y su acervo cultural a la humanidad y a los genes mestizos, la invisibilidad en la universidad de los escritores y pensadores de ascendencia africana, el nacionalismo literario, la novela colonizada y las prácticas pseudo racistas de gran parte de la academia latinoamericana que ha hecho a un lado el aporte afrodescendiente y de la africanía a las ciencias generales del hombre. Los estudios culturales tendrán que ver en MZO un referente de remisiones necesarias, imprescindibles y ubicar su reflexión en el rango de notoriedad y creatividad de Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, C.L.R James, Sylvia Wynter, Anthony Bogues; entre otros.

La faceta de MZO como intelectual es una de las más dignas de admirar dentro de su formación cultural. ¿Tiene alguna función social la novela? ¿Tiene el académico algún

compromiso con su sociedad? ¿Tiene el escritor alguna misión con la ciudad? ¿Son los artistas e intelectuales sujetos públicos? ¿Hay que comprometerse en el mundo histórico - social por una causa o proyecto político ideológico por parte del literato, o debe sólo dedicarse a escribir, a pulir las técnicas del lenguaje? Para MZO la literatura no era panfletaria, ni debería serlo, pero no concebía a un escritor sin conciencia étnica, sin el conocimiento de una historia y sin responsabilidades políticas y morales. Se debía escribir bien pero la escritura tendría que construir y formar una conciencia crítica en los lectores. El compromiso es con la palabra, con la estética, con el discurso del arte por el arte de escribir bien, pero también frente a las injusticias sociales. Antes que defender discursos y lenguajes hegemónicos de los Estados, la labor ética de un profundo escritor en tanto ciudadano, es fumigar las ideologías, los totalitarismos y los esquemas que llevan a la clausura política de toda disidencia. El escritor, el novelista debe estar facultados para poder escribir, pensar, decir, y refutar todo con su pluma. Como intelectual y novelista tenemos a un MZO que asumió una posición política de izquierda y que vio en el socialismo el modelo de sociedad a seguir. Hemos aquí con un intelectual que criticará la marginalidad, la invisibilidad y la exclusión cultural, económica y política de los grupos minoritarios en el globo. Hemos aquí con un intelectual como MZO, que desde joven adquiere conciencia de su identidad triétnica. Hemos aquí con un intelectual que va a arremeter contra cualquier tipo de discriminación racial. Hemos aquí con un escritor y ciudadano con una subjetividad subversiva, resistente y disidente que busca la libertad y la autonomía del pueblo por el pueblo. Creo que MZO bien podría ser recordado como Octavio Paz por sus luchas a favor de la libertad individual y colectiva, y la defensa libertaria de un lenguaje de originalidad y autenticidad del escritor, del intelectual. ¿Nos permite la vida, los viajes y la obra ínter cultural de MZO hacer una reflexión profunda del *affaire*, de una clase intelectual afrodiaspórica? Claro que sí, y los epicentros de esa discusión no serían el París de Camus, de Breton, de Sartre sino Bogotá, Cartagena de indias, Barranquilla, Loricá, Harlem y Port Spain que él recorrió. El espacio desde donde se haría el gran debate conceptual serían los lugares del ser y del pensar de la africanía, desde los intelectuales de la afrodiáspora que han discutido al respecto: Soyinka, y Senghor referente a la Tigritud - Negritud, Senghor y Diop entorno a la verdadera identidad cultural africana, Du Bois y Garvey alrededor de cómo ser o no afro norteamericano (integrarse o volver al África), King y Malcolm X sobre la naturaleza del movimiento político afro recurriendo a la no violencia o a la combinación de todas las formas de lucha, seguir siendo servil al régimen neo colonial o subvertirse contra él, ser disidente de los regímenes capitalistas o volverse socialistas a secas, hacer un movimiento político autónomo afrodiaspórico o ser simples militantes de los partidos y parlamentos políticos occidentales tradicionales. Manuel como intelectual afro diaspórico inscrito en el contexto latinoamericano conoció el caribe

afro de Cèsaire y Fanon, el pacífico de Martán y Velásquez, el Atlántico de Artel y de Obeso, las Guayanas de Damas, y las luchas identitarias de los escritores africanos y caribeños en Europa con la creación de revistas como “Legítima defensa”, “Presencia africana”, “El estudiante negro” espacios culturales que dieron significación, valoración, y pertenencia a una ciudadanía universal de pensamiento y reflexión a la africanía en el mundo académico.

El sendero de MZO como viajero y vagabundo, es uno de los más dignos de admirar entre 1943 y 1947 cuando viajó a pie por Centroamérica hasta llegar a los Estados Unidos. ¡Cuándo algún cineasta se atreverá a llevar a escena este épico y lírico paso por la vida de este aventurero, escritor, soñador y novelista! Libros como *Pasión Vagabunda, he visto la noche, China 6AM y Tambores de América para despertar al viejo mundo* (Inédita), son fehacientes testimonios de una vida donde el viaje y la aventura se metamorfosearon en crónica, relatos, dramas, fábulas y miradas ínter culturales de rostros, cuerpos, símbolos y obras. Diría que en cada uno de esos vagabundajes, en las ansias de ser, aprendió algo, conoció algo; resaltaría en su estancia en México su amistad con Mario Azuela, José Revuelta y con Diego Rivera, quien plasmó su rostro de mulato en uno de sus murales. ¡Falta que alguien se atreva a analizar la estancia de MZO en México! En Estados es significativo mencionar su amistad con el poeta

L. Hughes y con Ciro Alegría quien hará el brillante prólogo de su primera novela *Tierra Mojada*, donde se entremezcla el realismo mítico, la ínter culturalidad o el mestizaje triétnico y la cuestión socio política. De su viaje a la China de Mao Tse Tung le dejó el legado de conocer a insignes intelectuales y escritores como Neruda y Jorge Amado, y una recompensa desafortunada una vez de regreso a Colombia al saborear los aromas de la cárcel bajo el régimen de Laureano Gómez al viajar a un país que en tiempos de guerra fría significaba “Ser un peligro intelectual para la sociedad colombiana”, era la segunda vez que Manuel era llevado a la cárcel, pues la primera fue en Bogotá en los años 40 cuando antes de irse de vagabundo por el mundo gritó en las calles de la capital de la república ¡Vivan los negros! ¡Abajo el racismo! arengas de compromiso político de las que nacerían el día del afro y el movimiento afro en Colombia, avivados por un escritor, un novelista, un intelectual comprometido con su ciudad, con su sociedad, con la literatura y con su etnia.

Excepto el género cuento, todas las demás facetas de este pensador y ensayista cosmopolita que entrecruza los saberes fueron estudiadas en el congreso. Eso dice mucho sobre la amplia red del pensamiento diaspórico que se construirá a partir de hoy desde su obra, desde aquí, desde Popayán, desde la Universidad de Cauca, desde Colombia para el mundo entero.

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## NOTAS

1. Tomado de mi libro *Novela, sociedad y cultura* (2017), Asociación Iberoamericana de Filosofía Práctica, Cuernavaca, que fue resultado del Congreso Internacional sobre Manuel Zapata Olivella realizado en Popayán (2014).
2. Filósofo Universidad del Valle y PhD en Sociología y ciencia política de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, profesor titular Universidad del Cauca, Facultad de derecho Ciencias políticas y Sociales, miembro del Grupo de Investigación Actores, procesos e instituciones políticas (Giaprip).
3. Ver mis libros *MZO: Un humanista afrodiaspórico*, Asociación Iberoamericana de Filosofía práctica, (Cuernavaca, México, 2014). y *La Imaginación Creadora Afrodiaspóricas*, Asociación Iberoamericana de Filosofía práctica, (Cuernavaca, México, 2014).



# Manuel Zapata Olivella: de vagabundo a combatiente por la libertad y la igualdad en la afrodiáspora

George Palacios • Clemson University

Pensar las sociedades y culturas afrodescendientes en sus ámbitos políticos, sociales y culturales hoy, implica comprender que el reconocimiento y la afirmación de la herencia africana es fundamental en el desarrollo de las sociedades latinoamericanas contemporáneas en clave plural e intercultural y más allá de sus fronteras nacionales. Esto es así no solamente porque dichos reconocimientos y afirmaciones se hicieron visibles a partir de las reformas constitucionales y políticas de finales de siglo XX (Van Cott 1-35), sino también porque el ejercicio político y cultural de un intelectual y activista como Manuel Zapata Olivella tuvo un impacto significativo al destacar el protagonismo de los individuos y las comunidades afrodescendientes en la lucha, resistencia y (re)creación permanentes de sus sociedades en los espacios locales, nacionales y globales (Tillis 126-32).

Al identificarse como sujeto racializado, Manuel Zapata Olivella describe sus experiencias de viaje (tanto las físicas como las simbólicas) como vagabundeos. Esto para poder expresar sin restricción alguna su tránsito a través de la historia, la política, la literatura, la antropología y el activismo social, entre otras disciplinas del conocimiento, y así lograr comprender crítica y ampliamente las diversas tradiciones que la afrodiáspora desarrolló en Colombia, Latinoamérica y los Estados Unidos<sup>1</sup>. El espíritu vagabundo de Zapata Olivella refleja que conocer de primera mano las difíciles experiencias de vida de sus congéneres, fueran estos trabajadores, analfabetas, campesinos o desposeídos y, por sobre todo, discriminados y apartados social, económica y racialmente, implicaba articular un proyecto intelectual radical en su contexto social y cultural. Por esto, Zapata Olivella se anticipa por mucho tiempo a las conceptualizaciones pluri/multiculturales avanzadas por las reformas constitucionales del Estado-nación latinoamericano hacia finales del siglo XX<sup>2</sup>.

El pensamiento afrodiaspórico se enfoca en examinar profundamente las implicaciones que tiene la presencia africana en las sociedades americanas no solamente en el pasado sino también en el dinámico y conflictivo presente. Zapata Olivella asume esta tarea acudiendo a la escritura y al activismo sociocultural como ejes transformadores que permiten cruzar las fronteras físicas e imaginadas de las comunidades para vagabundear o errar en el espacio y el tiempo históricos. Su

propósito al escribir es evaluar críticamente las condiciones por las cuales históricamente se ha intentado silenciar los aportes cruciales que ha hecho la afrodiáspora a la vida social y cultural de Colombia y Latinoamérica. William Mina Aragón (2006) observa que el “vagabundaje” en Zapata Olivella es un elemento imprescindible para su formación como médico, novelista, antropólogo y pensador. Según este crítico, el joven Zapata Olivella,

Guiado por Arturo Cova —el personaje de *La vorágine* que antes de desaparecer, subsumido por la voraz selva, se adentra en las caucheras del Amazonas para hacer una denuncia social— [...] inicia su aventura de caminante vagabundo por los Llanos Orientales (Villavicencio), para luego ir a Bogotá, a Ibagué, a Cali, a Buenaventura, al Chocó y finalmente a Cartagena [...] [y, así] empezaría sus andanzas por América Central (de Panamá a México), y luego a los Estados Unidos. (Mina Aragón 51-52).

En vista de Mina Aragón las ideas del viaje, tanto en el mundo de la ficción como en el de la experiencia vital de Zapata Olivella, están estrechamente ligados con el despertar de la conciencia que le lleva a hacer el análisis crítico y su correspondiente denuncia social, a través de su producción intelectual en forma de novela, teatro o ensayo, entre otros géneros escriturales, para hacer visible la negación, el ocultamiento y el silenciamiento del legado histórico, social y cultural africano a lo largo y ancho de su país y las regiones del continente americano.

Del mismo modo, José Luís Garcés González (2002) destaca la etapa de “caminante” de nuestro autor como un momento inaugural en los ámbitos literarios e históricos de Colombia y las Américas, subrayando que Zapata Olivella “[D]esde que inició su carrera de caminante a pie desde su natal Colombia, pasando por ese gusano de peripecias que era [es] Centroamérica hasta llegar a Nueva York, la conciencia de este mulato se amplía y profundiza: de conciencia en sí se torna en conciencia para sí” (9). Desde luego, tal profundización de conciencia propicia que Zapata Olivella al abandonar el vagabundaje físico, “egocéntrico”, en vista de Garcés González, asuma una conciencia “policéntrica, racial

y clasista” (9). Es decir, una vez nuestro autor viaja, vagabundea, atraviesa su país y medio continente a pie, y vive la experiencia preconizada por W.E.B. Du Bois en su ya famosa sentencia: “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line” (Du Bois), descubre y, a la vez, afirma su intuición de una realidad profunda: la existencia de una dolorosa ruptura justo en la intersección entre raza y clase en un mundo (las Américas) donde los afrodescendientes parecen no tener un lugar digno para existir libremente.

Por esto, cuando el joven Zapata Olivella relata que viajaba en bus hacia Los Ángeles y el conductor le pidió que se levantara del puesto donde estaba y se fuera a sentar en el lugar que les correspondía a los negros (la parte trasera), nuestro autor pudo comprender que “allí viajaban los negros unidos por la misma opresión, mermados por el mismo opresor” y, por esto, escribiría en *¡Levántate mulato! “Por mi raza hablará el espíritu”* (1990) que: “En aquel instante alcancé a comprender que el vagabundo había muerto y nació el combatiente por la igualdad de los hombres, cualquiera fuera el color de su piel” (Garcés González 29). Reseñar esta anécdota de la vida de Zapata Olivella es importante por el hecho de que fue una experiencia indeleble vivida en un momento histórico sin igual en las Américas y con gran influencia para su vida creativa y personal (Garcés González 29)<sup>3</sup>. Laurence E. Prescott afirma que “[...] travel literature has been a particularly cogent and successful form of manifesting, transmitting and reinforcing the relationship between power and knowledge (Journeying Through Jim Crow 4). Es por esto que aun con la terrible experiencia de ser obligado a sentarse en la parte trasera de un bus de servicio público en tiempos de Jim Crow, Zapata Olivella,

Never erased or attempted to conceal his identity as a person of African descent. Neither, unlike other, more privileged visitors from below the Río Bravo, did he use his Latin American identity to evade or gain immunity from the discriminatory treatment accorded to people of color. Rather, as a person fully aware of his mixed racial parentage, he chose to embrace his blackness by identifying with those who were the victims of segregation and whom he called “mis hermanos de raza”. (Journeying Through Jim Crow 23)

Identificarse con las víctimas de la segregación racial, económica, histórica y política en su natal Colombia y fuera de ella se convertiría en la misión intelectual y artística de Zapata Olivella durante toda su vida. Dentro del amplio archivo de sus reflexiones publicadas en forma de ensayo, conviene observar cómo en *Las claves mágicas de América* (1989), nuestro autor apuntala la importancia de releer, o mejor (re)relatar la historia colombiana y, por extensión, la del continente en cuanto a la problemática racial se refiere, proponiendo que:

El aporte cultural de los negros es generalmente desconocido y negado [...] el acceso de los negros a las escuelas y universidades persiste en ser tan difícil o imposible como lo fue en el régimen de castas de la Colonia [...] los índices de desempleo, pobreza, mortandad y morbilidad afectan en primer lugar a los negros, mulatos y zambos que no han podido recuperarse de la desheredad que les dejó la independencia. Lo más angustioso de la depauperización son las amputaciones psicológicas y culturales que moldean la mentalidad del subdesarrollo en los analfabetas y semiletreados [...] constituidos en su inmensa mayoría por gentes pigmentadas que vegetan en condiciones infrahumanas bajo el régimen de las oligarquías económicas, autollamadas blancas (Zapata Olivella 168-69)

Zapata Olivella señala cómo las reglas de juego para la constitución de la sociedad colombiana trazadas desde tiempos coloniales continúan incidiendo en el desarrollo de las comunidades e individuos afrodescendientes. Al respecto nos informa sin reserva alguna:

En Colombia como en otros países latinos donde hay una reconocida población negra, la actitud general es la de negar la existencia de problemas raciales [...] Desde luego, este encubrimiento por parte de los blancos y mestizos, aceptado inconsciente o lúcidamente, inclusive por la mayoría de los descendientes africanos, no es otra cosa que la introyección de la vieja escala de valores de la supremacía blanca. En la escuela, clubes, establecimientos públicos, en la política, colegios y universidades, así como en las fábricas y otras actividades, encontramos negros, en una forma u otra incorporados al proceso sociocultural. Pero esto no niega la existencia de prácticas discriminatorias en un orden republicano que ha perpetuado los privilegios y prejuicios de la sociedad colonial. (179)

La negación de la problemática racial por parte del establecimiento en Colombia, en vista de Zapata Olivella responde a la perpetuación de patrones, “privilegios” y “prejuicios” de una sociedad colonial enraizada y prolongada por la vida de la república independiente. Tal vez por ello declararíamos nuestro autor sin restricción alguna que se tiene que “incinerar todos los textos de historia de Colombia y de América en los cuales al contar nuestras guerras de Independencia se ignora o minimiza lo influjos de los levantamientos de indios y negros” (144). Incinerar los libros en este contexto apunta a la necesidad de acabar con ese proceso que Trouillot (1995) ha llamado el “silenciamiento” y “borramiento” del “pasado” vía la “banalización” de cualquier intento por poner entre dicho las narraciones, ontologías, epistemologías y prácticas que se han llegado a constituir como las “narrativas maestras” de la historia (83-91). En otras palabras, para Zapata Olivella es importante señalar que:

Son racistas todos aquellos relatos e interpretaciones que olvidan la importancia decisiva que tuvo la Revolución Antiesclavista de Haití, cuya victoria influyó no solo en la organización de los ejércitos libertadores [...], sino en el pensamiento de los pueblos de toda América. Fue ella la que demostró que el colonialismo europeo, pese a sus grandes ejércitos [...] podía ser derrotado. (*Las claves mágicas de América* 175)

Al celebrar en 2020 el natalicio centenario de Zapata Olivella, su llamado a no olvidar y adoptar la histórica lucha antirracista haitiana para poder vencer el colonialismo y su legado discriminatorio en todas las Américas es evidentemente relevante y actual. La tarea emprendida por Zapata Olivella nos revela las “claves mágicas” para

articular las experiencias de vida individuales y comunitarias con espacios de creación literaria y reflexión histórica y política para intentar cambiar las nefastas asimetrías cimentadas en las relaciones sociales, económicas y raciales coloniales y de la línea de color ya identificada por Du Bois. El pensamiento de Manuel Zapata Olivella, al reconstruir e imaginar el pasado y fincar su esperanza en un mejor futuro para los hijos de la afrodíspora, con su creatividad literaria y liderazgo intelectual y social, nos ha mostrado los problemas y propuesto distintas maneras de solucionarlos. El mejor homenaje que podemos hacer a Manuel Zapata Olivella es la impostergable lectura permanente de sus obras, analizándolas críticamente y desde múltiples perspectivas, tanto en nuestras aulas como en las plazas públicas, para afirmar su relevancia en el mundo de hoy.

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## NOTAS

1. Remitirse a los trabajos de Ortiz, pp. 29-32 y Krakusin, pp. 23-28.
2. Obsérvese su liderazgo en la organización del Primer Congreso de la Cultura Negra realizado en Cali, Colombia en 1977 y siguientes encuentros en Ciudad de Panamá, Panamá en 1980 y São Paulo, Brasil en 1982.
3. Laurence Prescott también reseña esta experiencia como formativa y fundamental en el ulterior proceso creativo y personal de nuestro autor. Véanse “Journeying Through Jim Crow”, pp. 21-23 y “Brother to Brother”, pp. 93-98, en donde se describe la amistad sostenida entre nuestro autor y Langston Hughes desde su encuentro personal en Harlem.

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# Of Cocks and Boxers: [Black] Masculinity and National Belonging in Manuel Zapata Olivella's *Chambacú, corral de negros*<sup>1</sup>

Ligia S. Aldana • SUNY New Paltz

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

*Pico y espuela*, Luis Towers "El Rasta."

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

*El Flecha*, David Sanchez Juliao

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

It is important, therefore, to deconstruct the ideal male [white] citizen—or *mestizo* in the case of Colombia and Latin America—to examine representations of masculinity in relation to race and nationality.

In this study, I examine the relationship between black masculinity and national belonging in the Northern coast of Colombia, as depicted in Manuel Zapata Olivella's novel *Chambacú, corral de negros*.<sup>6</sup> The text clearly portrays subjects whose lives are marked by race and who exhibit relationships with nationality and gender that pose a series of important questions. In addition, looking at blackness and gender in relation to national belonging in *Chambacú* provides an opportunity to explore the currency of Zapata Olivella's agenda of representation to this very day. Definitions of self in the novel are determined, to a great extent, by work, the type of which is, in turn, related to traditionally established gender categories. Thus, I concentrate my analysis on the novel's treatment of cockfighting and boxing, two central occupations performed by *chambaculero* men, and two of the very few careers available to them for their subsistence. By probing the elements offered in *Chambacú* when blackness and masculinity intersect, the rationale behind the models of black males that the text projects comes alive. Ideally, this analysis aims to contribute to transcend the very artificial racialized gender categories exhibited in the novel to raise questions about their own legitimacy, and to envision the possibility of attaining what Paul Gilroy defines as a non-Spartan male subjectivity that can subvert the limited design of patriarchal maleness in the context of the modern nation (*Small Acts* 8).

## *Masculinity and Blackness*

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

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

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

Biron's affirmation is not intended to privilege one position over the other; that is, biological arguments versus manifestations of gender through performance. Her own analysis leans towards the psychoanalytical dimensions of gender studies that recognize masculinity as a process of

negotiation between master and secondary signifiers (14). What is perceived in the realm of the "real" would be the outcome of said negotiations, that is its projections. It could be argued that masculinity is both: a self-appropriated birth-right legitimized by the Symbolic Order, and the result of a social obligation to perform the part, lest the individual does not care to invoke self-deprecation. Having at stake inclusion or exclusion from the national community, individuals are under duress to prove their capacity to be valuable and reliable citizens. If we return to the premise of citizen = male subject, men find themselves under the gun, another very phallic symbol. This may imply that women must find their place in the nation in the spaces devoid of the masculine. However, a lot has happened in Latin America to subvert this axiom, thankfully, mostly through upper and middle class women participation in the public arena, but with an increasing presence of women from marginalized groups. In Colombia this recent increase in the number of women in public roles also applies to Afrodescendant women, more so than indigenous women. Nonetheless, the ideal national subject remains male, rich and white, or mestizo, if diversity is required.

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

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

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

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

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

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

in *Chambacú* through the character of Dominguito, Clotilde's son. Clotilde is Cotena's only daughter. She is a domestic servant and single mother who is "impregnated" by "el blanco Emiliani" (Zapata Olivella 14).

### *Fighting Cocks and (Black) Men*

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

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

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz's pioneer ethnographic study about cockfighting in Bali is still one of the most important sources of information on the economic and social function of cockfighting. His arguments are duly contested by Dundes, for the latter feels that Geertz focuses more on the social and economic dimensions of cockfighting, and leaves its *unconscious* charge largely unexplained. Indeed, Geertz's ethnographic study of cockfighting in Bali describes the complex betting system that rules the cockfighting ring, and how it maps the social and economic coordinates of rival cock owners and spectators (425-432). Geertz's observations are still pertinent and transcend the merely quantitative

dimension he addresses. Julie Sheridan states that Geertz's analysis "provides a 'metasocial commentary,'" (497), a helpful consideration in relation to *Chambacú*. Indeed, Geertz's interpretations surrounding cockfighting emphasize key elements in Balinese culture, regarding Balinese people's views on animals and how the Balinese relate to them.

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

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

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

gratification, the cockfight can be addictive, and "attending cockfights is a harder habit to kick than smoking or heavy drinking," says Marko Maunula (81).

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

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

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

Crispulo's battle for survival is ultimately lost, for his cocks are blind and too old to win their matches.<sup>14</sup> Under constant threat of being attacked by rats in Crispulo's house, the cocks have to sleep and stay in a sack since "habían

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

The inefficacy of Crispulo’s fighting cocks symbolizes *chambaculero* masculinity as the locus of an inept subjectivity unable to produce money, safety, children- as is the case with José Raquel, or political leadership, in the case of Máximo.<sup>15</sup> This general male ineptitude also questions the legitimacy of the status of *chambaculero* men as Colombian citizens, taking into account what Paul Gilroy defines as “the necessary relationship between nationality, citizenship, and masculinity” (*The Black Atlantic* 25). This equation establishes that “the integrity of the race [read as the integrity of the black *chambaculero* community] is primarily the integrity of its male heads of household and secondarily the integrity of the families over which they preside” (25). Constituted predominantly by matriarchal units and populated by men who are unable to be productive enough to provide for their family or their community and guarantee their safety, the novel reveals this failure as a direct result of the conditions in which *chambaculero* men are forced to exist because of their racial identity. Taken as a paradigm of black masculinity as it can be represented in the 1950s in the Northern coast, Zapata Olivella offers a bleak picture that highlights a subjugated existence with few hopes of subversion.

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

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

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

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

### *Boxing: The “Real” Fight for Survival*

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

The inclusion of boxing by Zapata Olivella in *Chambacú* is full of intent. Boxing, more so than cockfighting, has been a popular sport among Cartagena’s black poor males for decades. Pambél,<sup>18</sup> a boxer from Palenque de San Basilio, a community of descendants of *cimarrones* located near Cartagena, placed Palenque’s and Cartagena’s name on the international boxing map. However, allusions to boxing do not abound in *costeño* literature. David Sánchez Juliao’s play *El flechas* is perhaps the best testimony of the role of boxing in the region and merits further analysis, particularly because it addresses the ideology of *machismo* and prevalent notions of masculinity in the Northern coast of Colombia. The author’s choice of a *mestizo* protagonist distances the text from the issue of ethnicity. The

abundance of writing both scholarly and in specialized sports venues in North America and Europe about boxing stands in sharp contrast against the scarcity of studies and representations of the sport in Latin America, a region that has offered so many famous boxers.<sup>19</sup> My study aims to begin a more substantial discussion on boxing and its representations in Latin American literature and culture.

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

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

hungry, and full of rage: "En el ring se despeaban. Murallas, negros. El "Zurdo" combatía a nombre de un pasado" (40). And in the name of a present, the intent on ensuring their disappearance from the national landscape becomes reason why approximately five hundred chambaculero men were sent to the Korean War forcefully.<sup>21</sup>

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

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

Hidden amidst multiple layers of meaning surrounding the scene of boxing in Zapata Olivella's novel, the sport can also be seen, according to Frank Ardolino, as a source of renewal and "as a symbol of liberation" (17). Ardolino's assessment of boxing is based on the rise of boxing in Europe and the US in early XX century and fits *Chambacú's* reality to a limited extent, but it is helpful, in so far as his analysis is contained within conditions derived by war. As a spectacle closely related to the scene of a battle, boxing comprises aggression, fight—in this case fraternal—, attack, blood and, many times, even death. Elmwood offers another possible scenario that can be applied to the cultural milieu of Zapata Olivella's novel, since she addresses the effects of the Vietnam War. Elmwood states that Rocky combines a "male masochism that both reinvigorates the American man's virility and mitigates the perceived compromise of American manhood resulting from the then-recent military withdrawal from Vietnam" (50). War times, we all know, create a delicate social balance that needs to be maintained. To preserve a status quo in peril, David Bathrick assesses, when referring to the Weimar Period in Germany in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, that boxing can offer a type of "athletic renewal, and with the help of sport... the rejuvenation of culture as a whole" (15), promoting as well a culture of physicality in which the boxer's naked body is a sign of liberation and "boxing is an attitude" (18).

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

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

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

Alternatively, war is a vehicle to rid *Chambacú* of its men and the threat they represent to ongoing plans for urban

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

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

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

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

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

From another angle, boxing is defined in the novel as a way to challenge high (modern) culture, book-learned

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

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

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

powerful assertion made by a novel set in the Cartagena of the 1950s and written by an Afrodescendant author in the 1960s, when Latin American authors as a whole were faced with the pressures of a symbolic market that insisted on equating modern literary experimentation with a push for the abstract and universal disguised within a mystified local realm. Yet, *Chambacú, corral de negros* is even more significant now when new efforts to recognize the African and indigenous roots of the Colombian nation abound.

SUNY New Paltz



## NOTES

1. A portion of this paper was presented at the VI International and Interdisciplinary Conference of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association ALARA 2006 August 8-12, Veracruz, Mexico. The section on cockfighting is part of Chapter I of my doctoral dissertation "Violencia, raza, mito e historia en la literatura del Caribe colombiano."
2. See Homi K. Bhabha's *Nation and Narration*, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* and *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*; Alfonso Múnera's *El fracaso de la nación* and *Fronteras imaginadas*.
3. In this essay, I deploy the term *race* to refer to ethnic difference. While I acknowledge the constructivist nature of the term as it has been historically used by the hegemonic culture throughout the Americas to other people of African heritage, I believe it is important to utilize it when speaking of discrimination to convey the powerful effect of racist and separatist ideologies. For current arguments on ethnicity and race in Colombia see Antonio Tillis' *Manuel Zapata Olivella and The Darkening of Latin American Literature*; Ligia Aldana's "Policing Culture: The Champeta Movement Under the New Colombian Constitution" and "Memorias/ritmos diaspóricos: La champeta desde donde sea;" Elisabeth Cunin's "El Caribe visto desde el interior del país: estereotipos raciales y sexuales;" Joe Streicker's "Policing boundaries: race, class, and gender in Cartagena, Colombia; John W. Green's "Left Liberalism and Race in the Evolution of Colombian Popular National Identity;" Peter Wade's "Understanding 'Africa' and 'blackness' in Colombia: music and the politics of culture," "Working Culture: Making Cultural Identities in Cali, Colombia," "Music, blackness and national identity: three moments in Colombian history."
4. See Kiran Asher's "text in context: Afro-Colombian Women's Activism in the Pacific Lowlands of Colombia for an overview of various grassroots women organizations in the Pacific coast.
5. See Peter Wade's "Understanding 'Africa' and 'blackness' in Colombia: Music and the Politics of Culture," "Working Culture: Making Cultural Identities in Cali, Colombia," and "Music, Blackness and National Identity: Three Moments in Colombian History;" Lisa Waxer's "Salsa, Champeta, and Rap: Black Sounds and Black Identities in Afro Colombia;" Claudia Mosquera and Marion Provansal's "Construcción de la identidad caribeña popular en Cartagena de Indias, a través de la música y el baile de champeta," and Elisabeth Cunin's "El Caribe visto desde el interior del país: estereotipos raciales y sexuales."
6. All quotes and references correspond to Zapata Olivella's *Chambacú, corral de negros*, Spanish edition published by Bolsilibros Bedout in 1967. For an excellent translation of this novel see Jonathan Tittler's *Chambacú, Black Slum*.
7. When using the term "subjugated," I refer to the lack of equal access to social, economic and political rights and the status of Afrodescendants as second-rate citizens. In no way I am establishing acceptance and resignation to this status on their part which would adhere to the concept of the subaltern that circulates in postcolonial studies, for Afrodescendants have always "put up a fight" against oppression and marginality. I do however emphasize the persistent marginalization imposed upon Afrodescendants in Colombia.
8. See Antonio Tillis' *Manuel Zapata Olivella and the Darkening of Latin American Literature* for an incisive analysis of Zapata Olivella's insertion of race onto the Latin American literary production. Numerous contributions by Laurence Prescott and Marvin Lewis, pioneers in the field of Afro Latin American research and writing, have helped shape current focus on race and identity in Latin America.
9. Research conducted in the summer of 2000 in the Archivo de Cartagena de Indias housed at Palacio de la Inquisición, Cartagena, Colombia.
10. Alan Dundes' remarkable anthology *The Cockfight: A Casebook* gathers a substantial number of essays, including Clifford Geertz pioneering work on cockfighting, and begins with a piece by St. Augustine that discusses fourth century barnyard cockfights. In his anthology, Dundes offers a most complete list of works on cockfighting.
11. My grandfather, Pedro Hernández Vergara, was a cockfighter, though he did not fight nor train his own cocks. At the tender age of 10, access to the cockfighting ring in the outskirts of my native El Carmen de Bolívar, a dangerous and isolated area, meant to me entrance into a forbidden male world that I could not quite comprehend. I was given my own cock then, which must have been very good, because it was stolen shortly after his first fight from my grandparents' backyard, right outside my bedroom window. I am only now deconstructing the

meanings contained in this experience and, although I do not have the guts anymore to witness a cockfight, a boxing match or a bullfight, as I was able to do with my grandfather in my teen years, I am still fascinated by the system of beliefs that sustain these practices, as well as their economic dimension.

12. In continental US, Zora Neale Hurston's account of her brief visit to the cockfighting ring in North Florida in her ethnographic studies inserts this practice in the cultural African American landscape alive and well in the twentieth century. Zora Neale Hurston also offers a rare insight into the presence of women in the space of cockfighting, but offers no further analysis of it.
13. Treatment of cockfighting has been acknowledged in Gabriel García Márquez' *El colonel no tiene quien le escriba* and Juan Rulfo's short story "El gallo de oro." Both texts underscore the significance of cockfighting as a means for economic survival while they also highlight the personal attachment owners exhibit towards their cocks, as if they were family members. It is at this juncture where more work is needed to compare the very familial connection portrayed in Rulfo's, García Márquez' and Zapata Olivella's texts, to name the ones with which I am better acquainted. Rulfo's text seems to raise more questions surrounding Dionisio's belief that his cock possesses a particular ability to give him access to power and love.
14. Máximo's reaction to Dominguito's accident denounces his own contradictions when he insists on having him taken to a hospital. Cotena, Dominguito's grandmother, decides to take him to the community's *curandero*, who is able to read the signs of a condition that is a product of a particular cultural and economic practice, in spite of the self-legitimization of hegemonic knowledge. Dominguito survives and his leg is saved, an instance in the novel that attests to the tensions created by a desired modern condition. Dominguito's experience also projects the inherent fragility of the rituals that are supposed to guarantee induction into a continuum of masculinity. Forthcoming work of mine will examine this very complex and significant dynamics more closely.
15. Máximo's continuous attempts to organize the community against plans by the local police and political class to expel them from their homes are foiled once he is incarcerated, tortured and ultimately shot during a demonstration. Inge, José Raquel's wife, a white European woman and self-proclaimed *chambaculera*, takes up Máximo's role and is more effectively able to negotiate with the local authorities who refrain from causing her any harm. This dimension of the novel opens countless possibilities of interpretation, not fully explored in this analysis that merits attention.
16. MZO's inclusion of boxing, I believe, inscribes the historical importance of this sport in Chambacú and in El Palenque de San Basilio, the birthplace of Pambelé, among others. In his testimonio, *Chambacú, a la tiña, puño y patá*, the *chambaculero* writer, Juan Gutiérrez Magallanes, confirms the relevance of boxing in Chambacú and mentions some of the area's best known pugilists: Dinamita Pum, Pelúo Arnedo, and Juana Maza's *giant* sons, el Milagro y Andresito. Gutiérrez Magallanes states that these local athletes fought Paye Atómico, Kid Bogotá, and many others, at the Espíritu Santo Coliseum and the Theatre Circus (68-69).
17. The UN Decree dated June 27, 1950 and drafted by the UN's Security Council: 27 de junio de 1950 states: "The Security Council, HAVING DETERMINED that the armed attack upon the Republic of Korea by forces from North Korea constitutes a breach of the peace, HAVING CALLED FOR an immediate cessation of hostilities, and HAVING CALLED UPON the authorities of North Korea to withdraw forthwith their armed forces to the 38th parallel, and HAVING NOTED from the report of the United Nations Commission for Korea that the authorities in North Korea have neither ceased hostilities nor withdrawn their armed forces to the 38th parallel and that urgent military measures are required to restore international peace and security, and HAVING NOTED the appeal from the Republic of Korea to the United Nations for immediate and effective steps to secure peace and security, RECOMMENDS that the Members of the United Nations furnish such assistance to the Republic of Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security in the area" (source). As a member of the UN and due to the prominent role of the United States in the organization, Colombia sees an opportunity to fall in good terms with the US: "[e]ra posible y benéfico buscar un acercamiento con los Estados Unidos, cuya política tanto se había criticado. La apertura y las ventajas al capital foráneo eran un gaje, la participación en una guerra lejana la mejor prueba de buena voluntad" (Tirado Mejía 90-91).
18. Born in Palenque de San Basilio, Antonio Cervantes Reyes in 1945, Kid Pambelé, was the first Colombian boxer to win a world title in the light welterweight. He still lives on a farm near Palenque, continuing his fight against drug addiction and alcoholism, the legacy

of triumph and excess money. He is an icon adored by Colombians and immortalized in song, “Pambe” by Carlos Vives, and in the popular lore.

19. Other prominent Latin American fighters include Oscar De La Hoya.
  20. Oates makes reference to the outcome of Jack Johnson’s triumph over Jim Jeffries “White Hope” when race riots and lynchings followed.
  21. See Alberto Ruiz Novoa’s *El Batallón Colombia en Korea, 1951-1954*.
  22. Muhammad Ali’s autobiography *The Greatest: My Own Story* written with Richard Durham was published in 1976 and could have helped Oates explore in more detail the challenges experienced by one of the most famous pugilists in the world as a direct result of his ethnicity. The controversy that began with Ali’s position in regards to the Vietnam War and his refusal to go to war could have lent Oates substantial material for the parallel she offers in her essay between war and boxing. A reason for the lack of extensive discussion on Ali’s boxing career maybe because “his background was not one of desperate poverty” (86), a factor, Oates indicates,
23. Julie Sheridan’s and Frank Ardolino’s articles allude to the part war plays in the scene of boxing. Interestingly enough, Sheridan’s analysis of Carol Joyce Oates’ novel *What I Lived For* highlights the experience of the protagonist, boxer, and Union City native Tim Corcoran “Corky” in the Korean War. In his examination of the life of German boxer Max Schmeling and the geopolitical dynamics of postwar Europe and the US in early twentieth century, Frank Ardolino appraises how sports, and boxing in particular, were seen as instrumental in “the rejuvenation of culture as a whole” (15). *Chambacú* delineates the connection between pugilism and war more directly. It would be worthwhile to pursue this correlation further, across geographical borders, as Ardolino does, to emphasize its relevance in the contemporary global stage.
  24. Frank Ardolino points to Bertold Brecht’s consideration “of boxing and mass culture as powerful metaphorical antidotes to the effect modernism” (20) was inflicting upon artists of the time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Para Bhabha, el exilio representa la existencia de una gente separada de su patria y esparcida en una nación aparte de la suya propia. Esta separación de personas de su patria natal crea una gente apatriada o sin patria. En el contexto de las dos novelas, *Nochebuena negra* y *Chambacú*, el exilio de los negros de Venezuela y de Colombia comenzó en el momento en que los primeros africanos llegaron a las Américas rompiendo la unión con África. Esta separación de África, de lo maternal, produjo una desconexión no solamente de la tierra, sino que causó una separación de la lengua, de las costumbres, de las creencias, de la religión, de casi toda la cultura africana antigua. Bhabha explica el exilio en términos de una reunión de los exiliados en una tierra extranjera, dentro del contexto de una cultura extranjera. Si aceptamos lo que nos propone del exilio y aplicamos su análisis a los personajes presentados dentro de los textos, podemos deducir que los africanos exiliados de la hacienda venezolana Pozo Frío y los de la isleta colombiana Chambacú son los productos de siglos de negros separados de África que viven exiliados en una patria extranjera.

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

Cultural marronage has been used to describe the psychological level on which the African slave resisted slavery through the preservation of the cultural forms which they brought with them to the New World ... Cultural marronage was as effective

as the various forms of physical resistance, in that it served to foster unity among the slaves and thereby confounded and confused their masters. Additionally, these cultural forms provided comfort to the slaves amidst the cruelty and hardness of their oppressive situation, until emancipation, when they were at liberty to openly practice them. (32)

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

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

By ‘Place’ we do not simply mean ‘landscape’. Indeed the idea of ‘landscape’ is predicated upon a particular philosophic tradition in which the objective world is separated from the viewing subject. Rather ‘place’ in postcolonial societies is a complex interaction of language, history and environment. It is characterized firstly by a sense of displacement in those who have moved to the colonies, or the more widespread sense of displacement from the imported language of a gap between the ‘experienced’ environment and descriptions the language provides, and secondly, by a sense of the immense investment of culture in the construction of place. (391)

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

Se ha dicho que uno de los puntos más fuertes de la convergencia para la resistencia del imperio y de la dominación imperial en las sociedades coloniales ha sido la idea de la nación. Generalmente, se ha aceptado que una nación representa una comunidad conceptualizada de gente que tiene su desarrollo en

experiencias y tradiciones compartidas. El psiquiatra y analista político, Frantz Fanon, en su ensayo “*On National Culture*”, habla del asunto de la cultura nacional y como se desarrolla. Él dice:

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

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

El medio ambiente de *Nochebuena negra* de Juan Pablo Sojo es Barlovento, Venezuela a fines del siglo XIX. Toda la acción de la novela ocurre en la plantación de cacao de la familia Sarabia, Pozo Frío. La novela tiene como enfoque principal, la vida de la gente de Pozo Frío. Es interesante notar que se presenta Pozo Frío como una “nación” donde la familia Sarabia, los blancos, representan el poder imperial mientras los trabajadores de la hacienda, los negros, representan los subyugados o el “Otro.” Esta presentación del autor crea un contexto postcolonial dentro de la novela. El asunto del “lugar” dentro de la hacienda Pozo Frío es revelado por la existencia de una gente desplazada en Venezuela que existe dentro de un contexto colonizado donde son víctimas de la explotación, exiliados de la tierra natal, África, y son participantes en un sistema del cimarronaje cultural. La obra culmina en el día de la celebración de la *Nochebuena* o la Fiesta de San Juan el Bautista. Los personajes principales son Luís Pantoja, el nieto del dueño de la hacienda, don Gisberto Sarabia, quien viene a Pozo Frío como el nuevo administrador; el señor Crisanto Marasma, el padre de Pedro y Deogracia, quien tiene papel como cantador de la historia folklórica. También, están Morocota, Lino Bembetoyo y Cointa. La narración de la novela trata de la interacción de los personajes exiliados en Pozo Frío mientras que resisten el poder hegemónico de Luis Pantoja. Él vino a la hacienda con la idea de implementar un nuevo sistema donde él tendría el



control autónomo sobre Pozo Frío. Este control resultaría de la explotación de los obreros negros.

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

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

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

Esta cita de la novela detalla, por lo mínimo, dos cosas que tienen que ver con la resistencia de los negros de Pozo Frío. En primer lugar, señala lo ya mencionado de la unión entre el tambor y la ascendencia africana. La presencia de esta unión dentro de la novela demuestra la importancia por parte de la gente de no abortar su cultura africana en las Américas. También, esta cita ilustra el asunto del sincretismo religioso (la combinación de la religión oficial, el catolicismo, y la religión popular, la de raíces africanas) dentro de Pozo Frío para mantener aspectos de la religión africana. La voz narrativa del texto usa una referencia bíblica para mostrar el intento de negar la herencia negra. Usa los versos de la *Biblia* sobre el discípulo Pedro, que iba a negar a Jesús tres veces antes del grito del gallo (Mateo 26:31-35). Inmediatamente después, cita el tambor corno “la cruz del Cristo negro.” Esta comparación textual forma una relación metafórica directa entre la cristiandad y la identidad racial. La asociación de Cristo con lo negro atestigua a la hegemonía revocada donde la voz narrativa le da al Cristo una identidad negra como un acto de la reclamación del poder cultural y la resistencia. Por hacerlo, estos exiliados construyen por sí mismos una imagen fenotípica que refleja su sentido de africanidad como un medio de la preservación cultural. Estas voces del margen reclaman su ancestro africano. Adicionalmente, esta reclamación culmina en el tambor que simbólicamente funciona para ellos como un recordatorio de su

negritud de la misma manera que la representación religiosa de Cristo corno uno para los cristianos: “(1)a gran voz del viejo *mina!* Voz del ancestro congregando el clan! Voz misteriosa, que reclama su sangre africana perdida en los recovecos de las venas como vaga reminiscencia ...” (300). Esta cita alude al hecho de que la gente, aunque trata de olvidar su africanidad, no puede a causa de que es parte de sí misma y es lo que asigna su existencia: es corno la sangre dentro de las venas. Es una afirmación que la sangre que corre por las venas es africana en sí.

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

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

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

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

Ninguno en Barlovento, conocía más historias que Crisanto Marasma. Por su imaginación pasaban los nombres de todos los nativos y forasteros residenciados en aquellas tierras... (73)

Crisanto, en el sentido folclórico, es el *griot* histórico de Pozo Frío y cuenta la historia de la gente en la tradición oral de África. Utilizando la voz de Crisanto y la de los otros, esta tradición africana penetra la obra desde las leyendas del tío Congrejo a las de la tía Culebra. La superstición es otra manifestación africana de la novela. Junta con las otras formas del folclór, crea un contexto cultural bien africano para los habitantes. Un ejemplo

de su manifestación se observa en el episodio de Morocota, un personaje africanizado por la voz narrativa y el Aruco, una ave típica de Venezuela. Este episodio está basado en una leyenda afro-venezolana que dice que si este pájaro le habla a una persona, la persona se volverá loca. A causa de la violación de Cointa por parte de este Morocota, la tía de ella le maldice a él. Y la manifestación de la maldición viene en forma del pájaro, el Aruco, que viene a Morocota por un sueño y le habla a él. Y, de acuerdo con la tradición, Morocota se vuelve loco. La maldición de Cointa se actualiza y esta leyenda afro-venezolana de superstición continúa.

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

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

Una de las premisas básicas de la novela tiene que ver con los gritos de una comunidad afro-colombiana que a través de los siglos existía como víctima de los sistemas violentos de la esclavitud, la pobreza, la marginalidad, la opresión social y la búsqueda de una salida. Como la comunidad negra venezolana de *Nochebuena negra*, los afro-colombianos de *Chambacú* han mantenido un sentido de la cultura nacional afro-colombiana por medio del cimarronaje cultural, el sincretismo religioso y la unión con los antepasados. Aparte de su leitmotiv mimético, hay algunas diferencias entre las dos novelas. Una diferencia grave es el tiempo cronológico de *Chambacú* y el tratamiento por Zapata Olivella de esta época. La novela comienza en el medio del siglo XX cuando la región de *Chambacú* existe dentro de Colombia como una isla separada, marginalizada y desplazada de la masa territorial. Su conexión con la tierra es por medio de un puente que facilita viajes entre Cartagena y *Chambacú*. Esta comunidad que consta de una mayoría negra y pobre existe en la forma más pura de la definición de Bhabha del exilio en plena mitad de la época moderna. La perspectiva del tiempo cronológico representa un enfoque global de la novelística de Zapata Olivella. La infiltración de los Estados Unidos se presenta en la primera parte de esta novela tripartita. En “Los reclutas,” la

primera parte de la obra, la participación de Colombia en la guerra coreana se desarrolla con una llamada para el reclutamiento de los negros para ayudar a las fuerzas norteamericanas. Por medio de un apunte textual, el autor nos informa lo siguiente:

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

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

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

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

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

—No es ocasional que *Chambacú*, corral de negros, haya nacido al pie de las murallas. Nuestros antepasados fueron traídos aquí para construir las murallas. Los barcos negreros llegaron atestados de esclavos provenientes de toda África. Mandingas, yolofofos, minas, carabalies, biáfaras, yorubas, más que cuarenta tribus. (189)

La voz ancestral de Máximo da un resumen histórico de la presencia africana en esta isleta y de lo que pasó a los antepasados al llegar a Colombia. El reconoce el hecho de que los antepasados

fueron exiliados y fueron traídos a Chambacú con el propósito de ser esclavos. Máximo, por media de esta cita, hace una declaración profunda de la unión entre los negros de Chambacú de hoy y África. Pues ahora, para los afrocolombianos textualizados, Chambacú representa la construcción postcolonial del lugar donde el mundo objetivo se ha separado de sí mismo creando un sentido de desplazamiento para los que viven en la isleta sin participación política, económica y social dentro de su “lugar desplazado”, *Chambacú*. Máximo revela este hecho y el de la identidad desplazada de la gente por media de una conversación entre él e Inge, la esposa sueca de su hermano José Raquel. Máximo le explica la pérdida de la identidad de los negros en Chambacú y exige que todos los negros reclamen esa identidad:

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

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

Paulette Ramsay en su definición del cimarronaje cultural pone mucho énfasis en el hecho de que este concepto representa el nivel psicológico por el cual los africanos esclavizados resistieron la esclavitud y la hegemonía cultural del Este por mantener intacto algunos aspectos de la cultura africana. Uno de estos aspectos preservados de la cultura negra de *Chambacú* es la práctica de y la fe en la medicina popular. Esta forma de resistencia cultural es encamada en el curandero del texto, Bonifacio. Llega a ser evidente dentro del texto que los de *Chambacú* ponen más fe en las prácticas populares de Bonifacio que en las de la medicina oficial. En un escenario donde Dominguito, el hijo mestizo de Clotilde, la hija de La Catena es herido por un gallo, se hace sabido. Al llevar al niño a los médicos blancos que representan lo oficial, ellos sugieren que el niño tenga que perder la pierna. Dicen que tendrán que amputarla. Al oír esto, La Catena demanda vehementemente que la familia lo lleve al niño donde está Bonifacio. Esta acción por parte de esta matriarca pone en duda las prácticas médicas oficiales y crea un donde las populares son superiores: “Ellos sabrán mucho de cortar piernas, pero no cómo curar un espolazo de gallo. Me lo llevo a donde Bonifacio. -Salva a mi nieto, Bonifacio. ¡Sálvalo!” (177). Firmemente plantado en las prácticas de África, el

remedio de Bonifacio demuestra las prácticas médicas populares de la gente utilizando elementos naturales de la tierra en vez de los extractos sintéticos de la oficial:

“El ahogo lo matará”, había vaticinado Bonifacio. El insistía en medicarlo con escoria de manteca de cerdo. Hojas soasadas de higuera en el pecho. Collares de dientes de ajo. (38)

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

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

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# Hemingway, el Cazador de la Muerte: Kenya en la novela de un afrocolombiano

Manuel Zapata Olivella

El escritor y compilador Ntongela Masilela, siempre interesado en el origen común de la diáspora africana, nos ha invitado a colaborar en su antología “Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean: The Idea of Africa.”

Queremos responder a esta solicitud fraternal, revelando las motivaciones psicoafectivas y culturales que inspiraron nuestra novela *Hemingway, el Cazador de la Muerte* (original en español, Arango Editores, Bogotá, 1993).

El porqué de su título, temática, personajes (Hemingway, Kenyatta), tradición kikuyo, Mau-Mau, elefantes, y particularmente, la narración en primera persona en la voz del Premio Nobel, un “musungu” (blanco).

Consecuentes con el argumento de la obra, comencemos por afirmar la raíz ontogénica: Africa, madre del hombre. Para sus descendientes directos no es evocación paleontológica, sino eco de los latidos del primer embrión. Se calcula que ésta pudo haber palpitado hace dos, tres, cuatro millones de años en Kenya. Una fecha indeterminada por los etnohistoriadores pero no para quienes ajustamos nuestros sentimientos y conducta a los códigos genésicos. La sobrevivencia de lo africano en la familia humana trasciende el simple concepto de etnia inmodificada, para expresar la perdurabilidad de su acervo universal.

La mayor conjura de los ideólogos de la teoría “difusionista” sobre el origen del hombre es negar que Africa sea la cuna primigenia. Igualmente rechazan contra toda evidencia histórica que el *Homo sapiens* africano se diseminó al Sudeste por el océano Índico tanto como al Nordeste a lo largo del continente Euroasiático.

También los cronistas del execrable comercio de hombres libres, poco informan de los lazos étnicos y culturales que unían a todos los prisioneros africanos desterrados a la América, cualesquiera fuesen los puertos donde eran embarcados. Para minimizar el flujo proveniente del Este africano se estigmatizó el litoral atlántico con el nombre de “Costa de los Esclavos.”

Pero la historia comprueba que Africa, genética, histórica y culturalmente es indivisible.

Nuestra visita a Kenya (1986) nos permitió comprobarlo. Recorriamos los escenarios donde se desarrollarían las acciones de la novela, cuando el guía nos hizo caer en cuenta que pisábamos la Línea Ecuatorial en el poblado de Nanyuki, inscrito en todas las cartas geográficas y celestes. Entonces recordamos que Kenya y

Colombia, naciones hermanas, compartían rasgos tropicales y culturales semejantes: hombres de variadas etnias; volcanes nevados; litorales oceánicos, frondosas selvas, caudalosos ríos, lagos, sabanas, todos los pisos y climas térmicos... la única gran diferencia: la original, incomparable y poderosa fauna africana!

Extendido los brazos bajo la luz cenital y abiertas las piernas, pudimos abarcar ambos hemisferios, enraizada a nuestros pies la todo-poderosa e inseparable sombra de todos los Ancestros africanos.

He aquí el “plot ancestral” que concede derechos patrimoniales a un narrador afrocolombiano para incursionar en la temática humana y cultural de la antípoda Kenya.

## *Hemingway y Kenyatta, Protagonistas Principales*

Los personajes centrales de la obra están concebidos en la caracterización del cazador Ernest Hemingway y el antropólogo Jomo Kenyatta. La trama que los une es una leyenda kikuyo:

“Todo aquél que dispare contra un animal sagrado, recibirá sobre su propio cuerpo las mismas heridas que le haya ocasionado con sus armas.”

En verdad la bobina de la historia es mucha más compleja. El simple título del libro puede inducir al lector a relacionarlo con el suicidio del novelista: Hemingway, cazador irreductible, víctima de sus propias balas disparadas a la cabeza de las fieras en sus múltiples safaris en Africa.

No obstante la fábula es otra: los colonialistas al destruir con sus armas y voracidad la armonía existente los pueblos africanos y la naturaleza, se destruyen a sí mismos.

Contrario a cualquier presunción simplista, Hemingway no protagoniza en este drama al “malo”, el cazador desalmado, sino a un safarista arrepentido, cuyos ideales encarnan el pensamiento de su paisano Walt Whitman, poeta del amor, la vida, la naturaleza y la fraternidad universal. La transmutación literaria del cazador en ecologista propicia el entendimiento con Jomo Kenyatta, quien oculta su verdadera identidad de líder de los Mau-Mau para colaborar en la expedición científica del escritor, transformado a su vez en jefe expedicionario. Su misión es investigar por qué los elefantes suben a las cumbres nevadas del Monte Kenya.

## *Cartas Sobre la Mesa*

Al revelar las artimañas o trampas que se han entretendido en la creación de una obra literaria se corre el riesgo de perder al lector. Podría crearse mayores desestímulos y confusiones, particularmente cuando se pretende justificar juicios que no están en juego en el contenido de la narración, lo que ocurre en la mayor parte de las siguientes reflexiones.

Gran responsabilidad nos incumbe como autor afroamericano al abordar un tema tan ligado al patrimonio ancestral de muchos de sus lectores. Hemos depuesto sensiblerías para exponer las razones por las cuales hemos escrito sobre una región que se ha pretendido mantener oculta desde la antigüedad para encubrir las tropelías perpetradas por los colonizadores contra sus pueblos.

Conscientes de tales hechos, debimos reflexionar minuciosamente sobre su estructura, personajes, voces narrativas y temática. Son, pues, estos elementos históricos y fabulados los que exigen una confesión de parte.

## *Hemingway, Narrador*

Justo es que comencemos por aclarar el relato en primera persona en la voz de Ernest Hemingway.

¿Por qué el autor afroamericano se oculta tras la personalidad consagrada del Premio Nobel de Literatura?

Leída la novela podrá colegirse que no existe ningún encubrimiento. El estilo del autor es fácilmente reconocible. Tango Hemingway como Kenyatta apenas son portadores en forma impersonal del diálogo entre dos fuerzas históricas enfrentadas: el colonialismo y las luchas emancipadoras del pueblo africano. Resalta el debate filosófico utilizando dos figuras universalmente conocidas, fabular es la única intención de la farsa.

Consideramos válido este recurso literario para sustraernos del archiconocido truco de enmascarar con nombre propio ideas ajenas. Esperamos que en el reino de la muerte, Kenyatta y Hemingway se sienten alguna vez a dialogar sobre el tema.

## *Titiriteros, Carácteres y Lector*

Debido a los mutuos influjos que intercambian autor-personaje y autor-lector, es explicable confundir la vida fáctica de los caracteres con la ficción literaria, y no pocas veces con el titiritero que maneja los cordeles.

Jomo Kenyatta más allá de su ideología y militancia política, ha escrito como antropólogo, el mejor testimonio sobre la cultura kikuyo a la cual pertenecía. Su auténtico pensamiento aparece en los diálogos que se suponen redactados por Hemingway.

La técnica de las superposiciones de caracteres se enriquece con la fábula, género típico de la tradición africana, cuando un elefante filósofo pregunta al jefe de la expedición naturalista (Hemingway), por qué Dios Blanco patrocina el exterminio con armas de fuego de su comunidad religiosa y pacífica.

## *La Magia y el Mito*

La urdimbre de los personajes y las circunstancias en la medida en que suceden episodios inesperados pasa de lo aparentemente real y científico a la nebulosa de la magia, la alucinación y el delirio. Hemingway y sus compañeros de expedición—un biólogo español y una fotógrafa italiana—al principio incrédulos de la existencia del “Mamut Sagrado” en la cima del Monte Kenya, una vez atrapados en la caldera africana, desnudan sus instintos primarios—sexo, celos, miedo, delirios—hasta destruirse a sí mismos. En este contexto es donde aparece la idea suicida que lleva al biólogo, hijo de un torero, a lidiar con su capote un rinoceronte, y a Hemingway disparar contra el “Mamut Sagrado”, a sabiendas de que las halas le rebotarían sobre su cuerpo.

## *El Espacio Temporal*

La historia gira en torno a los días que preceden la captura de Jomo Kenyatta, acusado por el Gobierno Británico de ser el jefe de los Mau-Mau:

- 1953—Aún cuando esta fecha no se menciona en la obra, es clave para amarrar importantes acontecimientos históricos que como hilos invisibles estructuran su trama. Con su detención, el lector conoce la verdadera identidad de Kenyatta, hasta entonces encubierta con el nombre de Kamau Johnstone, uno de los muchos que utilizó a lo largo de su vida.
- 1952—La entonces princesa Isabel de Inglaterra, alojada en el “Treetops Hotel” del Parque Nacional de Aberdares, recibe la noticia de la muerte de su padre, el Rey Jorge VII. En sus inmediaciones tiene lugar un enfrentamiento nocturno entre los personajes principales y un búfalo enfurecido.
- 1954—El “Treetops Hotel” es incendiado y destruido por los rebeldes Mau-mau, otro suceso que tampoco se menciona en la narración. Sin embargo este año es trascendente para la correlación temporal y estructura de la obra: Hemingway recibe el Premio Nobel de Literatura.
- 1961—El célebre escritor colapsa a sus millones de lectores suicidándose de un disparo, hecho con el cual concluye la novela.

En las líneas finales el “narrador” Hemingway revela una carta marcada al lector, en la cual sugiere que el relato ha sido escrito después de la muerte:

“En ese instante, perdido el control de mis movimientos, siento que mi propio cuerpo, sueltas las amarras, flota sin las ataduras de la vida”

## *La Semilla Más Antigua*

La inteligencia humana, esa antiquísima luciérnaga que no ilumina, emprendió en Kenya su vuelo hasta nosotros, hace dos, tres o cuatro millones de años.

Una noche, bajo el cielo estrellado que tanto asustó al homosapiens,—Hemingway, el biólogo, la fotógrafa y un kikuyo—, al calor de los tragos de whisky, advierten sorprendidos que su piel, corroída por el gusano del tiempo, les desnuda hasta dejarlos en sus tétricos esqueletos. Entonces ven desfilar los fósiles de sus antepasados—Ramapiteco kenia, Homo erectus, Homo robustus, Homo habilis, Neandertals, Homosapiens — nacidos y evolucionados a la vuelta de la esquina, cerca de Koopi Fora, al este del lago Turkana y en las orillas del lago Elmenteita, todos en Africa. Después del largo desfile que duró veinte o más millones de años, los personajes novelados comprenden que son los últimos eslabones de aquella cadena ininterrumpida, Homo contemporaneus. En ese instante, recuperados músculos y tegumentos, son ennegrecidos por la lejana radiación de un hongo atómico que funde la noche en un infierno de llamas.

Sueño, utopía o realidad, allí donde había nacido la semilla del hombre—Kenya—los tambores de guerra de los Mau-Mau anunciaban a los “musungos” que estaban dispuestos a no permitir que incineraran la vida y el planeta.

### Los Wa-Ndoboro

Por dos veces se enfrentan el hombre primoeval—los Wa-Ndoboro—y el robot flamígero—Hemingway—en las selvas de Kenya. Desde luego, desnudos los unos y armados de fusiles los otros, el diálogo fue posible solo con las miradas de los siglos:

Los primeros manipuladores del fuego miraban con recelo las armas de los “civilizados” que escupían el rayo de la muerte. Cuando Hemingway ansioso de ganarse su simpatía les ofrece varias botellas de licor, tabacos y un puñado de monedas de cobre, el jefe tribal, malicioso, le pide un fusil que le es rehusado.

Pero más tarde, después que el hombre blanco ha herido al “Mamut Sagrado” y trata de halagarlo con nuevos presentes, el anciano brujo le muestra el camino con su bastón mágico para que se retire, y apretando sus ojos, lo desaparece de su presencia.

### La Filosofía Bantú

En *Hemingway, el Cazador de la Muerte*, un espíritu pródigo y vigilante transpira la atmósfera y pensamiento de los personajes: la sombra de los Ancestros bantú.

Profundicemos la naturaleza y trascendencia de este elemento.

Los códigos genéticos marcaron las respuestas biológicas y espirituales que los primeros hombres dieron a los misterios de la vida y la muerte. Desde entonces identifican la familia humana cualesquiera que hayan sido sus mezclas y culturas.

Así mismo la defensa de la vida y la sobrevivencia más allá de la muerte, les llevó a concebir Dioses, Orichas y Ancestros, fecundadores y protectores de la familia. En todas las religiones encontramos esta ideal del génesis como una herencia común de los pueblos. Sin embargo, en el africano y su diáspora es mucho más

connatural en la medida en que somos descendientes directos de los primeros hombres, antes no existieron otros.

La etnia africana en el evolucionar de los tiempos ha generado en su continente de origen las cepas humanas de los pueblos “negrito” y “negros”, las más antiguas del planeta, aunque no se haya podido establecer con certidumbre los anillos que los unen a sus antepasados primigenios.

A este conjunto de ideas y sentimientos ancestrales pueden dársele cualquier nombre, pero nosotros reconocemos en ellos la filosofía del “muntu” que recitan los juglares bantú, yoruba, ewe-fofon, etc., etnias raizales de las mil y una tribus de la familia humana del planeta: “Los vivos y difuntos por voluntad de los dioses y orichas están hermanados con los astros, animales, árboles y herramientas.

### Nómadas y Trashumantes

Los lazos ancestrales que ligan los africanos a este ancestro bantú-sangre y espíritu—se entroncan con la etnia “negrito”, desprendida del homosapiens durante el Paleolítico Superior. Nómadas y navegantes recorrieron Euroasia, Australia, Melanesia y Polinesia, originando variedades de pueblos y culturas. Siglos después, ya habitaban en América (¿hace 60-70 mil años?), donde por primera vez se estrecharon las manos los ciudadanos euroasiáticos y afroasiáticos, conformando la nueva nacionalidad multiétnica universal. Aunque la noticia no se difundió por escritos, telégrafo, radio, televideo o satélite, ni consta en ninguna carta geográfica, lo cierto es que en esos tiempos arqueológicos la simiente africana había circunvalado el planeta.

Revivamos estas huellas para desatar el primer nudo de la bobina bantú que nos permita desandar la trama de la novela. Sigamos el camino del sol que diariamente recorre las aguas oceánicas del Pacífico desde las costas colombianas a las de Kenya en el Indico.

Al leer el ensayo antropológico de Jomo Kenyatta, (*Facing Mount Kenya*) descubrimos que el pensamiento religioso kikuyo, a pesar de las distancias geográficas e históricas, preserva la misma filosofía de la tradición oral de nuestros aborígenes.

Igual asombro tuvo Vasco Nuñez de Balboa al encontrar comunidades de “piel oscura” en el litoral del océano que acababa de descubrir (P. Martie). Rasgos que explican el parentesco de las esculturas megalíticas de los mohai de Rapa Nui (Chile), hermanas de las cabezas Olmecas (México), ídolos de Tiahuanaco (Bolivia y Perú) y San Agustín (Colombia). Otro tanto acontece con las milenarias y minúsculas cerámicas de Valdivia (Ecuador) y Tumaco (Colombia). ¡Todos con los rostros de faraones egipcios y reyes de Napata! De estos últimos se conserva la cabeza gigante del rey Natekemani (Meros 1100 A.C?) impresionantemente similar a las Olmecas.

En los litorales, selvas y altiplanos de América, bajo la Luna y frente al Sol naciente, padres fecundos, los pueblos afroamerindios repiten las mismas oraciones y danzas rituales que los bantú en Africa acompañan con sus tambores y bailes.

### “¿Por Quién Doblan las Campanas?”

El título de la obra de Ernest Hemingway no evoca ningún tópico de nuestra narración, pero sí puede simbolizar el reloj del colonialismo al iniciarse el Siglo XVI, marcando con fúnebre simultaneidad las horas de la deprecación y la esclavitud perpetradas en África y América.

El rezongo fúnebre de las campanas denunciaba los millones de cadáveres insepultos, alimento de hienas en las sabanas africanas y detritus de tiburones en las profundidades del Atlántico.

También se oía en los socavones de las minas de oro tapizadas con la osamenta de los taínos, convertidos en raíces, piedras y sangre de los nuevos hombres de América.

Eviquemos África a mediados del Siglo XVI, cuando las naciones europeas se repartían a gruñidos el botín de prisioneros para transplantarlos a sus colonias americanas.

Los Reyes de España, excluidos del gran safari por decisión pontificia, ratificada por el Tratado de Tordecillas (1494), desterraban y vendían a sus propios súbditos africanos nacidos y cristianizados en la Península. Acto impío que reprochaban como oprobioso a los etíopes. Iguales y peores apostasías cometían sus Majestades británicas, francesas, lusitanas, holandesas, belgas y danesas, fueran católicas o calvinistas, cuando cazaban y vendían a los hombres que la misma bula papal había puesto bajo su protección.

¿Con qué moral condenaban a sus pares, los llamados “reyezuelos” a quienes corrompían con filigranas, bebidas embriagantes, mosquetes y pólvora a cambio de sus súbditos?

Detrás de esta cacería avanzaba el gran funeral:

Portugal afirmaba sus dominios en el Congo, Angola, Mozambique y Zanzíbar.

Holanda hundía sus colmillos en Cabo Verde, extendiendo sus garras sobre Sud África.

Inglaterra, atrapada Senegambia, rugía amenazante como potencia en el continente africano. Desde ciudad del Cabo hasta el alto Zambeze, los británicos aliados a los boers holandeses, profundizaban sus conquistas con cañones, fusiles y redobles de guerra sobre las hasta entonces misteriosas tierras de los zulúes, xhosas, sotho, stawana, tonga, zima, pedi.

Por el litoral Indico, los barcos de la Compañía de las Indias Orientales, con pabellón británico, armados de artillería pesada, expulsados árabes y portugueses de Zanzíbar, desde donde afianzaban sus conquistas sobre Kenya, Tanganika, Uganda y la oceánica Australia.

Francia les seguía el rastro, disputándoles y conquistando los territorios del Senegal, Dahomey y Castilla de Oro. Guerras por la posición de fuertes, factorías y la navegación en los ríos Gambia y Senegal por donde fluían las barcazas atiborradas de prisioneros.

Se consolidaba a cañonazos el reparto del globo circunvalado por los navegantes. Evidentemente, el tráfico de hombres superaba el comercio de especias. Sobre las espaldas de los africanos se abría paso la Modernidad, proporcionando a Europa el privilegio de enriquecerse en la nueva era de la “civilización”.

### El Rostro Oculto de la Ignominia

El tráfico de los zandj, “hombres negros como azabache” para ser esclavizados comenzó en el Este y no en el Occidente africano. Medio milenio antes de iniciarse la Era Cristiana, el infamante negocio ya se ocultaba por sus perpetradores, dejando a la memoria frágil de la tradición oral los fastos de sus felonías. Los relatos escritos por algunos cronistas y viajeros, más interesados en las hazañas de los conquistadores, menospreciaron a quienes, al decir de Homero, eran “bárbaros”: egipcios, medos, persas, etíopes...

El “padre de la historia,” en sus comentarios sobre Egipto, relata la penetración de las huestes romanas hasta los reinos de Kush, Meroe y Napata en el alto Nilo, cuya antigüedad se remontaba a 2000 años a.C. De allí regresaban las caravanas de cautivos zandj con pesadas cargas de oro, colmillos de elefantes y plantas aromáticas. Unos y otros llegaban a Roma para embellecer a las matronas y servir de esclavos a los patricios.

El primer documento sobre el litoral, “Periplo del Mar Eritreo” fue escrito por otro griego, el navegante Hippalus, quien lo recorrió desde el Cabo de Serapión (Mogadiscio) hasta la isla de sus pobladores, ciudades y puertos ya visitados por mercaderes indios, árabes y hebreos.

Sorprendidos por la gran estatura, fortaleza y habilidad de los zandj en la cacería de leones y elefantes, los marinos subestimarón sus delicadas orfebrerías en oro, marfil, carey y tejidos de algodón, para atraparlos como bestias y venderlos en los reinos de Omán, India y China, donde eran sometidos a trabajos forzados en labores de mampostería, cultivos de caña de azúcar, té y algodón.

### Los Primeros Insumisos

Tan antigua como la esclavitud era la decisión de los africanos por liberarse. Los levantamientos y fugas constantes dieron comienzo a la táctica de emboscarse y resistir, precursora de los palenques cimarrones en América.

En el año 868 tuvo lugar la rebelión victoriosa de los zandj en Basora (Mesopotamia), apoderándose del puerto de Obolla, entonces bajo el control del Califato de Bagdad. Los insubordinados resistieron quince años hasta cuando un poderoso ejército árabe logró exterminarlos sin dejar huella de su descendencia.

Aunque los viajeros no narran las luchas de resistencias de los pueblos índicos, sus relatos ayudan a rescatar su pasado brumoso:

La “Geografía de Ptolomeo”, escrita tras la muerte del Faraón por varios autores en Bizancio, (año 120), registra datos que relacionan y esclarecen crónicas dispersas.

Los manuscritos de Al Macundí por India y China también recogen importantes observaciones sobre los pobladores orientales de África (año 915).

Al Idrisi (1100-1166), quedó altamente sorprendido por los vaporosos mantos y alhajas con que se adornaban las hermosas mujeres de piel oscura.



A estos escritos se suman los de Abdul Ibn Batuta quien visitó a Mombasa (1331), gran puerto de embarque de prisioneros zandj hacia el Medio Oriente e Indochina y los del árabe Abú al Masin (1411-1469).

Hasta desde la lejana China llegaron navegantes al oriente africano atraídos por la fama de sus fabulosas riquezas y vigorosos hombres. El primero de ellos fue Tuang Cheng Shih (año 863), seguido siglos después por el almirante Cheng Ho, quien a partir del año 1417, visitó la región por tres veces, la última en 1433.

### ***Resistencia al Islam***

Debemos confesar que para nuestro proyecto novelístico importó menos la historia de los colonizadores que la resistencia y perdurabilidad del pensamiento religioso de los oprimidos: la respuesta de los padres de la civilización a los “bárbaros”.

La colonización árabe en el oriente africano durante un milenio, produjo imprescindiblemente un mestizaje con los pueblos del litoral: giriana, duruma, pokomo y con los del interior: kikuyo, masai, tukana, mandi, suk, etc. También éstos han sufrido influjos de hamita y nilótico sin que hayan perdido su lengua y cultura bantú. Los swahili y bajún de la costa han recreado un nuevo idioma árabe-bantú, el swahili.

El Islam es un punto de confluencia con múltiples ramificaciones en torno a sus símbolos inmodificados: el Corán, el Ramadán, las mezquitas, oraciones, vestidos, etc. No obstante prevalece la filosofía bantú, núcleo existencial que ha resistido las prédicas islámicas, católicas y cristianas.

Cuando Cristóbal Colón (1492) pisó por vez primera a la América, en ese mismo año había fallecido Sonni Ali, soberano del esplendoroso Reino del Sonhai. Dejaba una gran herencia a la cultura africana: la Universidad de Timbuctú, el mayor centro cultural y científico de su tiempo. Allí enseñaban los más famosos educadores del mundo árabe:

“...médicos, juristas, predicadores y otros sabios que son generosamente pagados por el Rey. Han traído manuscritos y escrito libros sobre Barbaria (Egipto, Etiopía, Persia, etc.), los cuales eran valorados en mayor precio que cualquier otra mercancía,” escribió el poeta Leo Africanus, protegido de León IX.

Hechos que contrastan con la “calumnia negra” sobre la incultura de los cautivos africanos para justificar su esclavitud. Igual mentira para desconocer y saquear las civilizaciones afroamerindias.

Sin que hayamos caracterizado esta resistencia como elemento central de nuestra novela, Kenya trasciende en los vientos telúricos que respiran los personajes aborígenes y extraños, animales, selvas y cimas nevadas.

### ***Epílogo sin Final***

La trata inhumana en el Oriente de la deslumbrante Africa, mantenida a oscuras por los árabes, nunca se interrumpió durante ocho siglos (700-1500), encadenándose al monopolio portugués

(1500-1700). Lejos de humanizarla, los nuevos amos cristianos conservaron las prácticas antiguas, esforzándose en extremarlas.

Con la trata masiva de prisioneros africanos, a partir del Siglo XVI, los lusitanos continuarían la misma política de explotación, esclavitud y silencio de los árabes, desarraigando pueblos y arrasando culturas desde Madagascar, Tanganika, Kenya, Somlia hasta Etiopía. Bandas de cazadores armados y a sueldo de portugueses, británicos y franceses desde el interior de Africa conducían sus prisioneros a las factorías de embarque en Sofala, Malindi, Kilwa, Mombasa (Indico), de donde muchos fueron transportados a la América, vía Manila, vieja ruta de traficantes árabes hacia los mercados del extremo Oriente: India, Malasia, Molucas y Filipinas.

Todavía a principio del Siglo XVIII, cuando la revolución industrial inglesa socavaba la esclavitud con nuevas formas de producción, aligerando en parte el esfuerzo humano, la Compañía Francesa de las Indias Orientales, tras arrebatar a los portugueses las islas Mauricio y Seychelles, expoliaba al máximo la mano de obra esclava.

Aunque el tráfico haya sido reducido, no puede negarse la presencia étnica de los pueblos bantú del Oriente y Sur de Africa en América. Ese influjo no debe ponderarse por la cuantía, sino por su espíritu libertario, hoy presentes en la rebeldía de sus pueblos.

### ***El Gran Safari Comenzó en Oriente***

El comienzo de la trata masiva de los pueblos africanos (S. XVI) es un punto referencial muy importante en la motivación para escribir nuestra novela sobre Kenya. Lo que a primera vista pudiera considerarse como inconexo y antípoda, encuentra poderosas razones étnicas e históricas que los justifican:

Africa del Este siempre estuvo ligada a la América.

En gran medida la aparente ruptura se debe al sigilo riguroso que pusieron los portugueses en ocultar sus verdaderos intereses esclavistas en el Indico. Aquí nacen las falsedades sobre el poco influjo cultural del Oriente de Africa en la diáspora americana.

Por el contrario, en la lectura de *Hemingway, el Cazador de la Muerte* (Kenya), el lector afroamericano respirará en cada párrafo una atmósfera y una realidad humana que le son propias.

La cuña portuguesa que distorsionaría la historia común de nuestros pueblos comenzó con el primer desembarco lusitano en el Congo, lo que daría una prominente presencia en la costa occidental, cuando gran parte de sus cautivos bantú con destino a la América, fueron embarcados en los puertos orientales de Mozambique.

Rememoremos las andanzas de los portugueses por el Indico, ansiosos de expandir sus negocios esclavistas:

- 1484, Diego Cao explora la costa del Manikongo, donde muy pronto aparecerían las primeras factorías de prisioneros.
- 1488, Bartolomé Dias alcanza el extremo sur del continente africano cuando lo recorre y bautiza con el nombre de Cabo de las Tormentas.
- 1493, Pedro de Carvilha navega el Mar Rojo desde Arabia a Etiopía.

- 1497, Vasco da Gama traspasa el Cabo de las Tormentas, ya rebautizado Cabo de la Buena Esperanza por el Rey Manuel, el Afortunado. Augurio de sus nuevas conquistas en el Oriente.

Gama desembarca en Mozambique y erige varias cruces cristianas, las que fueron destruidas por los aborígenes al considerarlas ídolos contrarios a los suyos. Principios de una guerra que duraría siglos entre las religiones bantú, islámica y católica.

Vasco siguió hasta Mombasa, floreciente ciudad, donde encontró navíos árabes, lo suficientemente numerosos para disuadirlo de atacarla.

- 1502, Vasco da Gama retorna al Indico al comando de una expedición de 19 navíos de guerra para consolidar la hegemonía portuguesa en la región.

Ese mismo año (1502) arriba otra flota lusitana al mando de Pedro Alvarez del Cabral, quien acababa de tomar posesión del Brasil a nombre del Rey de Portugal (1501).

- 1505, Francisco de Almeida, nombrado Virrey de las Indias por la Corona de Portugal, derrotó la flota de los emiratos árabes coligados. El vencedor impondría el nuevo cuño esclavista del Imperio Portugués en Africa y las Indias, el cual calcarían todas las naciones europeas: esclavizar y saquear los pueblos conquistados.

### ***América Ignorada en el Génesis***

En la agonía del Siglo XV, el reloj de la muerte había comenzado a marcar los segundos del genocidio de los aborígenes de América.

Mientras los lusitanos continuaban explorando y afianzándose en las Indias Orientales, con “virrey” abordo, los españoles se esforzaban en alcanzar el Imperio del Gran Khan por el Occidente.

- 1492, Cristóbal Colón desembarcó en el islote Guahananí (Bahamas), tomando a nombre de los Reyes Católicos de España la posesión de su territorio y demás adyacentes, convirtiéndose de hecho en el primer Virrey de América.

En su libro de viaje, Colón afirma que “los aborígenes (taínos) tienen la color de los canarios”, es decir, similar a los moradores de las islas Canarias, descendientes de africanos desde tiempos inmemoriales (¿Tartesios, Siglo V. a.C?).

En verdad los taínos, estaban emparentados con los melánicos Olmeca de México, “mater gentium” de los pueblos de Mesoamérica. (Coe). *Hemingway, el Cazador de la Muerte* con los tambores y danzas guerreras de los Mau-Mau desde los invisibles horizontes de la noche y las selvas.

### ***El Exodo del Nunca Retorno***

En este momento Africa y América comienzan a ser parte de una sola historia. Confluencia que nos permite iniciar nuestra novela sin mayores preámbulos al lector afroamericano.

Conquistada la mayor parte del Nuevo Mundo y diezmados sus pueblos, los Reyes de España repartían a sus favoritos flamencos y germánicos licencias de corzo para que negociaran con los portugueses, sus antiguos súbditos, la mercancía humana que abundaba en sus posiciones de Africa.

Estos últimos disponían de los barcos ataúdes con bodegas nau-seabundas para acarrear millones de africanos cautivos a la América, de donde nunca jamás regresarían a la tierra de sus ancestros. Desde entonces comenzaron a irrigar con sus vidas los yacimientos de oro y plata donde espiraban exhaustos los sobrevivientes amerindios.

Galeones reales y piratas de todas las banderas recorrían el Atlántico, atiborrados de niños, mujeres y hombres, semillas inextinguibles de la nueva progenie americana.

En Africa los puertos y mercados solían cambiar de amos al fuego de los cañones pero los imperios ya demarcaban en el Nuevo Continente la cartografía de sus parcelas:

Portugal, propietario absoluto de sus despensas en el Congo, Angola y Mozambique, abastecía de cautivos a las numerosas colonias españolas, la propia del Brasil y aún le sobraban remanentes para cualquier postor necesitado.

Gran Bretaña, cada vez más ambiciosa, había convertido sus islas de Barbados, Jamaica, Providencia, Bahamas y las Vírgenes en campos de aprovisionamiento y mercadeo internacional, además de suplir las demandas de sus colonias en Virginia, Carolina, Alabama y Mississippi.

Los piratas reconocidos como “caballeros” por el Imperio Británico, asaltaban navíos y puertos en todos los mares, preludeo del monopolio esclavista que mantendría por varias siglos.

Francia con sus bucaneros asentados en Haití, disputaban a España espacios en martinica, Guadalupe, el Caribe y Guyana, a la par que sus legiones desembarcaban en Nueva Orleans y el Canadá.

No tardarían en llegar a estas islas los encadenados escultores, poetas y músicos de Benín, mágicos sacerdotes del Vodú.

Holanda había convertido las pequeñas islas de Curazao y Aruba en grandes factorías de prisioneros africanos para el consumo caribeño, sus territorios en la Guyana (Surinam) y conquistas en el Brasil.

Alemania, aprovechada de que sus cortesanos poseían el usufructo exclusivo de licencias para introducir prisioneros africanos a las colonias españolas, inició sus propias conquistas en la Capitanía General de Venezuela.

Cinco siglos después de la sangría que había padecido Africa por más de dos milenios, aparecen historiadores que minimizan a sólo 12 o 25 millones los 50 o más desterrados a la América.

### ***La Guerra Contra la Cacería Humana***

Las gestas heroicas de los pueblos africanos por su libertad contra los imperios europeos durante milenios deben figurar en

la Historia Universal como las más importantes por la dignidad humana. Sin embargo, no se registra en los anales de ninguna nación del mundo. Todo lo contrario, se sepulta y recuerda tan sólo como un episodio más de la esclavitud, sin que cuente el heroísmo de quienes se sacrificaron para impedirla y abolirla.

Para los cronistas de la historia africana sólo cuentan los “descubrimientos” y “encubrimientos” de los pueblos colonizados. Más los sometidos también tienen sus Homeros, los juglares que han cantado y preservado en sus cantos la memoria de las epopeyas de sus héroes, mártires e ideales libertarios.

Pruebas de estas luchas son las fortalezas amuralladas construidas por portugueses, holandeses, franceses, alemanes e ingleses en las costas del Atlántico, Mediterráneo y del Índico, donde eran confinados los prisioneros de todo África antes de la partida.

Los nombres de esas “casas de los Muertos” encubren las historias milenarias de culturas vivas y florecientes en el momento en que se enfrentaron a las ordas imperiales de los llamados “cruzados” de la Cristianidad. Asedios, incendios, exterminios, robos, capturas y exilio.

¿Por qué fortalezas amuralladas y no puertos de embarque?

Con esta aparente omisión u olvido se pretende ignorar a millones de rebeldes que murieron en la lucha contra los cazadores de hombres en defensa de ciudades, riberas, litorales y selvas, allí donde hubiera un prisionero que liberar.

Como en todas las infamias, no faltaron los Judas. Muchas jefes y reyes se dejaron sobornar por los invasores, comerciantes y esclavistas, patrocinando los crímenes contra sus hermanos. Otras veces fueron rivalidades ancestrales revividas por los traficantes a cambio de armas, tropas y dineros para destronar a los soberanos enemigos y esclavizar a sus súbditos.

Pero también hubo gobernantes insumisos a los halagos que nunca permitieron en su territorio fortalezas para la concentración y embarque de prisioneros. Movimientos liberadores como el capitaneado por Dingaan, cuya arremetida contra los cazadores portugueses en Sofala fue tan arrolladora que a su paso sus tropas aullantes no dejaron extraños con vida.

Y los temidos códigos espartanos de Zaka, el jefe zulú que hicieron temblar a los sanguinarios invasores de Sud África:

¡“Primero muerto que prisionero”!

¡Primero suicida que esclavo”!

### *La Parábola del Bumerang*

Era necesario recorrer dos millones de años de inteligencia y lucha por la vida, desde el primer Homosapiens africano hasta hoy, para exteriorizar la idea genésica que inspiró nuestra novela. El tema universal está abierto a todos los hijos de la diáspora en cualquier rincón del mundo, y desde luego en cada milímetro de África. Sin embargo, nos reclamaba Kenya, donde nacieron los padres primigenios.

¿Qué actitud han asumido los descendientes africanos, amerindios y mestizos, particularmente los novelistas y poetas,

herederos de los griots y sacerdotes-jaguales, narradores de las epopeyas de nuestros antepasados?

Una vez más nos encontramos con el silencio de la literatura escrita sobre la verdadera épica de los africanos en su desesperada defensa de sus pueblos y culturas.

En *Hemingway, el Cazador de la Muerte*, no intentamos asumir un compromiso global sobre esta responsabilidad ineludible, pero sí comprometernos con una temática que no debemos soslayar con el pretexto de considerarla como algo “exótico” o vedado para un escritor afroamericano.

Apenas trazamos un instante de la memoria universal, los años intermedios entre las décadas 50 y 60 de este siglo, caracterizados por la toma de conciencia nacionalista y las luchas armadas contra el colonialismo en África, concomitantes a los fenómenos de toma de conciencia étnica y social en América por parte de los escritores de la diáspora.

Este paralelismo o itinerario común por la libertad, como lo acabamos de resumir, ha sido constante en nuestro pasado. Revela así mismo que para los escritores de la diáspora no existen meridianos de tiempo y espacio que separen a nuestros pueblos como antípodas y nos demarquen fronteras literarias.

No debe sorprender que ese ideario haya inspirado la rebelión de los zandj en la antiquísima Basora, las guerras de los cimarrones en América, la Revolución Antiesclavista de los generales haitianos (L'Ouverture, Dessalines, Christophe) y la también victoriosa Rebelión Anticolonialista de los Mau-mau (Kenyatta, M'Boya, Kimathi).

¡El mismo grito “¡Uhuru!” (“¡Libertad! ¡Independencia!”)

Hemos querido recoger lo más trascendente de ese origen, encadenándolo a las luchas contra el colonialismo depredador de la vida (Monte Kenya), los hombres (kikuyos), los animales (elefantes), los árboles protectores (mogumos) y la tradición (“Mamut Sagrado”), un cocktail explosivo que como el bumerang africano—única arma capaz de retornar a las manos de su dueño—simboliza el suicidio de Hemingway al descargar sobre sí mismo las halas disparadas contra los hijos de la selva.

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# Omnipresencia Africana en la Civilización Universal

Manuel Zapata Olivella

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

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

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

Para señalar un sólo ejemplo en la simultaneidad histórica de la civilización y la barbarie, digamos que Timbuctú, capital de Songhai, en 1492, año en que Cristóbal Colón arribó a la América, poseía una universidad en la que enseñaban sabios de Arabia, Grecia, Italia y de la propia España morisca. Filósofos, matemáticos, astrónomos, médicos y sacerdotes cayeron en la red de los cazadores y traficantes de seres humanos. Pero la lucha contra la esclavitud es tan antigua como las “bárbaroscivilizados”. Recordarlo es muy importante para conocer quién es el homosapiens retrógrado y quién el liberado.

## La “Substancia” del Pensamiento

En sus conocidas experiencias, Pavlov demostró que el cerebro animal es una caja de resonancia de las sensaciones percibidas por los sentidos, provenientes del medio exterior y del interno. Una

capacidad psicomotora mucho más compleja en el hombre que no sólo reacciona con impulsos reflejos condicionados instintivamente, sino apta para dar respuestas racionales e incondicionadas.

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

Laboratorio ambulante, anduvo extraviado por milenios circundando la naturaleza como miembro dócil de la manada. Las primeras luces de inteligencia que le permitieron interrogarse, sin hallar respuestas, sobre los misterios del hambre, la vida y la muerte.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recordemos el texto de su paladina reivindicación:

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

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

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

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

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

Paradójicamente, Guillermo Humboldt, iniciador de la tesis del diacronismo lingüístico, se obstinó en separar la cultura y la civilización como ramas divergentes de la creatividad humana, al

sostener que la sabiduría empírica acumula los conocimientos del que hacer profano pero no los altos vuelos del espíritu.

Pero la paleontología, más atenta a los fósiles que a los ideales, ha confirmado que la inteligencia nació en la noche selvática africana entre croar de sapos y titilar de estrellas. Buscarle distinto origen sería reinventar la historia de la humanidad en otro planeta.

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

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

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

### *Los Diez Pilares de la Cultura*

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

Veamos los testimonios que nos aportan las ciencias humanas:

1. La inteligencia creadora del *Homosapiens Africano* fue la fuente originaria de la cultura.<sup>7</sup>
2. El reconocimiento consciente del parentesco entre padres e hijos por parte del Neandertal africano, dio comienzo a la formación de los primeros núcleos familiares en el seno de la horda o el clan.<sup>8</sup>
3. La invención del lenguaje facilitó al *Homosapiens Africano* desarrollar el primer Sistema filosófico para la comprensión de la naturaleza, antecedente de la filosofía, la matemática, la religión y la literatura.<sup>9</sup>
4. El lenguaje gestual precedió a la palabra. La mímica, el baile, la música y el teatro ritual iniciaron la comunión del *Homosapiens Africano* con sus semejantes, dioses y ancestros.<sup>10</sup>
5. La agudización de los sentidos para percibir la realidad desarrolló el instinto de observación del *Homosapiens Africano*, que conduciría a la astronomía, física, biología.<sup>11</sup>
6. La captura del fuego, por el *Homosapiens Africano* fue otro gran salto en el dominio de la naturaleza, gracias a él se iluminaron las cavernas del cuaternario. La primera experiencia para extraer de los minerales y cuerpos orgánicos, la chispa, el calor, la electricidad y la energía atómica.

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

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

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

9. Otro de los grandes prodigios de Homosapiens Africano, fue la doma de los instintos egoístas del individuo para someterlo a los sentimientos gregarios y amorosos de la sociedad y la familia. ¿Se habrá logrado dos millones de años después?<sup>14</sup>

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

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

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

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

### ***El Arbol de la Palabra y la Sabiduría***

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

Somos conscientes de la dificultad de explicar en breves páginas sus prodigios. No obstante lo intentaremos, validos de la omnipresencia africana a partir de las no menos oscuras bodegas de los barcos traficantes iluminadas por el talento de sus hijos encadenados. Para ellos es preciso no olvidar que esta hazaña prometida se remonta a la antigüedad grecolatina cuando sus filósofos creían que encarnaban el verbo de Dios. Todos los

pueblos más allá de Atenas y Roma pertenecían al Oikounmene, país imaginario, que habitaban los “bárbaros” de Africa, Europa y Asia, por tanto aptos para conquistar y ser esclavizados. Ni el esplendor de Mesopotamia, Egipto y Etiopía, ni el florecimiento de su filosofía, religión, escritura y artes les indujo a pensar que Africa había fecundado a la Hélade.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Los pueblos colonizados pertenecían a una misma etnia, la caucásica.

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

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

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

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

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

### *El Maremoto Lingüístico*

Cincuenta millones o más de africanos transplantados, y otros tantos de amerindios sobrevivientes de la conquista; cientos de miles de indostanes, malayos y filipinos, sumados al torrente incesante de millones de europeos, provocaron el gran maremoto que trastoca en América los idiomas aborígenes y extranjeros. Jamás antes ni después se ha dado en la historia otra revulsión lingüística de tal magnitud.

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

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

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

Al sur, las cadenas de los Andes vertebraban los idiomas igualmente arcaicos del vasto imperio socialista de los Incas—aymará y quéchua—, aglutinando culturalmente pueblos de diferentes etnias por cumbres, praderas y ríos. Desde Colombia, Ecuador,

Perú, Bolivia, Brasil, Paraguay, Uruguay, hasta la helada Tierra del Fuego: chibchas, timotes, quillacingas, charrúas, aricas, mapuches, calchaquies o patagones...

Todos emparentados por la lengua arawak, la más extendida por las riberas selváticas del Río de la Plata, Paraná, Amazonas y Orinoco, ámbitos del guaraní, tupí y caribe que confluyen al circumscribe de los taironas, tainos y olmeca, con lo cual se cierra el universo lingüístico de los amerindios.

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

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

### *África Sacrificada y Renacida*

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

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

Después de tres meses o más de navegación, los cautivos arribaban a las puertos reducidos a una tercera parte por el hacinamiento, las hambrunas y enfermedades. Los sobrevivientes, sin contar con un día de descanso, eran sometidos a la expoliación de los trabajos forzados bajo azotes y encadenamiento con tanta saña que la expectativa de vida útil no sobrepasaba las siete o diez años.

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

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

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

A sabiendas del incierto destino que les esperaba, quienquiera que fuese el padre—africano o no—, la madre arrullaba al



hijo, recordándole el nombre de “Africa”. Con esta sola palabra se mantenía el recuerdo de los orígenes.

### *Memoria del Lenguaje*

La omnipresencia de Africa en América es tan ostensible en el Caribe, Estados Unidos, Brasil y litorales de Sud América que la mente se resiste a pensar que su etnia y cultura sean un paisaje trasplantado. El afroamericano parece tener la edad, la piel, el sabor y el aroma de la tierra.

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

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

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

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

La estrategia para abordar este dolor existencial requiere una interpretación ontogenética, la empleada por Freud para desembobinar el inconsciente y consciente de los pueblos. Una tarea para sus discípulos—el psicoanálisis colectivo—capaz de evaluar los logros y frustraciones de los millones de violentados, distinta a la óptica de los colonizadores. Frantz Fanon la había empezado cuando lo sorprendió Tanos.<sup>21</sup>

### *Los Lenguajes Subversivos*

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

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

Una vez más nos encontramos frente a una tarea paleontológica, reconstruir la osamenta fósil del lenguaje ontogénico. Afortunadamente hoy disponemos también de recursos científicos

para comprender las trampas psicológicas de crear idiomas subversivos.

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

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

Las lenguas americanas opusieron sus mitos cosmogónicos a los idiomas invasores. Dos universes contrapuestos que convivieron como partes recíprocas a las que se sumó el polen inseminador del árbol africano de la palabra, arrastrado por huracanados vientos de la trata mercenaria. Para explicar lo acontecido, acudamos a la lingüística existencial que connota la creatividad humana en todo acto de la palabra viva o escrita.<sup>22</sup>

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

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

### *El Bumerang de Doble Filo*

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

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

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

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

## *Las Lenguas Cimarronas*

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

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

Lo insólito es haber podido tejer toda la trama lingüística de sociedades nuevas en un continente extraño, desde el culto religioso, núcleo aglutinante de etnias e idiomas, hasta la cúpula de un poder centralizado en la autoridad de un rey. A imagen y semejanza de los antiguos reinos africanos, conformaron sociedades jerárquicas en base a una cúpula militar y consejos de ancianos. Sin embargo fue la lucha por la liberación de la esclavitud lo que definió su carácter político.

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

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

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

Las lenguas cimarronas habían emprendido la emancipación mucho antes de que los criollos iniciaran sus guerras de independencia. Gunga Zumbi (Brasil), Lemba (Santo Domingo), Benkos Biojo (Nueva Granada), reyes y filósofos que fueron conformando, el genio político y militar de Toussaint L'Ouverture.

Convocado por los tambores, dialogaban con sus Ancestros para que les enseñaran a derrotar los ejércitos europeos. Proclamada la República Antiesclavista de Haití, pudieron suministrar a los patriotas criollos armas, soldados y barcos con la única condición, bajo juramento—¡siempre la palabra viva!—, de proclamar constituciones que abolieran la esclavitud. Pero

las repúblicas americanas con su constitución esclavista, nunca acogieron el espíritu libertario de la palabra cimarrona.

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

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

## *Summun*

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

*Bogotá, Colombia*

**NOTAS**

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# Black Dancers and Musicians Performing Afro-Christian Identity in Early Modern Spain and Portugal

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## Abstract

This article discusses several early modern Spanish and Portuguese texts that describe Afro-Iberians' festive and confraternal practices in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. While scholars have contended that the early modern Iberian states and church used conversion and confraternities, or lay Catholic brotherhoods, to integrate Afrodescendants to Iberian society, by linking Afro-Iberians' festive practices to their confraternities, the article contends that these texts underscore how Afrodescendants adapted their African cosmologies and festive customs in the diaspora, rather than totally assimilate to Iberian culture. The article also triangulates Afrodescendants' festive practices in Europe, Africa, and the Americas, suggesting that Afrodescendants thought of the diaspora as an imagined community.

Black Woman: If you want me to have a fiesta,  
I'll sing a song from our land.

*Preta: Queri tu que faça uns festa, eu canta  
argum moda de nossa terra.*<sup>1</sup>

**O**n March 20, 1455, a group of free blacks from the parish church of *Sanct Jaume* (St. James the Great, d. 44 CE) in Barcelona received royal permission to establish a confraternity, or Catholic association made up of laypersons and established for various pious purposes.<sup>2</sup> The royal edict encouraged the members to continue taking part in the city's annual Corpus Christi celebration, "which they were already accustomed to doing" [*lo qual ja acostumen de fer*].<sup>3</sup> Corpus Christi was one of the most important feasts of the Catholic calendar, and was celebrated with great pageantry in the early modern Mediterranean.<sup>4</sup> This pageantry, which was meant to reinforce the Catholic Church's doctrine on the Eucharistic presence, sought to incorporate all sectors of society.<sup>5</sup> In 1497, for example, when Queen Isabella I of Castile (r. 1474-1504) entered Seville on Corpus Christi, the council asked "all the blacks in the city" to join the rest of the citizenry in welcoming the Catholic monarch [*que deuián salir al dho. recibimiento todos los negros que ouiese en esta çibdad*].<sup>6</sup> When this order was issued by the city council, Seville already had several black confraternities, which certainly participated in these festivities. These early

examples link black confraternities to both religious and civic celebrations, a distinction that was not always made in the early modern Mediterranean.

How did these blacks participate in these civic-religious celebrations? According to the royal decree, the confraternity of *St. Jaume* was to take part in the Corpus Christi celebration by participating in the processional with candles, like the other confraternities of the city.<sup>7</sup> The 1565 *compromisso* (constitution) of a black confraternity of the Rosary, founded in 1460 in Lisbon, also asks its members to celebrate their feast in a similar fashion, by marching with candles while "very devoutly praying the rosary" [*virão todos os irmãos e confrades com cirios azeos nesta procissão muito devotamente rezando o rosario*].<sup>8</sup> The language in the documents cited so far has led scholars such as Didier Lahon, Iván Armenteros Martínez, Aurelia Martín Casares, and Christine Delaigue, to posit that sub-Saharan Africans were culturally assimilated into Iberian society through religious integration.<sup>9</sup> Yet scholars such as Isidoro Moreno affirm the opposite: that Afro-Iberians did not forego their ancestral cultural heritage altogether as they participated in the social life of early modern Spain and Portugal.<sup>10</sup> In this essay, I follow this second line of argument and, through the analysis of texts that show blacks in both civic and religious festive performances in early modern Spain and Portugal, demonstrate that blacks used confraternities to continue their ancestral festive practices in their new European context. This claim will be supported

by the fact that blacks did more than march with candles in religious events; they danced, played African instruments, and sang to the tune of African music.

The first black confraternity in Western history may have been founded in Seville between 1391 and 1401 by the prelate of that city to minister to infirm blacks.<sup>11</sup> This confraternity eventually evolved into a black confraternity similar to *St. Jaume* or Lisbon's black Rosary and became popularly known as *Los Negritos* (The Little Blacks), but was officially under the spiritual patronage of Our Lady of the Angels.<sup>12</sup> In the sixteenth century, there were at least three other black confraternities in Seville. The ones of the Rosary and the Precious Blood were founded by blacks from Portugal in Triana, outside the city limits.<sup>13</sup> The third one was founded by the mixed race mulattoes of the parish church of *San Idelfonso* (St. Idelphonsus, c. 607-67).<sup>14</sup> There were also black confraternities in Valencia, Granada, Cadiz and other Andalusian cities, as well as in Portugal, Sicily and Naples, making it a relatively common phenomenon in the Mediterranean. Some black confraternities were made up of only free persons, like St. Jaume, but most were made up of both free and enslaved Africans.<sup>15</sup>

As the origin of *Los Negritos* suggests, caring for sick members, paying for the burial of those whose survivors could not afford it or who had no survivors, and praying for their soul were central tenets of black confraternities.<sup>16</sup> In this fashion, Afro-Iberian confraternities continued the traditions established by their European predecessors.<sup>17</sup> But black confraternities had many elements that were uniquely their own. On the one hand, black confraternities could, and often did, purchase the freedom of members. On the other, they imbued their confraternal life and festive performances with African elements. By making confraternities their own, blacks transformed confraternities into alternative communities within the broader oppressive structure of Iberian society and used them to exercise limited self-rule in their affairs.

Black confraternities also adapted other European confraternal traditions. Especially in Portugal, but also in Spain, black confraternities elected ceremonial royalties for festive performance, a tradition that resonated with both European carnival and African practices.<sup>18</sup> Although this practice was also common in other Iberian confraternities, it eventually became particularly associated with black confraternities.<sup>19</sup> In early modern Spain and Portugal, blacks would appear in festive performances led by their king and queen. Through these festive performances, blacks performed their Afro-Christian identity before their black and broader European audiences.<sup>20</sup>

Afro-Iberians of sub-Saharan descent were partially allowed to establish confraternities because the Church and Crown did not see them as *hostes fidei* (enemies of the faith), but rather as theopolitical *tabula rasa*, ready to receive the Gospel.<sup>21</sup> As such, they were treated with less suspicion than

their *moriscos*, or Muslim converts, counterparts.<sup>22</sup> Their festive practices were not perceived as threats to the social order, but rather as a necessary respite from their harsh labor. In this sense, the seventeenth-century Sevillian alderman and historian Diego Ortiz de Zuñiga (1636-1680) wrote in his annals for the year 1474, that

in Seville, the Blacks have been treated with great benignity since the time of King Henry III [of Castile, b. 1379, r. 1390-1406], being allowed to gather for their dances and fiestas on holidays, which made them work with greater joy and better bear their captivity.

[eran en Sevilla los Negros tratados con gran benignidad desde el tiempo de el Rey Don Henrique Tercero, permitiendoseles juntarse à sus bayles, y fiestas, en los días feriados, con que acudian mas gustosos al trabajo, y tolerauan mejor el captiuero.]<sup>23</sup>

However, blacks were not allowed to engage in their merriment without authorial supervision. As Ortiz de Zuñiga himself writes, “[a black was given the title of *mayoral* [overseer] and would represent the others before their masters” [à uno se le daua título de *Mayoral*, que patrocinava a los demás con sus Amos].<sup>24</sup> (Confraternity leaders would be called *mayoral* in the Spanish-speaking world.) To this end, in 1475, when Queen Isabella named the “Black Count” [*Conde Negro*] Juan de Valladolid *mayoral e juez* (overseer and judge) of the blacks of Seville, she instructed him not to allow the black and mulatto men and women of the city to meet or have fiestas without his presence. The monarch instructed him to make sure “that the said *negros* (blacks) and *loros* (mulattoes) may not and do not have fiestas or coronations without your presence [que no puedan fazer, ni fagan los dichos Negros, y Negras, y Loros, y Loras, ningunas fiestas, nin juzgados de entre ellos, salvo ante vos].<sup>25</sup> The Queen's instruction reflects the Crown and Church's desire to control the social activity of the black population, and at the same time, could reveal their inability to do so to the fullest extent of their will.

Unfortunately, we do not have detailed accounts of black festive performances for early modern Spain. However, we can imagine what they may have been like through the Portuguese texts that will be discussed later. Nonetheless, there are myriad mentions of black festive practices and performances in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish texts. This study will not examine Golden Age authors such as Miguel de Cervantes and Lope de Vega as this work has already been done by many Golden Age literary critics.<sup>26</sup> Instead, it will analyze lesser-studied texts.

Within the short period between 1585 and 1600, we find three documents that mention black dancers in Barcelona, Madrid and Valencia. The first one is the Dutch Henrique Cock's *Annals of the Year 1585*. These annals detail King Philip

II and Prince Philip III's journey through Aragon, Catalonia and Valencia for the purpose of holding the courts for the Kingdom of Aragon for that year.<sup>27</sup> Cock traveled with the king and prince as an archer in the monarch's personal guard (*Guarda del Cuerpo Real*), but he was also a scholar, and later became Apostolic Notary.<sup>28</sup> As the king and prince traveled through the kingdom, his entourage and the cities they entered staged lavish fiestas for them. The nobles that traveled with the king and prince brought their black slaves with them. On March 20, describing all the people in the entourage and in what order they traveled, Cock mentions the black slaves of one don Sebastian de Santoyo:

After [some Castilian nobles] came don Pedro de Bolea and don Bernardino Copones, and in front of them, the blacks of don Sebastian de Santoyo.

Después de [algunos nobles castellanos] vinieron los señores don Pedro de Bolea y Bernardino Copones, yendo delante de ellos los negros del señor Sebastián de Santoyo.<sup>29</sup>

These blacks also took part in the fiestas staged by the traveling court. On March 28, when the nobles staged a lavish Renaissance festival for the king and prince, Cock describes a group of “twelve blacks dressed in red and playing their instruments” [*venían delante doce negros vestidos de colorado tocando sus instrumentos*].<sup>30</sup> Albeit this is a very elusive mention of the blacks' performance, it makes clear that they played *their* (and not *our*) instruments. In other words, they may have performed on African instruments. The normality with which Cock describes the blacks should not surprise us. Black drummers had been used in the Spanish royal army since the time of Charles V.<sup>31</sup> In 1529, Christoph Weiditz witnessed such black drummers, with a red shirt, in Emperor Charles' coronation entourage traveling to Rome (fig. 1). Weiditz concretely writes that “thus ride the army drummers in Spain when the emperor rides into a city,” suggesting, as Kate Lowe concedes, that black drummers were a staple of Spanish Renaissance royal entries.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps, the blacks in Queen Isabella's 1497 Corpus Christi entrance into Seville performed in a similar fashion, as Isidoro Moreno suggests.<sup>33</sup>

In Barcelona, on the feast of St. Stephen (December 26), the king and prince witnessed blacks in a religious celebration: the previous performance “was followed by a Moorish dance and that of the blacks” [*siguió una danza de moriscos y luego los negrillos*].<sup>34</sup> On this occasion we have two black groups (northern Africans [*moriscos*] and sub-Saharan Africans [*negrillos*]) performing different, or at least two dances at the same event. This example allows us to see that Iberians, and perhaps Africans themselves, distinguished between the two groups. Furthermore, each group may have performed their own cultural heritage.<sup>35</sup>



Fig. 1. Christoph Weiditz, “Drummer at the Entrance of the Emperor,” ca. 1529. Courtesy of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum.<sup>36</sup>

The blacks' performance was followed by a procession of Barcelona's confraternities: “Then came the confraternities with their standards, according to their rank, whose images were taken in by the prince” [*Luego vinieron los pendones de las cofradías, por su orden, cuyas imágenes tomó todas el príncipe*].<sup>37</sup> Although Cock does not go into details, *St. Jaume* most certainly was among the confraternities that processed before the monarch. City records show that *St. Jaume* was among the confraternities that processed through the streets of the city when Philip II visited Barcelona in 1564. On that occasion, when the confraternities of the city had a processional before the monarch, *St. Jaume* came in fifth place out of thirty confraternities.<sup>38</sup> *St. Jaume* is the only confraternity identified by its name, rather than by professions. The confraternities that came before *St. Jaume* were those of farmers (*parayres*), carpenters (*ffusters*), tanners (*blanquers*) and gardeners (*hortolans*). This list places *St. Jaume* among the humblest occupations, which must have been the kind of labor available to free blacks in early modern Iberia. Confraternities, then, marched according to rank, as Cock writes, but from lowest to highest, which is the form many Catholic processions still take today.

This same order was observed when Philip III visited Barcelona again in 1599. On this occasion, the gardener confraternity that came in front of *St. Jaume* was that of the young gardeners (*jovens ortolans*). The older gardener confraternities of St. Anthony (*Sanct Anthoni*) and St. Peter (*Sanct Pere*) came later in the procession, toward the middle.<sup>39</sup> This shows that rank was not fixed for Europeans confraternities, for by 1599, the gardeners of 1564 had ascended in rank and the young/new gardeners occupied their old place in the procession. *St. Jaume*, however, seems to have been fixed in its place, highlighting the little social mobility available to blacks. For example, in the eighteenth century, white

Sevillanos took over *Los Negritos*, and it was only then that the confraternity came first in the city's Corpus Christi procession, although the black members had fought for this right in the sixteenth century.<sup>40</sup>

In 1590 and 1599, Philip II and Philip III witnessed Afro-Iberians of sub-Saharan descent performing black dances and music again. In 1590, when nobles in Madrid staged a poetry competition for Philip II, there was a black dance and a Sayagoan dance (*sayagiúés*) with a black bride that won for best performance:

Don Pedro de Toledo and don Bernardo de Toledo, brought out a group of black dancers; [...]; and another of Sayagoans with a black bride, who was Francisca de Almada, the slave of Prior Don Fernando [...]. They won the prize for best performance.

Don Pedro de Toledo y Don Bernardo de Toledo, sacaron por invención una danza de negros; [...]; otra de sayagiúeses con una novia negra, que era Francisca de Almada, la negra del prior Don Fernando [...]. Diéronles el precio de mejor invención.<sup>41</sup>

Philip III also witnessed black dancers in Valencia in 1599. That year the monarch traveled to Valencia to receive his bride, Margaret of Austria. The festivities celebrated in Valencia for this occasion are meticulously detailed in the city's chronicler, Felipe de Gauna's *Account of the Fiestas Celebrated in Valencia on the Occasion of the Marriage of Philip III*, which in the modern facsimile edition fills two tomes.<sup>42</sup> As with St. Stephen in Barcelona, the blacks of Valencia were involved in the wedding festivities on a Christian feast day, that of St. Vincent Ferrer, native son and patron of the city.

These instances link black festive performances to Christian holidays, and points to religious and state occasions as one of the events that gave Afro-Iberians the freedom to perform African dances in early modern Spain. As we see, these religious events were often sponsored by civic authorities, pointing to what Ortiz de Zuñiga highlighted as a tradition that went back to the late medieval period; namely, that civic authorities also gave Afro-Iberians the freedom to perform African dances. It is not surprising that the accounts that bear witness to Afro-Iberian festive performances are found in accounts about festivals staged for monarchs, as royal events demanded recording, while lesser festivities may have not. This means that we can take this small sample as an indicator that blacks performed African dances and music for both religious and secular purposes in early modern Spain on a regular basis.<sup>43</sup>

From the point of view of state, church and city authorities, this permissive practice constituted what has become known in ethnography as the safety release valve theory of containment, which is precisely what Ortiz de Zuñiga expresses in his annals for the year 1474, cited earlier: that is

that such allowances allowed blacks to get much needed rest from their oppressive labor so that they would "work with greater joy and better bear their captivity."<sup>44</sup> In other words, authorities allowed these practices in order to prevent revolts and other forms of resistance. However, ethnographers contend that such performances as the ones described here constitute transformative practices through which subaltern groups form their collective identity.<sup>45</sup> So, while the blacks in the festivals above and below are manifesting their adherence to Iberian Catholicism and showing their loyalty to the sovereign, they are also taking part in events that celebrate and contribute to the formation of their Afro-Iberian identity and culture, a syncretism of African and Iberian cosmologies.

Portuguese accounts of black festive performances are not to be found until the early eighteenth century, when they abound. Albeit written toward the end of baroque culture, these accounts are far more detailed than the ones we have seen from Spain. Spanish baroque reached its zenith in the seventeenth century. Portugal, on the other hand, extended its baroque into the eighteenth century, thanks to the discovery of gold in Brazil. This newfound wealth not only increased Portugal's power, but also its black population. This black population filled the streets and public spaces of urban Portugal with their festive culture.

The *Brief Extract of the Most August Triumph which the August City of Braga Offers in Honor of the Most Holy Sacrament*, published by a Jesuit school (*Colegio das Artes*) in Coimbra, Portugal, in 1731, is a unique text because rather than a festival account *a posteriori*, it is an instruction book for those who were to participate in the festival. As the title states, this festival was to take place in the northern city of Braga on the feast of Corpus Christi, on May 27, 1731. Also, as the title states, the instructions do not include all the parts of the festival, but only some. Thus, the inclusion of the black dance (*bayle dos negros*) among the three (out of thirteen) dances (*bayles*), four plays (*fabulas*), and the *triumfo* or procession with the Eucharist, described in the extract in full is significant (fig. 2). Intended to show the rest of Portugal how the city of Braga celebrated Corpus Christi, the extract included the black dance as one of the festival's main attractions:

Then in ninth place, will come the black company, with a new composition, and pleasing music, and their ceremonial figures being most talented, they will perform an elegant, and jovial dance.

Logo em nono lugar, virà a Fulia Preta, formada com nova composição, e agradável musica, e por serem nella destrissimas as Figuras, formã hum vistoso, e alegre bayle.<sup>46</sup>



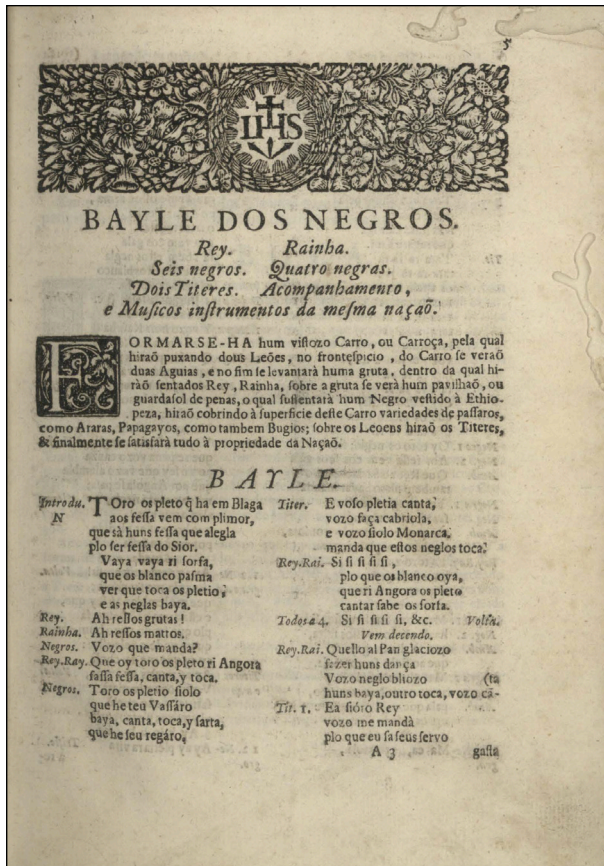


Fig. 2. Page 3 of the *Brief Extract*, 1731. Courtesy of the National Library of Portugal.

The dance troupe was to be composed of a king (*rey*), queen (*rainha*), “six black men,” “four black women,” “two dwarfs” (*titeres*) “and musicians [and] instruments from the same group” (*nação*).<sup>47</sup> Like the other performers in the festival, and in accord with baroque custom, the black troupe was to travel in a sumptuous carriage (*vistoso Carro, ou Carroça*):

There will be an elegant carriage drawn by two lions, there will be two eagles in the front of the carriage, and on the back there will a cave, inside which will travel the king and queen. On top of the cave there will be a parasol held by a black person dressed in African custom. There will be many birds on top of the carriage, such as macaw, parrot, as well as monkeys. The dwarfs will ride on the lions, and finally everything will be done according to their custom.

Formarse-ha hum vistoso Carro, ou Carroça, pela qual hiraõ puxando dous Leões, no frontespicio, do Carro se veraõ duas Aguais, e no fim se levantará huma gruta, dentro da qual hiraõ sentados Rey, Rainha, sobre a gruta se veraõ hum pavilhaõ, ou guardasol de penas, o qual



Fig. 3. Carlos Julião, “Brazilian Ceremonial Black King and Queen,” ca. 1775. Courtesy of the National Library of Brazil.<sup>48</sup>



Fig. 4. Bernadino D'Asti, “The Missionary is Welcomed by the King of the Kongo,” ca. 1750. Courtesy of the Public Library of Turin, Italy.<sup>49</sup>

sustentará un Negro vestido à Ethiopeza, hiraõ cobrindo à superficie deste Carro variedades de passaros, como Araras, Papagayos, como tambem Bugios; sobre os Leões hiraõ os Titeres, & finalmente se satisfará tudo à propriedade da Nação.<sup>50</sup>

This design’s similarity with black festive performance in eighteenth-century Brazil could illustrate how black festive culture circulated in the early modern Atlantic, forming an imagined community across the African diaspora. For example, the description of how the king and queen were to travel, especially under “a parasol held a black person dressed in African custom,” resembles what the Italian artist Carlos Julião witnessed in Rio de Janeiro in the late eighteenth century (fig. 3).

The performance also bears striking similarities with early modern African royal pageantry, especially as recorded by Italian missionaries in the Kingdom of the Kongo, where the Portuguese had taken Christianity in the late fifteenth century (fig. 4).<sup>51</sup>

Here we see the governor of Soyo, one the three provinces of the Kongo, receiving a Franciscan missionary. The governor

and the nobles travel under a parasol. These similarities triangulate the African diaspora and its practices.

According to the extract, as the dancers performed to the rhythm of the music, they were to sing the “new composition” mentioned in the introductory paragraph cited above. As in Spanish Golden Age works with black characters, this text is a stereotyped (European) version of how blacks spoke Portuguese, as in the epigraph that opened this essay. In this text, for example, what would normally be *r*'s are rendered as *l*'s, so that *negra* (black woman) in a black person's speech is *negla*. This dialect was known as *lingua de negros* (black speech).<sup>52</sup> This performative text was most likely composed by a non-black writer and shows that the truly authentic part of the blacks' performance is their dance and music, which was to be done according to their customs, as the instructions state. This claim is supported by the fact that most blacks were illiterate, and the text is not an African song but rather an elaborate baroque poem.

A year before, on Friday, October 6, 1730, the weekly satirical *Pamphlet of Both Lisbons* (*Folheto de ambas Lisboas*) reported that the blacks of the city had celebrated the feast of the Rosary on Sunday, October 1, in the churchyard of the parish of Salvador in Alfama.<sup>53</sup> The *Pamphlet* describes the music as bizarrely dissonant:

There were myriad instruments in the churchyard, with a bizarre dissonance; because there were three marimbas, four piccolos, two fiddles, more than three hundred berimbaus, tambourines, African drums, the instruments they use.

No adro estava hum rancho de instrumentos, com huma bizarra dissonancia; porque estavaõ tres marimbas, quatro pifanos, duas rebecas do peditorio, mais de trezentos berimbaus, pandeiros, congos, e cangáz, instrumentos de que uzaõ.<sup>54</sup>

The pamphlet also includes a letter which the ceremonial king of Angola supposedly sent to the ceremonial king of Mina<sup>55</sup> in a very satirically distorted version of *lingua de negros*:

The Lord be with you, brother, King of Mina. You know that our feast is on Sunday, and that you should come celebrate with us. Make sure you don't miss it, brother, because sister Susana and the daughter of brother Mauricio will be there, and sister Josefa's daughter is the viscountess. You will sing the Zaramangoè and dance the fofa in the procession. Brother José prepared the music to company the dancing. Now, if you come great, and if you don't, also. May God keep you many years, brother.

Seoro compadra Re Mina Zambiapum tatè: sabe vozo, que nossos fessa sà Domingo, e que vozo hade vir fazer os forgamenta: oya vussè naõ falta vussè comprada, que

as may Zoana os fia dos pay Maulicia, e dos may Zozefa sa biscondeça dos taraya: nos procissaõ vozo cantar o Zaramangoè, e traze vussè nos fofa que os pay Zozè nos fezo os cutambala, cuzambala cuyè nunas minueta; agora se vozo vem zangana se naõ vem zangana vussè homo Zambiapum tatè muitos anos.<sup>56</sup>

Even if this celebration did not take place, it is certainly based on the fact that the blacks of Lisbon did indeed celebrate the feast of the Rosary and other Catholic feasts. The false letter may be based on the fact that the blacks of Lisbon may have announced their forthcoming celebrations (but orally, since most were illiterate), calling on all their *irmãos* (brothers and sisters but also confraternity members) to join in the feast. As James H. Sweet has stated, “the letter still reveals a deep understanding of specific African national differences—in language, music, dance, and religion.”<sup>57</sup> The letter, for example, imitates a herald (*pregoeiro*), which was an office in Portuguese confraternities.<sup>58</sup> In this sense, it alludes to the fact that confraternities convoke their own members and other confraternities to celebrate with them. Moreover, as Sweet adds, “an invented letter of invitation, written by a Portuguese, would represent more powerful evidence of Central African cultural vibrancy in Lisbon than one actually written by an Angolan.”<sup>59</sup> The figure of the ceremonial kings is also taken from reality, as we saw in the example from Braga.

In this essay, we have seen black dancers and musicians performing their Afro-Christian identity in civic-religious festivals in early modern Spain and Portugal. The Spanish texts analyzed here showed blacks performing before the sovereign, especially on Christian holidays, while Portuguese texts only show blacks performing in religious festivals. Although the texts do not show it, Portuguese state, church and city authorities also allowed these festivals for the same reason Spanish ones did, namely in order to help blacks bear their “work with greater joy and better bear their captivity,” as Ortiz de Zuñiga states. Yet, as ethnographers Peter Stallybrass and Allon White contend, these festive performances constituted transformative practices in which Afro-Iberians celebrated and formed their collective group identity. The difference between the seemingly more austere Spanish examples and the more pompous Portuguese ones may very well be due to the fact at the time these events took place in Portugal, in comparison to the time those in Spain took place, Portugal had a greater African presence. In sum, this essay has shown that when blacks participated in religious and secular celebrations in early modern Spain and Portugal, they did it “according to their [ancestral] customs,” as the black character in my opening epigraph proclaims; performing and forming their Afro-Christian identity before and among their black counterparts and broader European audiences.

## NOTES

1. José Daniel Rodrigues da Costa, *Pequena peça intitulada o Caes do Sudré* (Lisbon: José Aquino Bulhoens, 1791), 10. All translation are my own unless otherwise noted.
2. “Ordenanzas de la cofradía de los cristianos negros de Barcelona” (Barcelona, March 20, 1445). Archive of the Crown of Aragon, Reg. 3298, fol. 5r/v. Reproduced in Próspero Bofarull y Mascaré, ed., *Colección de documentos inéditos de la corona de Aragón* (Barcelona: José Eusebio Monfort, 1851), VIII: 463-471. On the origin and nature of medieval confraternities, see, for example, Catherine Vincent, *Les confréries médiévales dans le royaume de France: XIIIe-XVe siècles* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994). Most medieval and early modern confraternities were exclusively for men or women, but *St. Jaume* explicitly welcomed men, women and children, which was a common practice among national confraternities.
3. As cited in Bofarull y Mascaré VIII: 467.
4. On Corpus Christi, see, for example, Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), esp. 164-287.
5. This pageantry increased in volume as the Eucharist became a central concern of the Catholic Church during the post-Tridentine Counter-Reformation.
6. Municipal Archive of Seville, Cuaderno de Actas Capitulares, June 27, 1497. Qtd. in José Gestoso y Pérez, *Curiosidades antiguas de Sevilla* (Seville: El Correo de Andalucía, 1910), II: 101. Queen Isabella was a significant promoter of Corpus Christi celebrations in Spain (“bien sabía su merced quel tenía cargo de fazer salir los juegos y danças quando la Reyna nra. sra. mandase fazer la fiesta del cuerpo de nro Señor” / “your lordships [the city council] well know how [the mayor] has order to arrange for the performances and dances when the Queen our lady orders the celebration of the feast of the Body of Our Lord” (qtd. *ibid.*).
7. See Bofarull y Mascaré VIII: 467.
8. *Compromisso da irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos homens pretos* (Lisbon, 1565), fols. 6v-7r. National Library of Portugal, Lisbon, Portugal, MS 151. The first Confraternity of the Rosary was founded by Dominicans and was meant “to rid the poor and illiterate population of pagan belief” (Elizabeth W. Kiddy, “*Congados, Calunga, Cadombe: Our Lady of the Rosary in Minas Gerais, Brazil*” [*Luso-Brazilian Review* 37.1 (2000): 47-61], 58). Lisbon’s Rosary confraternity dated back to the early fifteenth century. Blacks were originally admitted into the Portuguese confraternity, but in 1460, they established their own branch. Unlike *St. Jaum*, this branch was originally only for men (“homens”).
9. Didier Lahon, “Da redução da alteridade a consagração da diferença: as irmandades negras em Portugal (séculos XVI-XVIII),” *Projeto História* 44 (2012): 53-83; Iván Armenteros Martínez, “De hermandades y procesiones: la cofradía de esclavos y libertos negros de *Sant Jaume* de Barcelona y la asimilación de la negritud en la Europa premoderna (siglos XV-XVI),” *Clio: Revista de Pesquisa Histórica* 29.2 (2011): n/p; Christine Delaigue and Aurelia Martín Casares, “The Evangelization of Freed and Slave Black Africans in Renaissance Spain: Baptism, Marriage, and Ethnic Brotherhoods,” *History of Religions* 52.3 (2013): 214-235.
10. Isidoro Moreno, *La antigua hermandad de “Los Negros” de Sevilla: etnicidad, poder y sociedad en 600 años de historia* (Seville: U of Seville/Government of Andalucía, 1997), 59-67.
11. Bernard Vincent, “Les Confréries de noirs dans la Péninsule Ibérique.” In David González Cruz, ed., *Religiosidad y costumbres populares en Iberoamérica* (Huelva: U of Huelva, 2000), 17-28. In a forthcoming book, Karen Graubart contends that this date is too early for a hospital for blacks.
12. Moreno 59-60. Like Lisbon’s black Rosary confraternity, this confraternity was also originally only for men (“negritos”). This confraternity is still in existence today, but since the 18th century, it is made up of European members (Moreno 337-475). It is still a masculine confraternity. [hermandadlosnegritos.es](http://hermandadlosnegritos.es)
13. Moreno 73-76.
14. Félix González de León, “Hermandades y cofradías de negros en la Sevilla del XVI.” *Alma Mater Hispalense*. URL: [http://personal.us.es/alporu/histsevilla/cofradias\\_negros\\_sevilla.htm](http://personal.us.es/alporu/histsevilla/cofradias_negros_sevilla.htm). All these confraternities were exclusively for men.
15. Miguel Gual Camarena, “Una cofradía de negros libertos en el siglo XV,” *Estudios de Edad Media de la Corona de Aragón* 5 (1952): 457-466; Debra Blumenthal, “*La Casa dels Negres: Black African Solidarity in Late Medieval Valencia*,” in T. F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe, eds., *Black Africans in Reinassance Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 225-246; Aurelia Martín Casares, “Free and

- Freed Black Africans in Granada in the Time of the Spanish Renaissance,” *ibid.*, 247-260; William D. Philips, *Slavery in Medieval and Early modern Iberia* (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2014), 91-97; Lahon, *op. cit.*; António Brásio, *Os pretos em Portugal* (Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colônias, 1944), 73-104; Cristóvão Rodrigues de Oliveira, *Sumario em que brevemente se contém algumas coisas, assim eclesiásticas como seculares, que há na cidade de Lisboa* (ca. 1548), Augusto Vieira da Silva, ed., (Lisbon: Biblion, 1938), 59. For a relatively comprehensive list of early modern Afro-Iberian confraternities, see, for example, Patricia Mulvey, “The Lay Brotherhoods of Colonial Brazil: A History” (PhD Dissertation, New York University, 1976), 283-286.
16. See, for example, Bofarull y Mascaré VIII: 466-67; *Compromisso* fols. 5r-5v; and Moreno 66.
  17. Elizabeth W. Kiddy argues that medieval views on death and other confraternal elements resonated with sub-Saharan cosmologies (*Blacks of the Rosary: Memory and History in Minas Gerais, Brazil* [University Park: Penn State UP, 2005], 15-63). Indeed, medieval cosmology was closer to African cosmology than later European worldviews, for as Miri Rubin writes, “In the Middle Ages the language of religion provided a language of social relations, and of cosmic order; it described and explained the interweaving of natural and supernatural with human action” (1).
  18. See, for example, *Compromisso* fols. 9v-10r; also Kiddy, *Blacks of the Rosary* 15-63; and José Ramos Tinhorão, *As origens da canção urbana* (Lisbon: Caminho, 1997), 121-24.
  19. Lisbon’s back Rosary brotherhood took this practice from their Portuguese predecessors of the same name.
  20. We will see in other examples to follow how their audience was not only Iberian, but fully continental.
  21. Delaigue and Martín Casares 215.
  22. *Ibid.*
  23. *Anales eclesiásticos y seculares de la muy noble y muy leal ciudad de Sevilla que contienen sus más principales memorias desde el año de 1246 hasta el de 1671* (Madrid: Royal Printing Office, 1677), 374.
  24. This practice was instituted by Henry III of Castile (Moreno 43).
  25. “[T]hat the said Black men and women, and Mulatto men and women, may not, and cannot, have fiestas nor meetings, unless it is in your presence” (qtd. in Ortiz de Zuñiga 374). The *mayoral* acted as justice of the peace in the community and was usually referred to by a royal title, as Juan de Valladolid was (see Nicole von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans* [Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2006], 81; and Moreno 43).
  26. See, for example, Juan R. Castellanos, “El negro esclavo en el entremés del Siglo de Oro,” *Hispania* 44.1 (1961): 55-65, Baltasar Fra-Moliner, *La imagen de los negros en el teatro del Siglo de Oro* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1995). Luis Quiñones de Benavente (1581-1651) is a lesser-known Golden Age author who wrote many short dramas (known as *entremeses*) with black characters. See, for example, Isidro de Robles, *Navidad y Corpus Christi, festejados por los mejores ingenios de España en diez y seis autos a lo divino, diez y seis loas y diez y seis entremeses: representados en esta corte y nunca hasta aora impresos* (Madrid: Ioseph Fernandez de Buendia, 1664), 128-132. It should not surprise us that Benavente was from Seville, although he was active in Madrid.
  27. See Teofilo F. Ruiz, *A king travels: festive traditions in late medieval and early modern Spain* (Princeton Princeton University Press, 2012).
  28. See José García Mercadal, ed., *Viajes de extranjeros por España y Portugal desde los tiempos más remotos hasta comienzos del siglo XX* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 1999. 6 vols.), II: 454. “There were formerly Apostolic notaries and even episcopal notaries, duly commissioned by papal or episcopal letters, whose duty it was to receive documents relating to ecclesiastical or mixed affairs, especially in connection with benefices, foundations, and donations in favor of churches, wills of clerics, etc.” *Catholic Encyclopedia* ([newadvent.org](http://newadvent.org)).
  29. *Anales del año ochenta y cinco, en el cual el rey católico de España don Felipe, con el príncipe don Felipe, su hijo, fue a Monzón a tener las cortes del reino de Aragón, compuestos por Enrique Cock, notario apostólico y arquero de la guardia del cuerpo real* (1585). Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Fond Espagnol MS 272. In José García Mercadal (II: 453-569), II: 486.
  30. As cited in García Mercadal II: 488.
  31. Kate Lowe, “The Stereotyping of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe” 37. In Earle and Lowe, 17-47.
  32. Trans. by Lowe.

33. “Pluriethnicidad, fiestas y poder: cofradías y fiestas andaluzas de negros como modelo para la América colonial,” in Antonio Garrido Aranda, ed., *El mundo festivo en España y América* (Córdoba: U of Córdoba, 2005, 169-188), 176.
34. As cited in García Mercadal II: 537.
35. In her forthcoming book, Graubart argues that the distinction between *moriscos* and sub-Saharan Africans developed as the latter grew in number in the fifteenth century.
36. Das Trachtenbuch fol. 168r. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, Germany, HS 22474/18.
37. As cited in García Mercadal II: 537.
38. “Ordinatio y forma de la cerimonia y festa feta per la ciutat de Barcelona per rahó de la nova entrada del catholico e molt alt senyor don Phelip, rey y senyor nostre, vuy beneventuradament, fill de la bona memoria de don Charles, emperador y rey nostre, la qual entrada es la primera que ha feta en esta ciutat de Barcelona com a rey” (Barcelona City Archive, January 10 – March 1, 1564). Qtd. in Agustí Duran i Sanpere and Josep Sanabre, eds., *Llibre de les solemnitats de Barcelona* (Barcelona: Institució Patxot, 1947), II: 1-13. 10-11.
39. “Ordinatio y forma de la cerimonia y festa feta per la ciutat de Barcelona per rahó de la nova entrada del catholico e molt alt senyor don Phelip, rey y senyor nostre, vuy beneventuradament, fill de la bona memoria de don Felip, rey y senyor nostre, la qual entrada es la primera que ha feta en esta ciutat de Barcelona com a rey” (Barcelona City Archive, May 14-18, 1599). Qtd. in Duran i Sanpere and Sanabre, II: 126-136. 133-34.
40. Moreno 26.
41. Anonymous, *Relación de la sortija que se hizo en 31 de marzo de 1590* (1590). National Library of Spain, MS 18638. Qtd. in José Simon Díaz, ed., *Relaciones breves de actos públicos celebrados en Madrid de 1541 a 1650* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Madrileños, 1982, 35-39), 37. Sayago is a town in Zamora.
42. *Relación de las fiestas celebradas en Valencia con motivo del casamiento de Felipe III*, Salvador Carreras Zacaras, ed. (Valencia: Acción Bibliográfica, 1926-1927). The original is at the U of Valencia, MS 550(1).
43. In this sense, Aurelia Martín Casares and Marga G. Barranco have studied literary representations of Afro-Iberian wedding ceremonies in early modern Spain in “Popular Literary Depictions of Black African Weddings in Early Modern Spain” (*Renaissance Reformation* 31.2 [2008]: 107-121).
44. Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 27; Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986), 13-14; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990) 183-201. My gratitude to Michelle Wibbelsman for her orientation on this topic.
45. Thomas Turino and James Lea, *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities* (Warren: Harmonie Park Press, 2004), 8-10.
46. Anonymous, *Breve extracto do augustissimo triunfo, que a augusta Braga prepara em obsequio do Santissimo Sacramento* (Coimbra: Colegio das Artes da Companhia de Jesu, 1731), 2.
47. 3. The term *nação* may refer to the fact that sub-Saharan groups were often identified as national groups, akin to tribal affiliation in African cosmology (see Kiddy, *Blacks of the Rosary* 39-63). This is in line with European understanding of *nation* as “people, tribe, kin, genus, class, flock,” which was often a unifying characteristic of confraternities (Guido Zernatto, “Nation: The History of a Word,” *The Review of Politics* 6.3 [1944]: 351-66).
48. *Riscos iluminados de figurinhos de brancos e negros dos uzos do Riode Janeiro e Serro do Frio*, fol. 70r. National Library of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Iconografia C.I.2.8.
49. *Missione in prattica: padri cappuccini ne Regni di Congo, Angola, et adiacenti*, MS 457, fol. 9r. Public Library of Turin, Italy. The verso of the same folio (9v) is a similar image of the same event.
50. Ibid.
51. See Cécile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 2014), 1-20.
52. See José Ramos Tinhorão, *Os negros em Portugal: uma presença silenciosa* (Lisbon: Caminho, 1988) 201-205; also Tania Alkmim, “Falas e cores: um estudo sobre o português de negros e escravos no Brasil do século XIX,” in Laura do Carmo and Ivana Stolze Lima, eds., *História*

*da língua nacional* (Rio de Janeiro: Casa de Rui Barbosa, 2008, 247-64), 247-51; Nicholas R. Jones, *Staging Habla de Negros Radical Performances of the African Diaspora in Early Modern Spain* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019).

53. The *Pamphlet's* title alludes to division of old Lisbon into two major districts, Bairro Alto to the north and Alfama to the south.
54. Anonymous, *Folheto de ambas Lisboaas*, no. 7 (Lisbon: Oficina de Música, 1730), 3. See James H. Sweet, "The Hidden Histories of African Lisbon," in Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Matt D. Child and James Sidbury, eds., *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2013, 233-247), 243.
55. From Castelo de São Jorge de Mina (Elmina Castle) in the Portuguese Gold Coast, in present-day Ghana.
56. *Folheto*, no. 7, 4. Despite, or precisely because of its satirical distortions, this fragment may be a good example of the black speech non-black authors attributed to black characters and blacks themselves. Here, for example, *Senhor* (Lord, Mister) is rendered as *Seoro*, *Susana* (Susan) as *Zoana*, and *José* (Joseph) as *Zozè*. It also contains Bantu terms, such as *Zambiampum* (Great God/Lord/Spirit), *zarambagoè* (a type of song) and *cutambala* (music) (see Linda M. Heywood, "The Angolan-Afro-Brazilian Cultural Connections," in Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, eds., *From Slavery to Emancipation in the Atlantic World* [London: Routledge, 1999, 9-23], 11-12; Dedier Lahon, "Esclavage, confréries noires, sainteté noire et pureté de sang au Portugal (XVIe et XVIIIe siècles)" [*Lusitania Sacra* 2.15 (2003): 119-162], 144-45; also Sweet, 243, 330nn43 and 44). On the *fofa* dance, see Peter Fryer, *Rhythms of Resistance: African Musical Heritage on Brazil* (Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 2000), 126-128.
57. 44.
58. Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho, "As confrarias medievais portuguesas: espaços de solidariedades na vida e na morte," in VV. AA., *Cofradías, gremios y solidariedades en la Europa medieval* (Pamplona: Government of Navarre, 1993, 149-184), 163.
59. 44.

# A Post-Occidental Ontology of Desire and Subjective Return in Gregorio Martínez's *Crónica de músicos y diablos* (1991)

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## Abstract

How can the study of the force of desire generate post-occidental knowledge with regards to the return of the parallel development of material and subjective production? Can we rely on the connective force of desire and the subject's loss of the self to the environment as ways to think about freedom and slavery today? By locating the novel *Crónica de músicos y diablos* (1991) at the intersection of post-occidental thinking and Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the force of desire, I shall provide a reading of *Crónica* that addresses these questions by considering desire's involvement in the process of subjective return in the context of non-exploitive labor practices. This reading reconsiders the surviving colonial co-relation between race and labor, which in the novel promotes on-going divisions between subjective and material existence. In addressing this division, this reading of the text offers a summary of the novel, locates Martínez's writings within the national literary context and considers the ontological question of the jeopardized parallel between material and subjective existence. At the end of this article, the reader will appreciate the direct consumption of musical surpluses leading to the possibility to overcome the surviving colonial stereotypes and the relationship between race and forms of rural exploitation.

## Introduction

In an interview published in 1992, the Afro-Peruvian author Gregorio Martínez explains that the communities of African heritage on the southern coast of Peru were still suffering from the parallel effects of slavery and capitalism well into the twentieth century. In his novel *Crónica de músicos y diablos* (1991), Martínez refers to this situation and depicts an ontological, or relational way to capture the jeopardized parallel between subject production and consumption. Through the ontological and connective force of desire, the reader elucidates this desubjectivated state as the characters become aware of the parallel between material and subjective production.

In portraying the restoration of this parallel, Martínez reminds us of the goals of post-occidental thought. In line with Eduardo Mendieta's theorization of post-occidental thinking, Martínez's characters respond through their own language of musical revolt to the demands of those who try to jeopardize the parallel between material and subjective production through the co-relation of race and labor set by colonial domination surviving in the twentieth century.

A summary of the novel, a literary contextualization of Martínez's writings and a reading of the second half of his novel *Crónica de músicos y diablos* shall make clear Martínez's ontologically oriented and post-occidental perspective on the Afro-Peruvian experience.

## Summary of the Novel: Revolt vs. Revolution in *Crónica de músicos y diablos*

The Afro-Peruvian Guzman family expects a State pension as reparation and reward for their ancestors' participation in the wars of independence. Instead, they receive a set of old musical instruments from the president, who hopes to get rid of the family and undermine their historical claims. But the family becomes what Deleuze and Guattari call a war machine, that is, a machine that can resist statist codification, which in contemporary times takes the form of wages, class division, the bureaucratic apparatus, and the machinery of military defense. At the same time, the family resists the rural capitalists' social control, that is,

their codification/definition/territorialization into a peasant class, which is defined by its need to sell its labor power and produce surplus value. In the novel, this resistance takes place by way of revolt rather than revolution.

Bartola, the mother, shares a stand on the family's departure from Cahuachi. This is a critique to the idealization of legal and economic inclusion generated in a center of power like the capital city of Lima. At first, Bartola is reluctant to negotiate the departure to Lima. In fact, the narrator acknowledges her disbelief in the outcomes of the trip: Bartola says that "resultaba preferible que cada quien, a través de su propia experiencia, se desengañara de las quimeras" (CDMD 138). When she confronts the officer, who receives the family in Lima, it becomes obvious that what she resists is the exclusionary violence, that sustains the institution and makes itself felt through its offices and personnel.

In challenging the codification or the family's integration in capitalist rural production, Martínez alludes, not only to the way in which the family turns into a war machine, but also to the State's own war or musical machine. The latter machine parallels the violent and anti-productive machine connected to the Parcona massacre. This deadly machine motivates Bartola's need to leave Lima and return to Cahuachi. The family acts as a war non-violent machine, although they are not nomads in the strict sense of the word. As they walk back, the connections created cause them to become part of a diaspora that occupies spaces temporarily and transforms surviving colonial stereotypes. Despite being in the epicenters of violence and political neglect, the family's apprenticeship into music is the means used by the family to change the locals and the landowners as they go back to Cahuachi.

The character known as Moquillaza makes it clear that, through the acceptance of the instruments, the family is not rewarded with a pension and historical recognition. Instead, they are "rewarded" with the opportunity to submit to the State's thirst for surplus extracted from the peasant classes. Since music epitomizes a type of manual labor out of which surplus can be produced and consumed by producers, Martínez shows that capitalist extraction, in other contexts, involves the suspension of subjectivity and the imposition of an intensive or pre-subjective state that limits the direct and joyful capture in relation to labor. The narrator recognizes the accidental yet important intervention of the president in imposing this state of mind in connection to labor practices. It could have resulted in the family's indebtedness, the State's economic codification, and parallel pre-subjective existence:

Mientras firmaba la exoneración de aduana delante del sorprendido furriel, el presidente continuaba pensando que ya tenía la solución perfecta para dejar contentos a los Guzmán y dijo: ¡école cuatro! que era su frase preferida, y entonces ordenó que enseguida recogieran los viejos instrumentos de música para entregárselos a los huéspedes alojados en el cuartel de Borbones, como

una recompensa oficial, como una donación del estado en lugar de arrumarlos entre los estrebejes que iban a servir para alimentar los hornos de la fábrica de municiones del ejército. (CDMD 201)

Under State control, the paying of the "small debt" through secondhand instruments plays the opposite role of liberating the Guzmán family from their socioeconomic burden. However, this burden has motivated them to leave Cahuachi in the first place as part of the stoppage of local production within the capitalist cycle that pushed the people in the rural world to the cities. The induction of indebtedness in the novel echoes Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the state's induction of debt. The philosophers explain that "it has often been remarked that the State commences (or recommences) with two fundamental acts, one of which is said to be an act of territoriality through the fixing of residence, and the other, an act of liberation through the abolition of small debts" (AO 195). In light with the Pacific Coast trends of cultural capture posed at the outset of this thesis, Martínez depicts the family's nomadic situation to show the factors that lead to the modern State's creation of contexts of indebtedness through cultural production.

To resist this exclusionary violence, Bartola, her husband and her children opt for a non-violent form of musical revolt. Martínez's depiction of the difference between revolt and revolution echoes the distinction and disappointment experienced by Deleuze and Guattari in May 1968, in relation to the tension between structural or paralyzing forces in France and *evental* or unstructured forms of political struggle. Françoise Dosse (2010) explains the difference between revolt and revolution. Revolution brings down the whole institution or power structure in what seems to be the end of the history of domination, which in return entails the unplanned reterritorialization of the class in power. The musical revolt depicted by Martínez, in contrast, entails daily forms of post-occidental resistance that keeps oppressors accountable, transforming them and the bureaucratic apparatus through which they operate. It is in the context of the ethics of institutional responsibility threatened by postmodernity that we see in Martínez elements of Dussel's theory of liberation, which are compatible with Mendieta's idea that under a post-occidental perspective historically oppressed groups see their existence and their current demands as extensions of the colonial experience.

Like Martínez in his novel, Deleuze and Guattari tell us that the leading classes' interests persevere through revolution. In the novel, the interests are sustained through colonial stereotypes. Revolt, which takes place in the novel through desire machines involving the connection between human and musical instruments, happens as the characters engage in musical production. Desire is a force that makes it possible for people to exist in terms of their potential to become inter-connected subjects. In light of this idea, Deleuze and Guattari define the subject in terms



of its mechanical qualities. They explain that “while there is a real machine that at a basic level connects the child to the mother’s breast, for example, beyond the household and within the household itself, . . . [e]verywhere it is machines—real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections” (AO 8).

Desire machines are the product of the connection between human and nonhuman realms. As the musical conglomerates bringing together the characters and their instruments, Martínez shows that the characters and their instruments function as a *modus operandi* that create a generalized, subjective transformation that does away with the paralyzing power of revolution. In a thematic dialogue between paralyzing modern European-inspired revolution and post-occidental Latin American revolt, Martínez relies on a seemingly everyday experience akin to the *Event*’s antistructural consumption/processing of material conditions in which structures are forced to undergo a moment of destratification (the community’s loss of its boundaries of labor to the environment of leisure). Under this de-stratifying state, the elites cannot be reterritorialized as part of molar or transcendental structures like the State. In *Crónica*, the peasantry, and the former peasant family, which has now become a group of musicians, brings about the subjective transformation of both the peasants and the elites. Martínez writes:

La presencia de los veintisiete Guzmán que habían vuelto a Cahuachi, reencarnados en una competente banda de músicos que aparecía alhajada hasta de vicio con las alpatanas más deslumbrantes del artilugio filarmónico [...]. Sin embargo los ricos de Nasca, por pura soberbia de cogotudos engreídos, se hacían los que ignoraban aquel hecho tan visible. De manera tal que cuando tuvieron que pensar en una banda de músicos para animar la fiesta patronal del 8 de septiembre, los ricos de Nasca jamás tuvieron en mente a los Guzmán. Los ignoraron adrede, de modo flagrante e intencional para que de una vez desde el inicio, empezaran a caer en la postergación, en el soslayamiento, y resignadamente volvieran mejor a la condición de meros peones de chakra. (CDMD 265)

In the previous lines, it is possible to see the parallel sources of destratification deployed by the landowners to direct the forces of desire of the family to maintain the social divisions. This source of control is Lima’s Guardia Republicana. In tension with the guardia republicana’s ability to change rural bodies is the family’s music-affective charge. It is in this tension that war machines at work in the Deleuzian and Guattarian sense. It is by zooming into pre-personal intensities and desire machines in a musical context that one can see the generation of a carnival.

Music thus reveals the extraction of surplus by a third party. Producers like the family of musicians become

examples of what it means to produce a surplus that is immediately consumed rather than transferred from the producers to the elite classes. The partial organs of the body involved in musical production, and the assemblages that they shape as they connect to the musical instruments, play a central role in this process. If we bear in mind that Deleuze and Guattari define the ontological force of desire as a connective force leading to subjective development and its very parallel consumption, the pre-personal force of desire functions as a pre-personal binding force leading to musical production and to its parallel, enjoyable, and immediately available to consume musical surplus. After a contextualization of Martínez’s writings, the article will discuss the socio-historical and inter-ethnic effects of this parallel consumption.

### *Martínez’s Literary and Political Context*

Through an exploration of Martínez’s literary and political context it is possible to appreciate the way in which Martínez’s oeuvre rejects transcendental categorizations that reiterates the colonial co-relations of race and labor without problematizing them. Through his writings, Martínez shows that these conditions are both Statist in nature and literary. One such categorization shows how Martínez’s novel clarifies various characteristics of the boom period. Ismael Márquez explains that

entretreídos la evocativa filigrana de Ricardo Palma, la exuberancia lingüística de García Márquez, el diálogo crítico con los procesos históricos de Vargas Llosa, la política de la rebelión de José María Arguedas, el cuestionamiento de la historiografía de Guamán Poma, el anacrónico barroquismo de Espinosa Medrano, el Lunarejo, y la vena humorística de Cabrera Infante. (Márquez 54)

In terms of Martínez’s Afro-Pacific contexts, his writings are in dialogue with urban authors of the Afro-Peruvian experience like Nicomedez Santa Cruz. For Heidi C. Feldman, Santa Cruz’s writings are a response to his predecessors who were part of a complex “Afro-criollo movement [that] swept Latin America beginning in the 1920s. This sensibility first manifested itself in the *Negrismo* of white writers who depicted blacks and their ‘picturesque’ traditions” (Feldman 86). She then explains that “Felipe Pardo (1806–1868), whose stereotyped black characters spoke a parodied black Spanish, was an early predecessor to *negrismo*” (Feldman 86). A novel from this period is Flora Tristán’s *Peregrination of a Pariah* (1838).<sup>1</sup> Paulk suggests that “a narrative such as Tristán’s is structured around the home, which is posited as the center of political and social life, and excursions made to and from the residence. Tristán closely resembles a nineteenth-century bourgeois, female social reformer as she visits and critiques the various institutions in Arequipa and Lima” (Paulk 199).

Then, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Peruvian *negrista* coincides with the *indigenismo* movement. The writings of Rosa María Macedo, a nonblack author from the 1940s, are a good example of the combination of both these literary movements. She is the author of *Ranchos de Caña* (1941) and *Rastrojo* (1944). Her narration of local stories, which coincide with the local stories about slavery in the Cauca Valley, are entry points to a discussion of the direction of the movement of enslaved bodies between the two countries.

In a very concise definition, Feldman speaks of the latter movement, *mestizaje*, as one “in which urban mestizos celebrated Peru’s indigenous/Inca heritage” (Feldman 84). It is in this environment—in which *indigenismo* and *negrista* coexist—that the depictions of black and indigenous voices in *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (1971) by Arguedas Altamirano find their place within both literary traditions. In relation to the *negrista* movement in Peru, the major works were the neo-realist texts *Estampas mulatas* (1938) by José Diez Canseco and *Matalaché* (1928) by Enrique López Albújar.

These texts were produced in the context of an interest in the Aprista politics that evolved from “the heirs of González Prada [who] were (1895–1980) and José Carlos Mariátegui” (Martin 117). After this period, the committed authors of *indigenismo* went on to form the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria. These authors discussed “unresolved debate[s] on nationalism, Americanism, *aprista*, socialism, communism and *indigenismo*” (Martin 118). Martínez describes this environment in *Canto de sirena* as his character Candelario, a black peasant who had become a security guard in Lima, struggles to find a place within the existing political environment upon his return to Coyungo.

In 1945, Candelario turns briefly into an oppressor of the Aprista supporters in Acarí. Candelario’s realization of his confusion speaks to Martínez’s concerns for the black and indigenous landless mobile labor force that had been caught up in the upheaval of land reform but did not benefit from it as expected. In addition to being caught up in a network of poverty, the figure of the dispossessed rural character is caught up and reproduced by Lima’s literary circles. The rural black “Other” is depicted as being an inherently disposable character.

Martínez questions literary depictions in which the black Others struggle to fulfill their current needs as these do not contextualize the surviving *latifundismo* and modes of contemporary slavery under capitalism. In one of his last interviews in 2013 (Carrillo-Jara), Martínez spoke about how this political and literary environment affected his writing. He explained that he was neither with the intellectuals who appropriated *lo popular* during the Velasquista period of land reform, such as “Hugo Neira, Julio Ortega, Alfredo Barnechea, Mirko Lauer, José B. Adolph, Leónidas Cevallos, aún Alejandro Romualdo y Julio Ramón Ribeyro” (Carrillo-Jara 196), nor with the Shining Path.

Throughout his life, he rejected the elitist appropriation of committed literature, as can be seen through the

fictionalization of real life authors like Ribeyro and through the opinions he shared during his interviews. As a reaction to this, *Crónica* shows the lower classes’ aspiration to control the means of communication and musical production. In light of this aspiration, in his interviews Martínez explained that “el ideario tiene que remontarse a la etapa anterior al marxismo, a la época de Proudhon, cuando los trabajadores producían directamente su prensa y literatura política, sin la mediación de los ‘intelectuales’ y teóricos del socialismo” (Carrillo-Jara 196).

Martínez’s interest in establishing a literary connection that captured the uniqueness of the Afro experience in Peru can be appreciated in the writings in which Martínez turns real authors from other Pacific Coast authors into fictional characters. Although Martínez refers to authors like Ribeyro and other authors from other regions with a rich Afro-Pacific presence in order to do away with hierarchies, María del Carmen Cuban’s reading explains that transcultural processes affected Martínez’s relationship to writers of African heritage because “Esta modernidad se extiende a toda la cultura y establece un sistema jerárquico. El patrón aristocrático, con una élite intelectual, se apropia de la literatura e impone las normas no sólo en la metrópoli, sino en la diversidad de regiones, incluso en el campo” (Cuba 16).

Her statement suggests that Martínez felt that his *ideario* might have been closer to that of well-known authors like Juan Ramón Ribeyro, who were interested in the experiences of Afro-Peruvians in urban centers like Lima. In Ribeyro’s narrative, subalternity is seen as the position in which an underprivileged group benefits from the redemption brought about by intellectual intervention. This urgency, reenacted by Ribeyro, is connected to “el ser subalterno [que] existe únicamente en la muerte y en el dolor” (Elguera Olórtegui 20). Martínez’s writings make it clear that this external redemption and interest in focusing on the pain and death of the Other in need of external redemption is problematic.

In *Crónica*, Martínez moves beyond racial and geographical divides and looks into the manipulation of desire and its connection to a lack, which is the very cause and source of subjection of communities to poverty and death in different regions of Peru. Martínez’s narrative shows how colonial forms of production, surviving in the twentieth century, are tackled by shedding light on the displacement of the force of desire from the side of production (subjective emergence/connectivity with the outside) to consumption of the outside as an isolated externality.

Under colonial and post-colonial exploitive conditions, the outside is to be grasped as something that does not constitute the subject and must be transformed while the subject produces a surplus for a third party. Embedded in a novel like *Crónica* and his other writings, Martínez is not only producing a Pacific Coast post-occidental cosmology of relations that can be explored through the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari but also enters into a dialogue with an awareness of the colonial forms of perception and power distribution. Anibal Quijano

explains that “raza se convirtió en el primer criterio fundamental para la distribución de la población mundial en los rangos, lugares y roles en la estructura de poder de la nueva sociedad. En otros términos, en el modo básico de clasificación social universal de la población mundial” (Quijano 780).

Precisely, in Martínez’s novel, the role assigned to the characters occurs in accordance with racial markers and with the fact that groups of African heritage, in the urban and rural settings that he depicts, are extensions of the natural environment of exploitation. The characters in *Crónica* challenge the order of domination of people and their own transformation into an extension of the territories to be conquered and exploited.

We can see Martínez’s complex understanding of the Pacific’s post-occidental condition in his understanding of ongoing colonization as a process of exploitation that survives well into the twentieth century and includes both land and people. His novel suggests that under the continuing colonial conditions as he depicts them, the domination of the land and its people do not cease to exist but rather function as part of a neo-colonialist assemblage in post-colonial domination. In the novel, the survival of this assemblage of domination make clear the importance of the control over the land and the people that has been noted by Peter Hulme. Hulme explains that although “la etimología de la palabra ‘colonia’ no sugiere que tiene que colonizarse gente, a menudo la tierra es el asunto crucial” (Hulme 35). Clearly, for Martínez the issue at hand is not only the land, as a material priority, but also the people, their subjective control and/or desubjectivation through labor via the internalization of a lack in the midst of great abundance of rural land.

In order to introduce a conscious rejection of the environment of exploitation, Martínez depicts socially organized arrangements, known as desire machines, which initially place the subject in a state of communion with its environment. As we come to learn later in the story, this state of lost boundaries of the self to production may not always be amenable to subjective development. In the novel, this loss of boundaries is channeled for the purpose of extracting surplus out of laborers.

Bearing in mind the extraction of surpluses generated through the loss of boundaries of the self in the environment of labor, Martínez gives a central role to desire in his post-occidental narrative. If the connective force of desire can promote the loss of the boundaries of the self, it can also act as a force that brings together individuals or social territorialities. These territories are manifested through alternative values and an alternative language. This language and values are different from the transcendental or molar images embodied in the language of power associated with state aggregates (productive arrangements, bureaucracies, military machines, oppressive family units, the law, and so on). In fact, Martínez challenges the need for external redemption and in *Crónica* the groups themselves resolve the mutual objectification that takes place between them.

The ability to solve inter-ethnic tensions can be explained by the fact that Martínez, like Deleuze and Guattari, was part of a generation that contested the idea that desire was connected to a lack rather than to the abundance of the drive to connect. In other words, they understood that subjective and material experience depended on the engagement and disengagement of the subject’s body from the environment and from other bodies before any profit/meaning could be brought about, so as to give rise to cultural and material life. For this reason, Martínez felt conflicted in relation to authors who simply described people of African descent as a needy population. For Martínez, it was important to first consider how an unfair land reform created the conditions for the reproduction of molar-scale subjectivities of lack. Lack functions as a transcendental and distorted life principle that is associated and territorialized through blackness.

The image of a needy pool of dispossessed laborers shapes the works by authors of the *indigenismo* period and the writings of the period that follows it. In “Denuncia estética y apertura hacia una nueva comprensión narrativa de la generación del cincuenta,” Christian Elguera-Olórtegui finds that Ribeyro made visible the exacerbating reality of racism and poverty that accompanied the movement of landless and jobless peasants to the capital city. In his short urban stories “Alienación” and “De color modesto” (1975), Ribeyro explores external and self-inflicted or internalized forms of oppression without considering the forces of capitalism that propel these internalizations in the first place. Thus, his black characters are caught up in the capital city’s deadly contradictions. They have opportunities to purchase goods, but it is impossible to fulfill this socially and economically imposed lack.

Because Ribeyro’s stance in relation to capitalism was only partially critical, Martínez’s intellectual relationship to him was a tense one. They experienced ideological and creative disagreements. In *Gloria del Piturrín*, a text in which Martínez mixes short stories, music, popular culture, myths, and literature, he displayed his political disagreement with Ribeyro’s support of *velasquismo*. In this text, Martínez refers to the city settlers who, like unwanted and invasive weeds depicted by Ribeyro, managed to survive Lima’s socially hostile environment. Ribeyro immortalized this urban experience in his short story “Al Pie del Acantilado.” In *Gloria*, Martínez connects Ribeyro to the rural world he might have seen only through the urban settlers and their adoption of a system of needs that always saw them as foreigners in spite of their consumption of “white culture.”

The impoverished black people produced by the mediation of capitalism inspired Ribeyro, but he did not acknowledge the effects of incomplete land reform. The settlements at Lima’s urban fringes were then a visible result of the conditions of deterritorialization affecting the mobile community in the rural world. In other words, these settlements were a physical and racialized territorialization. Martínez believed that the Velasquista-period intellectuals did not fully grasp these conditions.

Although Cuba has maintained that Martínez considered to be better than the authors from other rural regions like Antonio Gálvez Ronceros, Martínez's writings in fact show that he reached out not only to writers from Lima but also to authors from Chíncha in the Ica region. In referring to these authors, he created a literary network through his writings. Furthermore, he challenged the imposition of an intellectual *insularismo* in Peru that had separated the depictions of Afro-Pacific authors from the depictions by authors from other regions of Peru. For example, the narrator of *Biblia de Guarango* expresses the desire to communicate the regional, economic, and historical commonalities of the landless peasant workforces from Chíncha Alta in Ica and Martínez's Coyungo, in Chíncha Baja. He asks about the different ways to talk about the *lucraco*,<sup>2</sup> and through this comparative interests, he depicts a fictional conversation between himself and another writer of the Afro-Peruvian experience: Antonio Galvéz Ronceros. Martínez asks: "¿Será el chánguano que mienta Antonio Galvéz Ronceros?" (BDG 200).

In this fictional dialogue with the literary world, Martínez plays with dialectical variations to connect experiences in divided areas of rural production. In *La orgía lingüística y Gregorio Martínez: un estudio sobre canto de sirena* (1998), Milagros Carazas explains that Martínez turned Antonio Gálvez Ronceros into a fictional character. Gálvez Ronceros is in fact, the author of *Monólogo desde las Tinieblas* (1975) and a member of the group "Narración" of which Martínez was also a member. In his work, Martínez does not turn Julián Huanay, author of the short story "El negro perico" (1968), into a fictional character. Similarly, he does not turn José Matos Mar and Jorge A. Carbajal, authors of *Erasmus: Yanacón del Valle de Chancay* (1974), into fictional characters. However, Carazas connects them to Martínez's narrative effort to capture the experiences of people of African descent in Peru in the wave of authors that followed Santa Cruz.

To summarize the central role played by Martínez in the depiction of the experiences of people of African descent within the national imagination, it is helpful to cite the introductory note for *Las máscaras de la representación* (2005) by Marcel Velázquez Castro. Estuardo Núñez situates Santa Cruz's and Martínez's writings as part of a third wave of Afro-Pacific authors. Martínez not only represents the voices of black Peruvians but also speaks from within about the experiences of Afro-Peruvians. Most recently the Afro-Pacific scholar Juan Manuel Olaya Arocha has referred to José Campos, another author from this wave, in his blog.

*Las negras noches del dolor y para educar hombrecitos* (2004) is a text that according to Olaya

se enmarca dentro de una literatura comprometida con las reivindicaciones de la memoria histórica afroperuana al confrontar el registro oficial desde el discurso literario. José Campos no duda en aprovechar las licencias de la ficción para recuperar, reconstruir y llenar los vacíos historiográficos sobre la población negra. En este intento, nos ofrece un

proyecto de nación que reconoce la variedad étnica del país, donde se consolida un discurso transcultural afro-andino en su propósito de resistir el dominio esclavista.<sup>3</sup>

José Campos and Martínez rely on literature to reconstruct the history of slavery and tackle the subsequent invisibility of people of African descent that followed emancipation. This is an interest that Martínez shares with poets like Antonio Preciado-Bedoya from Ecuador. This interest is articulated by considering how intensities from physical encounters survive and feed literary depictions of labor and physical abuse usually associated with communities of African heritage.

Just as Martínez gives a central role to his character Bartola in *Crónica*, José Campos also gives a role of central importance to women in his texts. Soledad in *Reconciliándome con la vida* (2009), for example, is a woman of Spanish descent. As a child, she experiences a deep feeling of connection with the genuine welcoming attitude of descendants of former slaves with whom she grew up. After she marries an Afro-Peruvian her children are faced with the counteracting force of racism.

Her children's friends internalize the appearance of whiteness as the standard of sociability and leadership in the post-occidental world depicted by Campos, and so they mock the undefined appearance of Soledad's children. In his novels, José Campos also talks about the promise of equality, which has never been fulfilled. In a dialogue with this concern, Martínez depicts his characters' claim of freedom and inclusion. This promise has been made since the nineteenth century in order to keep the descendants of black people indebted to the State. Since the landowners will clearly never do justice to the former slaves, the government claims that they must rely on the state, which leaves them in a condition of dependence. In *Reconciliándome con la vida*, characters like Lorenzo el Macho, who fought with San Martín against Spain, live in tension with the landowners who leave for France without ever distributing the lands promised to former slaves.

In order to comment on this pending concern of historical retribution and inclusion, my focus of analysis for the second half of *Crónica* will be the Guzmán's family apprenticeship as musicians. From an ontological perspective, Martínez captures the loss of the self in non-exploitive forms of the communal existence. This loss allows them to gain an insight with regards to the history of exclusion during the family's return from Lima to Cahuachi. This is a time of social awakening for the family, who come to see the trickery of the state, and the way in which types of labor have become associated with race. Martínez alludes to Quijano's idea that

En América, la idea de raza fue un modo de otorgar legitimidad a las relaciones de dominación impuestas por la conquista. La posterior constitución de Europa como nueva identidad después de América y la expansión del colonialismo europeo sobre el resto del mundo llevaron

a la elaboración de la perspectiva eurocéntrica de conocimiento y con ella a la elaboración teórica de la idea de raza como naturalización de esas relaciones coloniales de dominación entre europeos y no-europeos. (Quijano 779)

In line with Quijano's criticism, the family renounces the Eurocentric division of labor and their turning into an extension of the exploitive environment. The family no longer fits the colonial roles assigned to the community. Through this geographical movement, which is also subjective, as desire comes to mediate the characters' connection to the community and to their material conditions, the family acquires a new understanding of their relationship to the means of production. Rural and coastal Peru are thus elucidated "no como lugares geográficos sino como formas de y pensamiento capaces de generar subjetividades concretas" (Hulme 53). The summary of the novel introduced at the beginning reveals the way in which the musical revolt depicted in the novel results in the possibility to consume, without intermediaries, the product of labor and its surplus as the co-relation between race and labor is overcome by the characters and their rural community.

This surviving relationship of domination in the twentieth century, which motivates Martínez's characters to speak for themselves can be seen in Gregorio Martínez's native Coyungo, a territory to which he returns in his novels *Tierra de caléndula* (1975), *Canto de sirena* (1977), *Gloria del piturrín y otros embrujos de amor* (1985), and *Crónica de músicos y diablos* (1991). He explains that "[i]n the social ambiance in which [he] was born and lived, everyone, children and adults, men and women, bore the burden of hard labor from morning to night" (Martínez in Flores 516). After leaving Coyungo to gain official forms of education in Lima, he then tells us, "It was brutalizing labor. I was seven or eight years old. I already received a fixed wage. We children worked, well-behaved, culling cotton, heaping up stones" (Martínez in Flores 516). In his personal experience of rural production, in which women and children produced goods for a third party under conditions of wage labor characterized by the extraction of a surplus in which the experience of the parallel of subjective and material existence are jeopardized.

### *The Return of Material and Subjective Existence in Crónica*

How do Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of return and deterritorialization help elucidate and analyze *Crónica's* depiction of the return of the parallel of material and subjective existence? My reading of the novel proposes to retrace Martínez's ontological understanding of the return, both subjective and geographical, as a way to articulate his post-occidental perspective of the Peruvian Pacific. In the subjective return depicted by Martínez, inter-ethnic alliances

are restored and the characters themselves enjoy surpluses, both material and immaterial, as they enjoy the local music played by the Guzmán family. It is in this context that the character's apprenticeship into music becomes key in understanding the parallel processes shaping them.

It is important to note that in this reading of the novel, the ontological approach functions as an entry point Martínez's post-occidental views. Thus, this reading takes as its starting point the connective force of desire as a constitutive force of the subject and the subject's relation to his environment of material existence. In the novel, material existence, broadly understood, also incorporates forms of cultural expression such as myth and music. As part of leisure, they are central in defining a relationship to the rural world and its exploitive practices. In order to derive a post-occidental reading of the text that takes as its starting point an interest in ontology, the article creates a dialogue between Deleuze and Guattari's ontology and Eduardo Mendieta's understanding of post-Occidentalism. For him, as in the case of Martínez, "El pensamiento postoccidentalista es aquel donde el otro contesta, responde en su lenguaje" (Mendieta 123). So in what ways do Martínez's character respond to the surviving colonial conditions and those who create them but in their own language?

According to post-occidentalist thought, post-occidentalist thought is more appropriate to Latin American dynamics than postcolonial thought because postcolonial thought assumes that colonial relations and forms of production have come to an end whereas post-occidentalist thought assumes a continuation to be addressed through, for example, regional divisions and internal colonialism. This division is clear through Martínez's depiction of the displacement of his characters from Cahuachi to Lima.

Bearing in mind that Deleuze and Guattari understand desire as a bridging force able to connect and undo the subject's experience of the inside and the outside as the experience of the outside is produced and consumed, one aim of post-occidental thought depicted by Martínez is to make visible the connection rather than the separation between the two that has been supported by the modernizing project, a project that through the colonial enterprise accentuates the subject-object division and the center-periphery tension. This division takes territorial dimensions that separate subjects from the epicenters of political power and turns them into objects of power to be dominated by the center dating back to the colonial period. In the words of Alfredo Dussel,

Entre el "sujeto" que conoce y el "objeto" conocido solo puede existir una relación de exterioridad y de asimetría. Por ello, la "ontología de la totalidad", característica central de la civilización europea, ha mirado todo lo que no pertenece a ella (la "exterioridad") como "carencia de ser" y "barbarie." (Dussel 59)

In the context of the novel, the ontological exploration of the undoing of the subject-object division as a manifestation of a subjective return, has implications for an understanding of an Afro-Pacific relational cosmology through which Martínez is able to articulate post-occidental goals: the restitution and healing of his characters from the lingering effects of colonization and its structures.

In *Crónica*, the characters experience their subjective emergence or their subjective return in the context of a material or socially productive existence that has been previously jeopardized due to the history of colonization. This return, in the local context of coastal Peru depicted by Martínez, is therefore a way to speak of a return to a conscious or internal ontological state in relation to an outside of production that has been previously internalized as external or foreign. The return, a synonym of the experience of freedom in postcolonial times, is to be understood as an active process of consumption of the environment of labor that parallels a conscious process of production.

Trying to understand the parallel between subjective and material existence under non-exploitive and exploitive conditions of production of the means of life is difficult. In this context, Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of territorialization (abstraction and consumption of the outside) helps the reader elucidate Martínez's concerns about the complete deterritorialization (loss of the self to the environment of labor and its dynamic flows). It is in the understanding of these two ontological processes that Martínez's post-occidental perspective emerges.

In relation to production and consumption, leading to subjectivity Deleuze and Guattari explain:

Hence everything is production: production of productions, of actions and of passions; productions of recording processes, of distributions and of co-ordinates that serve as points of reference; productions of consumptions, of sensual pleasures, of anxieties, and of pain. Everything is production, since the recording processes are immediately consumed, immediately consummated, and these consumptions directly reproduced (AO 4).

As in the parallel between production and consumption elucidated by Deleuze and Guattari, Martínez depicts the return to the close relationship between production and consumption, as parallel process leading to a free post-occidental subjectivity.

In fact, by the end of the novel, the reader appreciates this form of return in two ways: through their internal or musical transformation experienced by the characters as they directly consume what they produce, for instance, the joy of music, and through the way the family is perceived or visually processed by the locals as they return from Lima. In the first type of return, in the chapter "Los músicos de cahuachi," the narrator comments that "Cuando los Guzmán estaban con los ojos puestos en el papel y los dedos en el respectivo lugar del

instrumento y los labios pegados a la boquilla, se especulaba entonces que cualquiera que los veía podía creer que habían nacido sabiendo ese oficio" (CDMD 268).

The act of accepting the manuscript, and being able to read it, carries within it the further transformation of the character of the family (the family experiences a subjective residue that is produced and consumed in parallel to the task of learning music). The emergence of subjectivity in which material production and consumption of a joyful surplus coincide, attains a molar dimension. This molar transformation manifests itself through the new communal striation brought about by musical destratification. These limits are now permeable and welcome the entrance of the family. In this regard, through his character Huapaya, Martínez shows "how social production and relations of production are an institution of desire, and how affects or drives form part of the infrastructure itself" (AO 63).

Martínez focuses on the organs of the Guzmán family and on the desires that drive them back to their place of origin. At the same time, the characters establish new relationships in the form of social alliances. Furthermore, Martínez's novel shows that his narrative adds a different perspective to the racialized historical accounts that have located slaves and former slaves in a relationship of need controlled by Lima's political body. These historical accounts lead to a center-driven nomadism. Every line of flight takes the oppressed back to its oppressor's and its means of socio-economic codification.

In the second form of subjective return, the narrator refers to Felipe Guamán Poma in order to establish a subjective transformation brought about by music. During his discussion of the perception of the person of African heritage in Sondondo, the narrator evokes an image of racial fear from Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala's *Nueva Crónica y Buen Gobierno* (1615). Through this example, the narrator confirms the individual and molar transformation experienced by the characters. In so far as music challenges racial values that have gained a transcendental value or surface in consciousness, the community's transformation is of a molar type. Before the family's apprenticeship into music "se lo imaginaban tizado y maligno, con una apariencia más espantosa que el propio demonio" (CDMD 271). This perception is challenged through the possibility of finding enjoyment through the emotions produced by their musical performance.

Through the imperfect, Martínez alludes to the fact that musical flows transform the body internally. This transformation then leads to the replacement of the previously formed imaginary surface. In terms of subjectivation, the transformation of the community occurs in relation to the family. It amounts to their subjective emergence. This results in the production and consumption of a new way to process the appearance of the person of African heritage.

By enjoying the music played by the Guzmán family, the Sondondo people are able to rethink their perception

of whole persons identified with darkness and evil. The Sondondo people rid themselves of an overpowering emotion derived from the internalization of a despotic colonial order that has caused oppressed and oppressor to live under constant suspicion. Given the creation of racial surfaces in consciousness discussed in the theoretical chapter, the *comuneros* go through a process involving the transformation of the imaginary surfaces through which bodily encounters are processed and articulated.

In these examples, Martínez evokes subjective or ontological processes reminiscent of what Deleuze and Guattary understand as parallel processes leading to the development of consciousness. Through the processes of creating a desire machine involving the instruments and the colonial perceptions, Martínez alludes to how the parallel between subjective and material production initially involves the loss of the boundaries of the self. But this loss does not stop there because in the novel the Afro-Pacific subject, in tension with the Andean subject emerges in relation to its participation in material and cultural production. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari explain this emergence in terms of three syntheses that involve the bridging force of desire. In the first synthesis of consciousness, the subject's physical organs and senses become connected to the external world as we see through the characters' connection to the instruments and through their stereotyped perceptions. Initially, the pre-subject loses itself to the flows of racism because of the body's tendency to become connected, to create assemblages, and then to create an interiority out of the connectedness to the surrounding universe (territorialization). This loss of the self becomes an exploitable labor source. Then, in what Deleuze and Guattari call the second and third synthesis, Martínez's characters evolve and develop an economically, socially and historically conscious subjectivity. Consequently, in *Crónica*, the characters experience an instance of recollection, a reterritorialization of their connection to the surrounding environment of production that they are able to consume. This recollection comes into being due to music. Music functions as an alternative source of desire through which consciousness comes into being due to connective desire machines. These machines allow the characters to produce and consume music in parallel as the very manifestation of their existence.

## Conclusion

This article has attempted to produce a reading of the *Crónica de músicos y diablos* by relying on the study of the central force of desire. By looking into this connective force, the novel can be located at the intersection of an ontological or relational approach and decolonial thought in the form of post-Occidentalism. It is by placing Martínez's characters at the intersection of these two approaches that the characters

are able to restore jeopardized inter-ethnic relations and speak back to those who have kept them in the colonial limits of the race-labor co-relation. This is all possible as they experience a subjective return. This article has also provided socio-historic, biographical and bibliographical context in connection to the author. Through this contextualization, the article generates a post-occidental reading of the text in which the reader can see the author's criticism of the appropriation of the Afro experience in Peru. In terms of the content, the analysis has read the transformation of the Sondondo people, and the way the family challenges the State, by producing an alternative set of values through which they establish a new sense of community.

The new sense of community functions as a manifestation of an alternative body without organs or de-stratified social structure produced through the family's musical acquisition. This new alternative social structure results in a parallel sense of subjectivity connected, for example, to conscious understandings of extraction of surpluses and resolution of racial and class tensions (colonial subjective territorializations that survive in a post-occidental environment). These resolutions, generated after a joyful cultural destratification, are alternative territorializations or "designate regions in this [social] body" (AO 5). The body in question is one that calls attention to the transmodern condition of the characters and their world of exploitation. In depicting this transmodern condition, Martínez aligns with the goals of the post-occidental critique in which the effects of the colonial condition are still recognized as present and as generated from within existing social structures: "Lo vil no está más allá, sino adentro. En efecto, la crítica post-occidentalista empieza por descubrir lo abyecto altérico desde adentro" (Mendieta 122). More importantly, by intercalating musical machines produced through the connective force of desire and the local history of exploitation, the characters speak a language of liberation and attain their subjective and material states of freedom.

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**NOTES**

1. For a reading of this text that takes into account the role of European women travellers and their ambivalent replication of racist views, see Julia C. Paulk's "Representations of Slavery and Afro-Peruvians in Flora Tristan's Travel Narrative" in which Paulk relies on Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* (1992).
2. See the pamphlet "Plantas importantes de Ica," which was produced through the Darwin Initiative. This global initiative to gather and distribute local knowledge is supported by the British government around the world. The pamphlet provides the following information:

Nombre común: "Lucraco, Negrillo." Nombre científico: *Waltheria ovata* (Fam. Sterculiaceae) Útil para: apibotánica (miel de abeja-polen), medicinal, conservación de humedad, contenedor de las dunas, fertilidad del suelo, leña, hábitat para biodiversidad. Asociado con: Asociado con abejas, lagartijas, insectos.

The *lucraco* embodies biodiversity in Martínez's narrative.

3. See the blog article Juan Manuel Olaya, "La narrativa afroperuana de José 'Cheche' Campos: recuperación de la memoria histórica en Las negras noches del dolor." <http://juanmanuelolayarocha.blogspot.co.uk/2016/11/la-narrativa-afroperuana-de-jose-cheche.html>.

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# Constructions of Cultural Identity in the Poetry of the Afro-Colombian Angela Castro Garcés, *Ramillete pacífico* (2013)

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“Cultural identity... is a matter of becoming as well as of being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past.... identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within the narratives of the past” (Stuart Hall 98).

The preceding excerpt advances a critical aspect of Stuart Hall’s characterization of cultural identity. Implied in his exemplification is the centrality of individual agency and participation in the construction of the cultural identity of communities, its grounding in past and present experiences and how it serves to indicate future developments of these communities. This expression or assertion of cultural identity suggests that it is dynamic, subjective and provides an interesting frame within which to locate and analyse Angela Castro Garcés’ poems in the collection *Ramillete pacífico* (2013).

The discussions will reveal that in this debut collection, Castro Garcés explores her history and various aspects of her distinctive cultural heritage to firmly construct and preserve what she embraces as her own unique cultural identity. Tellingly, the introduction to the book, is the striking visual image on the cover that intimates that Castro Garcés has intentionally set out to create a portrait of difference. She pulls our focus away from “lo regular”, to a remarkable and unique representation of a black woman’s head with natural negroid hair, groomed in locks/plaits that are made up of words drawn from the lexicon of an Afro-Colombian dialect and intricately intertwined. With reference to this captivating image, Castro Garcés explains:

“...quería reflejar en la portada el contenido del libro, entonces tuve suerte de tener en una de mis clases de escritura a un estudiante con formación en diseño gráfico. Le conté a Luis Edwin de mi libro y le compartí los poemas y su significado, al igual que algunas fotografías de mi familia y amigos afro-descendientes. Él se fascinó por el léxico y por toda la historia detrás del poemario y me trajo esta fascinante propuesta. Significa y representa una mujer afro. Igual que la cantora y su hija, con su cabello y peinado característicos, quien además teje sus ideas con palabras propias de la región pacífica” (Personal interview, 2015).

Undoubtedly, this book functions as Garcés’ invitation into her exploration of her Afro-Colombian cultural heritage and identity. Readers are given an introduction to Afro-Colombian words by the locks of hair which seem to be springing firmly and defiantly from the woman’s head and pronouncing words such as *papiao*—someone who has just eaten; *conuno*—a musical instrument; *piangua*—mollusk prepared in coconut milk, *papachina*—a delicious tuber cooked with fish; *viche*—alcoholic drink made from sugarcane; *colirío*—the planting of bananas; *potrillo*—a small canoe steered by oars, among others. We are even drawn into an intriguing game of “find a word,” as we attempt to decipher distinct words among the intertwined strands of hair/words. As we turn this intriguing cover page, we anticipate more of this bold exhibition of something that is inherently African-centric and culturally distinctive.

Moreover, the large number of unfamiliar words in this cover image indicates that Garcés is interested in educating her audience/reader about the unique linguistic aspect of her culture. The inimitable Afro-Colombian vocabulary forcefully draws attention to itself—a specific and distinctive Afro-derived cultural heritage. The difference created by these unique words underline her interest in demonstrating that her cultural identity is singular, important and defining for her and her community.

## *Personal Formation and Maturation*

Angela Yicely Castro Garcés is an Afro-Colombian woman from the town of Noanamito on the Pacific Coast of Columbia. Her personal position is that Afro-Colombians of the Pacific Coast need to and can be empowered through their Afro-derived cultural heritage – with its richness, its creativity and distinguishing force. This, she feels is necessary, as Colombia still has a long way to go in advancing the causes of minority groups. Her declaration is that she has written because her

region abounds with a wealth of cultural forms and materials which inspired her to write. She expressly states: “esta riqueza familiar y regional me encaminó a seguir una carrera de letras. Quería hacer una autobiografía en verso para exaltar mi región pacífica” (Personal Interview, 2015). Indeed, Castro Garcés uses verses in the collection to bring an area or aspects of Colombian life and reality into focus. There are areas of which she is proud and she presents them in lively and well-articulated poems that bring their lifestyle and customs—typical foods, dances, celebrations and natural spaces and landscape into centre stage.

Upon reading the Dedication, we further witness the attempt to recall a personal history of formation within a particular cultural context:

“A mis padres, Herminio y Margoth,  
por enseñarme a perseverar y por darme  
el mejor regalo – la educación”(5).

Castro Garcés’ affectionate inscription in honour of her parents, foregrounds a number of key elements in consideration of her cultural identity and heritage as she recalls her parents’ role in her development. Without question, it is difficult to present any ideas of our upbringing without drawing on the memory of the people and experiences from our past. By invoking the memory of her parents, Castro Garcés squarely places her formation within a specific community and simultaneously disrupts the silence about the culture and way of life of that community. In an interview with Castro Garcés, she explains: “Mi abuela paterna, Doña Angelina Ángulo de Castro me enseñó mis primeras poesías; mi padre, Hermino Castro, docente y amante de la lectura y la escritura, ha sido un modelo de seguir por su hermoso manejo del discurso” (Personal Interview, 2015).

We immediately begin to appreciate that for Castro Garcés the personal self that she has constructed is central to the Afro-Colombian heritage and ancestral values.

### *Defence of the Regional Dialect*

Furthermore, Castro Garcés’ academic background and training as a linguist, aids in justifying her choice in presenting a cover such as the one previously discussed in this essay, which not only brings her racial identity and cultural difference into focus, but also her distinctive linguistic identity, evident through the unique vocabulary included. Indeed, Garcés has undertaken considerable study of the dialect that is widely spoken in her community on the Pacific Coast. In one particular study entitled, “The Spanish Dialect Spoken in Noanamito - Colombia”, Castro Garcés analyses the lexical and phonological patterns that distinguish the dialect of Noanamito from the Spanish that is spoken in the wider Colombia. Many of the words she studies in this academic essay are among the same ones included in the word-locks on the cover of *Ramillette pacífico*. She explains these as lexical variants or:

...words that vary in the community due to a) its geographical position (on the border of Micay river and close to the Pacific Ocean), and b) its employment of specific vocabulary, such as farming or fishing terms. Some of these words are: *potrillo* (to refer to a canoe) or *papiao* (to refer to someone who has just eaten) (Castro Garcés 30).

This insight into her academic background helps us to comprehend even more her decision to draw from this distinctive dialect to enrich her poetry and make it culturally outstanding, relevant, and specific. In fact, the idea that the inclusion of the unique lexical features of her Afro-Colombian dialect in her poetry as a critical aspect of her construction of cultural identity is strengthened by her own admission or revelation of the attitude of other Colombians to both the people of Noanamito and the dialect:

Many factors such as education, race, and socioeconomic status make the inhabitants and their dialect stigmatised in other parts of Colombia...The individuals who speak this dialect are perceived as rural and less civilized, this is why it is difficult for this dialect to have prestige (Castro Garcés 28).

Castro Garcés then, rejects all negative attitudes towards her dialect, in what may be regarded as an act of linguistic marronage as she brings her language into mainstream, and confronts us as we seek to enter into her poetry, with a piling up of words from this dialect on the very cover of the book. This overt identification with her Afro-Colombian tongue, while also writing in standard Colombian Spanish reveals her rejection of what Glissant characterized as the “arrogant imperialism of monolingualism” (249).

In the analyses and dissection of the individual poems, we note that the concentration of culture-bound diction is further enhanced and fortified by frequent *enjambment*, pointed rhetorical questions, hyperbole, forceful assonantic effects and a confident first person voice. All work together to unequivocally establish that the language of a marginalised group can contribute to the expression of the meanings that are important to the community’s understanding of self and establishment of its own independent identity. Indeed, the aspects of the dialect that are integrated with Spanish shows that she wants to emphasize her uneasiness, but at the same time her integration into the wider Colombian society.

### *The Black Presence in Colombia*

There is no monolithic black presence in Colombia, but rather, there are several different groups of persons of African descent in the country including groups on the Caribbean coast and the islands of San Andrés, Providencia and Catalina, as well as several communities in the Department of Chocó

on the Pacific Coast. The black population is larger than many realise, but largely comprises descendants of Africans who were brought against their will to Colombia:

Colombia's Black minority comprises 36-40% of the national population, but is officially recognized at 26%. This means our population is about 11 million of the 42 million people in Colombia. This is the second largest population of African descent in Latin America, after Brazil. African slavery in Colombia began in the first decade of the sixteenth century. By the 1520's, Africans were steadily imported into Colombia to replace the rapidly declining Native American population. Africans were forced to work in gold mines, on sugar plantations, cattle ranches, and large *haciendas*. African labor has been, and continues to be, essential in all regions of Colombia. African workers pioneered the extraction of alluvial gold deposits and the growing of sugar cane in the states of Choco, Antioquia, Cauca, Valle and Narino in western Colombia... Some historians view the Chocó as a very big *palenque* with a large population of *cimarrones*... (Murillo Oratia, 2).

Castro Garcés explains that the title, *Ramillote pacífico* (2013) was carefully chosen to reflect the central thrusts of the poems, as well as to fully locate her people in a place with which they identify on the Pacific Coast: "El título es un espejo de los poemas. Es aquella identidad que distingue al habitante de la región pacífica colombiana. El adjetivo 'pacífico', es una manera de mostrar la paz que se siente al volver a la tierra, una fuerza pacífica" (Personal Interview, 2015).

The deliberate choice of *pacífico* may also be regarded at the outset as a decisive and deliberate subversion of stereotypical constructions of Afro-derived persons as violent or naturally belligerent or pugnacious to counter this with a more positive representation of her community. It is her attempt to re-image the Afro-Colombian in a manner that belies common assumptions and expectations.

### *Celebrating the Land of her Birth*

In celebrating her birthplace and the richness of the land, the poet simultaneously highlights different aspects and attributes of her native region. Inherent in the poetic depictions and characterizations is a deep sense of the writer's connection to the land and a strong personal conviction that this land is central to her existence, history and understanding of herself as Afro-Colombian and specifically a resident of the Pacific coastal region. The ubiquitous presence of the land in the poet's life is evident. This truth, evoked from remembrances, is reinforced by the consideration that this all-encompassing environment is a timeless *zeitgeist* whose spirit possesses and prepossesses the life of its inhabitants, forging and leaving indelible imprints of a strong identity intricately woven in the land.

Garcés celebrates the idea that identity is linked to places and spaces. In "Cuna fecunda" written in a section entitled *Identidad pacífica* she gives homage to her native land. A strong sense of nationalism is conveyed in acclaiming her homeland and categorizing it by its inherently dominant characteristic: fertility. The metaphoric ascription in the title, "Cuna fecunda" unearths a hidden truth: the land is a womb of life – it issues forth life and gives entry into life or existence. It also imbues the land with life and the human quality of child bearing. The land is imaged as a perpetual life-giving source, birth is not cyclical for the land, but is incessantly generating. The opening lines seem to convey this idea:

Tus recuerdos me engrandecen  
siempre me han de acompañar,  
eres pasado y futuro  
y en mi mente estás hoy  
(“Cuna fecunda,” 52)

The land furthermore, is depicted as the source and sustainer of life: seemingly nestling and nurturing a child as a mother does. A visual image is presented of a mother's active role from inception through the formative stage of life guiding the child's development. This depiction of the land may be supported by the firm assertion of Glissant that the land must be shown to be actually involved in man's existence. He asserts: "Describing the landscape is not enough. The individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. Landscape is a character in this process" (Glissant xxxvii). The poetic voice seems to suggest that Afro-Colombians are a replica of the land where full genetic transference occurs in both the material and spiritual being. It is clear that the core essence of the poet's life is deeply entrenched in the land as well as transcending it. Further, Castro Garcés reiterates through the poem. The crucial role that the land plays in human existence from conception throughout the natural span of life. This idea is suggested in the following stanzas:

Has marcado mi vida  
has guiado mi existir  
eres el principio  
de mi vivir

Eres tierra bendita  
que me vio crecer  
que forjó en mi futuro  
un nuevo amanecer  
(“Cuna fecunda,” 52)

The land is seen as a divine endowment, a blessing in the life of the poetic persona, conveyed in the reverential address "eres tierra bendita." In buttressing the concept "cuna fecunda", and elevating the land as originator of life, Castro Garcés asserts that the land is the foundation

of society, first in hierarchy, essential to its construction of cultural identity and integral to the overall process of becoming and self-definition:

La tierra hace al hombre  
también la sociedad  
después de la familia  
el más grande pilar  
(“Cuna fecunda,” 52)

It is tacit that the human element is the first unit, followed by the family and from the family evolves the society. The family, therefore, is considered the greatest pillar in building the society up to a nation. However, Castro Garcés deconstructs this order as fundamental to creation and posits that the land which has been omitted, excluded and not given due consideration before, is preeminent to all others. “Cuna fecunda” is a veritable symphony that reinstates and establishes the land to its rightful position. As the womb and cradle of life: a land whose fecundity abounds in many forms, it’s most priceless and prized products are beautiful people. Expressions of practice and swelling pride reveal an undeniable proof of nationalism and portrayal of the people of the land being the grateful progeny of it:

Una tierra tan fértil  
otra cosa no ha de dar  
sino gente bonita  
que la sepa apreciar.  
(“Cuna fecunda,” 52)

The poetic voice seems to suggest that patriotism is non-existent if a people forget its motherland, or if there is no love and allegiance to their homeland, the land of their birth. Castro Garcés projects herself as a proud, grateful product of the land and aggrandizes the land of her birth as a noteworthy progenitor in her life:

Por eso no te olvido  
y te he de recordar,  
eres cuna fecunda  
eres mi patria y mi hogar  
(“Cuna fecunda,” 52)

The land represents her origin and her roots, her homeland and her home. Her deep love and fidelity are emissions of an identity forged and rooted in her motherland. Her eulogy is a memorial banner of exaltation, raised and flowing high across the endless passage of time. The poem creates an overall assertion of the agency of the land and of the relationship between land or environment and the shaping of self. This treatment of the land, without doubt, becomes a rejection of Colonial/European understanding of the land as a place to be dominated by man, rather than one which shows a relationship between the two.

### *Afro-Colombian Cultural Identity, Regionalism and Nationalism*

The importance of land, place and region to identity has been underlined by post-colonialists as follows:

... a major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with either developing or recovering an appropriate identifying relationship between self and place because it is precisely within the parameters of place and its separateness that the process of subjectivity can be conducted (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 346).

Castro Garcés deftly encapsulates different aspects of her Afro-Colombian cultural identity within the canopy of nationalism and regionalism. She explores the issue of social and racial classification based on skin colour, and the celebration of Africanness within the context of racial marginalisation and regional separation in Colombian society. In “¿De dónde es que sos?” Castro Garcés’ poetic voice seems to be undergirded by a desire to concretise her identity as she dexterously interweaves individual identity into the tapestry of nationalism and regionalism. In other words, a specific region within a nation is recognised as being responsible for the cultural formation of the Afro-Colombian persona. Through the use of a free form interview style, Castro Garcés unequivocally settles the question of identity with such *panache* as she situates her Afro-Colombian origin within the Pacific region:

¿De dónde es que sos?  
Soy de Noanamito  
¿Y de dónde queda?  
¡Es puro Pacífico!  
(“¿De dónde es que sos?” 53)

Castro Garcés asserts strong affiliation to the Pacific coastal region and the pivotal role it plays in forming the character of its dwellers. Against the backdrop of the transculturation of this Afro-Colombian coastal region, Castro Garcés suggests that identity is embedded in origin and origin is inherently linked to the Pacific region. In other words, she firmly proclaims her national identity as one that is rooted in the Pacific coastal Colombian region, where the Afro-Colombian ‘Noanamito’ descendants have appropriated for themselves a homeland. Regionalism is boldly celebrated as the place where cultural identity is forged/concretised through Pacific alignment and imprint: “¡Es puro Pacífico!”

Castro Garcés herself has written elsewhere about the isolation of the region from the rest of Colombia stating:

This is a very isolated area in the country that has been forgotten by the central government in many respects. Since there are no roads to this area and the only way

to access the community is by the sea, its people are in little contact with the rest of the country and not many people from other places visit this zone (Castro Garcés 28).

It seems that in this context of isolation and lacking modernization, members of the community have been brought close and have depended on the environment to create their own identity. Place as an environment demarcated and embodied by the Pacific Ocean is centralised in progressive stanzas which enthusiastically flow through *enjambment*:

Pa' llegar allá  
hay que atravesar  
esteros y ríos  
tras pasar el mar.

¡No puedo creerlo!  
¿Y no hay carretera?  
¿Eso es una isla  
o es zona costera?

No es una isla  
Si es zona costera  
vive mucha gente  
y no hay carretera.

(“¿De dónde es que sos?” 53)

Regionalism is advertised by placement of the land entity within its geographical context on the Pacific Coast which bestows on the region an aura of uniqueness by virtue of its isolation and seclusion. However, reference to regional exclusivity also alludes to social exclusion, racial isolation, and marginalisation. Furthermore, the remoteness of the region determines and affects economic viability and the availability or scarcity of products. In shipping or marine commerce, multiple traversing of waters becomes a crucial factor for trade and consequently, costliness defines and underscores the lives of these Afro-Colombian coastal dwellers. This connection between distance and trade is captured by the strong assonance in the line endings of stanza five:

La comida es cara  
por la lejanía,  
pero sobre todo  
por la travesía...

(“¿De dónde es que sos?” 53)

Notwithstanding the economic state of Noanamito, in closing this stanza, Castro Garcés superimposes the true wealth of her homeland—the quality of community solidarity championed by the spirit of diligence and alacrity which characterise the community and its cultural identity:

[...]  
la gente allá vive  
en comunidad,  
son bastante alegres  
y aman trabajar.

(“¿De dónde es que sos?” 53)

A strong sense of *amour propre* is evident in the poet's epithet for her people. The art of defining her national identity is synonymous with identifying with her people and the characteristics that delineate them. Their strength and resilience seem resident in their vivacity, regardless of life's circumstances. Moreover, their ability to survive, lies in this exuberant energy for work and perpetual state of contentment. In answering the titular question posed, “¿De dónde es que sos?” Castro Garcés, in the final stanza, eulogises her people and aligns herself with the proof of national origin and regional cultural identity – festivities, their successes and the very people themselves:

Se gozan las fiestas  
saben disfrutar  
lo que les da el medio  
para progresar.  
¡Eso es mi pueblo!  
Y hoy lo enalzo  
hoy lo idolatro  
lo llevo en lo alto  
porque soy costeña  
Soy Noanamiteña  
llegué a este pueblo  
siendo muy pequeña

(“¿De dónde es que sos?” 53)

Indubitably, the cultural legacy of conviviality resonates in their festive lifestyle, celebrating life in every form. Festivals transcend platitudes to become cohesive and unifying bonds, and motivating forces for life and daily existence. There is open admiration and exuberant praises, even veneration for her Afro-Colombian people in all spheres. The persona is proud to be an inhabitant of Noanamito, proud to align herself with the Pacific coastal region and proud of her Afro-Colombian cultural heritage. Profound and burgeoning pride to belong, to originate, to claim racial entrenchment with such an exceptional set of people ricochets with preponderant force as the curtain closes in this poem. The Noanametian flagship has raised its Pacific coastal banner to break barriers and announce itself on the international arena. Castro Garcés' exaltation and idolization of her people exudes pride in her place of birth and nurturing and pride in being an inhabitant of Noanamito, proud to align herself with the Pacific coastal region, proud of her Afro-Colombian heritage and culture, proud of her racial ethnicity and proud to identify herself with a great people. A cynical view of what may be considered as an over idealised depiction may well be advanced, but hyperbole seems acceptable in a context of deep gratification and pride.

### *Departure from the Land*

Arguably, Castro Garcés resolves a concern with the departure from the land as a shift that is regarded as undesirable and disruptive to the norm in her coastal homeland. Disdain for traditional agricultural or subsistence farming in the younger generation seems to be a major cause for concern as the disregard for what is of value pervades community living. Implicit in the fifth stanza, is the concern for a general abandonment of the land and culture. Thus, emergent from this forsaking of the land is a rootless generation characterised as aimless ruminants. Recognition of this reality and truth generates an atmosphere of mounting trepidation that neglect of the land will give way to the loss of essential elements of Afro-Colombian culture.

The poem “El pan coger,” is a powerful commentary on this departure from the land as a traditional source of livelihood. It typifies acculturation within the agricultural working sector. As a prelude, Castro Garcés both acknowledges and draws attention to the fertile state and resourcefulness of the land:

Nuestra tierra es fértil  
no lo voy a negar  
siempre se ha sembrado  
mucho variedad  
(“El pan coger,” 17)

The land is presented as the hub of productivity, the mainstay of livelihood, a vision highlighted by crisp and concise syntactic arrangements. Its usefulness and significance to the daily sustenance of the inhabitants is evident:

Se siembra la caña  
también el colino,  
y mucho maíz  
para el molino

De allí se preparan  
distintos productos,  
birimbí, maramorra,  
casabe y envuelto  
para nombrar algunos.  
(“El pan coger,” 17)

Castro Garcés paints an expansive picture of the products of the land which have been traditionally enjoyed by the inhabitants of her Afro-Colombian community from their primary stage to the end products. The reader gets a depiction of typical foods in the region that form part of their dietary constitution. However, while the poet expresses a certain depth of appreciation of the land’s richness and fruition, there is an implicit lamentation of the unrealised potential of this land. This is evident in the contrast drawn between the former state and utilisation of the land with the current state:

Pero hay algo más  
y debo contarlo,  
hoy en día la gente  
no quiere sembrarlo

Ya se han dedicado  
a otros menesteres  
que son bien modernos  
y dan más placeres.  
(“El pan coger,” 17)

Modernisation has obviously given way to displacement and replacement of the traditional way of earning bread. There is a loss and lack of interest among blacks of the region to grow their food or work the land. Agriculture is now a dying phenomenon. The gravitation towards modern and manufactured products, presumably imported, becomes predominant in this labour and production shift that has resulted in traditional jobs becoming obsolete. Consequently, the land wastes away because of abandonment and neglect. The change in the face of the labour frontier is more than a removal from tradition; it is symbolic of a vanishing or threatened culture, which the poet alludes to here in “El pan coger”:

Entonces la siembra  
bien tradicional,  
ha quedado resegada  
y debe esperar.  
Mientras tanto la tierra  
nos pide gritando  
vuelvan a sembrarme,  
estoy esperando.  
(“El pan coger,” 17)

The persona laments the fatally inflicted blow dealt to the land which has been revered and recoded as pivotal to life and existence, history and culture by the older generation of this Afro-Colombian region. The land lies in a state of oblivion, vacuity, and non-productivity. Castro Garcés illustrates the need to save a dying culture in the vociferous clarion call of the land, a call that resonates and arrests our attention. The employment of the personification in the desperate cry of the land reinforces the concept that the land is intrinsically alive, having human vitality and the right to existence and continuity that have always been acknowledged by its Afro-Colombian predecessors. Revivification is therefore necessary. We may assert then, that the centrality of land in maintaining cultural identity is advanced as a strong anti-colonial position and one that Plumwood promotes when he rejects writing in which nature is presented as inessential and massively denied as the unconsidered background to technological society (305).



### *Affirmation of Blackness*

In the poem, “Cierta que yo soy marrón?” (49), the question of blackness is simultaneously challenged and celebrated as Castro Garcés shows that racism and colour prejudice formed in the formative years of infancy can be confronted, dismantled, and deconstructed. As a precursor to embracing her racial identity, the poetic persona uses her daughter’s guileless learning experience about race and colour to expose issues of racism in Colombian society.

The problematic of colour and racial construction meant to give rise to the emergence of racial division based on the colour of one’s skin is challenged, debunked, and disclaimed by the kaleidoscopic representation of life in its myriad forms. Life and nature are presented as colourful and filled with varying hues of colours. Colours can never be viewed from an underground tunnel, but must be panoramic. Garcés unveils a hidden truth: the colour of life is not homogeneous, but heterogeneous. The uniqueness and uniformity of difference is conveyed in the harmonious cadence of the lines in the following excerpt:

De colores está hecho  
 Todo nuestro universo  
 de color azul el cielo  
 Y de color son mis versos

Está mi hija aprendiendo  
 que todo tiene color  
 que no sólo es el árbol  
 Sino su fruto y su flor.

(“Cierta que soy marrón,” 49)

There is a shift in linear time. This is presented in the arrangements of the fourth and fifth stanzas to draw a parallel between the time of uncovering and discovering the body to the time of self-discovery:

Ya es hora del baño  
 y en la batea la he sentado,  
 se toca por todas partes  
 y tararear sin cesar

(“Cierta que soy marrón,” 49)

Garcés uses the child’s innocent unassuming acts of self-exploration and self-discovery to broach the issues of identity and ethnicity. Such an act is typical on occasions of bathing and examining one’s images or reflection in the mirror. However, self-awareness is provoked by this child’s experience at school:

De pronto ella me dice  
 al ver su lindo color  
 mamá hoy me han dicho en la escuela  
 que soy de color marrón

(“Cierta que soy marrón,” 49)

The stripping away of all clothing metaphorically represents a removal of all covering, camouflage or pretence to true self. The baring of self allows for self-recognition, self-realization and self-acceptance. Visualizations of self-image in its naked form serve as a pathway of illumination into one’s identity. The wall preceding racial identity has always been the colour of one’s skin. Self-identity, however, is personal and cannot be fully or truly studied through the lens of others, who only possesses limited perceptions. The child seems to simultaneously impose the racism of the European (dominant) subject on the self and struggle to simultaneously assert the self:

Mamá, mamá ¿cierto que yo soy marrón?  
 ¿y por qué este color?  
 hija mía yo le he dicho  
 es un regalo de Dios

(“Cierta que soy marrón,” 49)

In debunking this uncomfortable confrontation of color prejudice faced by her young daughter, a representative of the future generation, the persona offers affirmation of self and identity and obliterates doubt and self-degradation by celebrating negritude as an elevating force. The magnificence of being black is projected as a precious privilege, a gift of God. Blackness is celebrated as beautiful, unique; a heavenly endowment undiluted in strength and richness; and a bulwark of empowerment against racism. This enviable colour in God’s creation is prominent and protuberant making it a prime target for begrudging attacks. However, the persona’s rebuttal, though simple in candour, is sagacious and profound. No other argument or defense is necessary than to direct questions about creation to the Creator. Therefore, as a gift in the human tapestry of God’s creation, it can only be appreciated, celebrated and extolled. It becomes a means of closing the conversation especially for a child who will be sufficiently impressionable to accept the reason given.

### *History and Memory in the Presentation of Cultural Identity*

The significance of history and memory in preserving cultural identity both seem to drive the thematic construction of the poem “Cuénteme señora,” which employs a conversational style to provide a social commentary on the erosion of culture, or the regression from fundamental elements that form and cement the Afro-Colombian cultural identity. The centrality of collective memory and reflection on everyday life is foregrounded by the suggestion that the *Señora*, who is being addressed, is from a different generation and needs to recall the distinctive way of life so as to pass it on. She is reminiscent of the black grandmother, so frequently portrayed in Caribbean

and other diasporic writing – the custodian of a community’s traditions and values. The conversation is therefore instrumental in forging a bridge between the past and the present or history and current issues of day-to-day life. The exuberant dialogue in “Cuénteme señora”, communicates the change in the cadence of Pacific coastal life, as depicted in the representation of two generations, the older and the younger. They engage in an oral discourse that resonates with a provocative and probing inquiry into the problematic of cultural dissolution and its impact on coastal and community life.

The poetic voice advances a crucial stance regarding the centrality of one’s history or past in fostering and preserving the legacy of culture passed on by ancestors. The *Señora*’s knowledge of the community, its history and values is indispensable to exposing how the group has maintained its cultural identity:

¿Qué tal mi señora,  
cómo me le va?  
Muy bien mi señorita  
¿Y usted, cómo está?  
Yo estoy muy bien  
Vine a contemplar  
cómo vive la gente  
en su comunidad

(“Cuénteme señora” 15)

Here Garcés skillfully creates what on the surface appears to be a simple conversation to create what is really an instrument of ethnographic research, the interview which generates a document of lived experiences. The technique brings to the fore Glissant’s views on the treatment of lived experiences among Caribbean writers: “It is not the literary side of things that has caused me anguish, as one would have expected of any writer concerned with devoting his attention to self-expression; it is rather the historical side, in the excessive or inadequate reflection on lived reality, with which like any man today... I can’t help feeling involved. History... and Literature form part of the same problematics: the account, or the frame of reference, of the collective relationships of men with their environment, in a space that keeps changing and in a time that is constantly being altered” (Glissant 69-70).

The oral exchange acquires a rhythmic tempo between the lines of the opening stanza where the requisite introduction and exchanges of courtesy set the stage to delve into and discuss more pressing matters affecting Pacific coastal life, the community or group and its understanding of its values and privileges. In this context, the poem becomes an informal investigation into the effect of modernisation on key components of the environment: the river, coastal life, traditional sources or means of livelihood based on the land. The dialectic of culture and cultural evolution through the trajectory from past to present is captured in the alignment of the first three stanzas with the last three of the poem:

Cuénteme del río  
y del pan coger,  
cuénteme historia  
de hoy de ayer  
hoy las cosas han cambiado  
al pasar del tiempo  
hoy en día a la gente  
le cuesta el sustento

Se han enajenado  
olvidado la tierra  
andan sin rumbo  
no se acuerdan de ella.  
Ahora si veamos  
por donde empezar

le hablaré del río  
en primer lugar...

(“Cuénteme señora” 15)

It becomes evident that the progression of time has transformed the arena of traditional life on the Pacific coastal homeland of the poet. There is a tangible shift from the traditional way of life, and the synchronisation of change with time, paradoxically reveals an antithesis that changing times unravel change in times. Evidently, in this coastal community, the price of modernisation and its challenge to the formation of Afro-Colombian cultural identity is prevalent. Inhabitants are no longer dependent on the land for sustenance or to make a living. There is a marked departure from the utility of the land as the chief and primary source of livelihood and the general proclivity is now towards manufactured products in this move from ‘earning a bread’ through working the land to ‘buying the bread’, presumably through costly importations.

The centrality of history to the contribution of self and cultural identity is foregrounded by the investment of the importance of the knowledge that has been carried by the “*Señora*” in her memory. There is a distinct suggestion that this history is needed for the poetic persona and those in her age to continue to thrive and live. The poem functions as a unique way of promoting the value of the elderly in highlighting what has been lost from the cultural heritage to imply how this cultural identity can be restored or preserved. Indeed, it gives substantiation to the powerful views of Glissant that “history as consciousness at work and history as lived experiences are not the business of historians exclusively” (65). In other words, writers must also point to history, record history and lament the loss of history.

In the forceful poem, “*Cultura ausente*,” we also witness this self-reflexive practice as the poetic persona recalls the past with remorse, especially in relation to young Afro-Colombians, who have abandoned their unique cultural identity. The poetic voice laments the loss of certain cultural forms, many of which are named in the word plaits/locks of the cover of the book. The younger generation is projected as neglecting their obligation

to preserve important aspects of their cultural heritage to the detriment of the community spirit and to the preservation of their identity. The repetition of the phrase “todo ha cambiado” forcefully emphasises the contrast in the attitude toward the ancestral values in the past – ‘ante’ and “hoy en día.” The sense that the values and practices have been infiltrated and even corrupted by outside influences is lamented. The conclusion is that their cultural identity and sense of self can only be concretised through the ancestral values and guidelines for conduct which are to be found in the “old ways”:

“Cultura ausente”

Ahora otra cosa  
voy a comentarle,  
sobre las costumbres  
que han sido ancestrales.

La música, el baile  
ya todo ha cambiado,  
no tocan cununo  
ni bailan currulao.

Antes se bailaba  
con bombo y guazá  
la gente unida amanecía  
bailando y tomando  
viche regional.

Pero hoy en día  
nuestra juventud,  
ya no toca bombo  
ni reza a Jesús.

Todo lo ha cambiado  
por bailes extraños,  
de otro lado  
han sido apañados.

La herencia se pierde  
falta la enseñanza,  
¿O falta conciencia?  
¿O sobra ignorancia?

Yo no sé m'hijita  
que es lo que ha pasado,  
pero lo moderno  
nos tiene azotados.

Se hace necesario  
Volver a enseñar,  
a la juventud  
lo de tiempo atrás.

(“Cultura ausente,” 19)

Both “Cuénteme Señora” and “Cultura ausente” seem to give credence to Assmann’s (1995) view that: “cultural identity must be practiced to be passed on to different generations for it to be preserved; it is not passed on in the genes or by natural processes.” Indeed, the poems, “Vamos a celebrar” and “La uramba” further suggest a sense of duty/obligation on the part of the persona to own her cultural heritage, to ensure that its centrality to the formation of the Afro-Colombian way of life and cultural identity continues to be intact. The intimation is that several authentic aspects of the heritage that lend it its uniqueness need to be maintained to concretise culture, as suggested by the many typical musical instruments, dances and foods that are named. The persona promotes the idea that community unity will also result from this celebration of cultural traditions. Once again we witness the incorporation of some of the typical words used in the image on the cover, to underline their centrality in identifying or challenging the Afro-Colombian culture.

Al son del cununo  
Bombo, marimba y guasá,  
se prende la rumba  
en mi litoral.

Busque su pareja  
vamos a bailar,  
juga o currulao  
para celebrar.

Es nuestra patrona  
fiesta regional,  
saquen aguardiente  
que sea de acá.

.....

Seguimos cantando  
hay que celebrar  
estos nueve días  
de fiesta patronal  
Así el pueblo es todo  
solidaridad,  
rezan y agradecen  
a la deidad.

(“Vamos a celebrar,” 32)

The concretisation of cultural identity is further forcefully foregrounded in: “La uramba” in which the seemingly simple preparation of a meal is a time for friends to gather and share in the recall of the recipe and the contribution of the ingredients. There is a spirit of sharing that is characteristic of the Afro-Colombian community which helps to unite it around its unique cuisine:

Me reúno con mis amigos  
y prendemos el fogón,  
vamos a hacer una uramba  
¿Y qué cocinamos hoy?

Voy a pedirle a mamá  
un poquitico de arroz,  
vos traé una papa grande  
de tu casa y un tazón.

Para hacer una limonada  
bajemos limón del palo,  
pedimos un poquito de azúcar  
y cocinamos banano.

Esta es la uramba que me gusta  
también llamada bodita,  
que en el patio de la casa  
preparan las amiguitas.  
("La uramba," 33)

The ritual of preparing the meal which will be shared gives attention to the bonds of community and *camaraderie* which are highly valued among those who have continued to embrace their culture. The high currency placed on family relations and bonds that are formed by a specific cultural influence, is also forcefully underlined in this poem.

It is clear that for Garcés the cultural identity of the Afro-Colombian is deeply rooted in ancestral values which are also hinged on the connection to land as an embodiment of African ancestral roots. I maintain that her bold focus on this Afro-Colombian culture is intended to undo the neglect to which it has hitherto been subjected. This neglect is synonymous with erasure and silencing with which her own community and the wider pacific region have been met by mainstream Colombia, despite being part of the everyday culture of a group of people on Colombia's Pacific Coast. We may assert that Castro Garcés engages in a consistent project of constructing her cultural identity, especially for those outside of her culture, but also for those who are forgetting or departing from their own culture.

Additionally, Castro Garcés underscores the fact that memory such as that carried by the older generation, is critical for preserving culture and must be supported by active reflection, sharing and transmission to younger generations. This also means that younger members of the community must consciously engage with their culture and seek to preserve and concretise it so as to resist annihilation. Garcés' presentations do not focus on the impecunious conditions in which these Colombian blacks of the Pacific Coast reside, but emphasize instead the wealth of their culture and the beauty, richness and vitality of the lands on the Pacific Coast and of how the construction of their identity is shaped by their connections to these lands. Indeed, she seems to be writing for a wide readership/audience, but also and mainly for the people about whom she has written. She has expressly stated:

Deseo que mis poemas sean leídos por gente de la  
región pacífica que vive allá para que se reconozcan en

estos, por aquellos que han salido de la región para que recuerden la belleza de nuestro litoral y también por foráneos para que, a través de este poemario, viajen a la región y conozcan su gente, su cultura y su dialecto (Personal Interview, 2015).

Without doubt, Castro Garcés succeeds in celebrating her region and heritage and in creating her own discourse—one that gives visibility to the region she proudly claims as home and to which she owes her heritage, as she seeks to rescue her cultural heritage from oblivion, and promote an understanding of her African-centric Colombian cultural identity.

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# Mestizaje/Hybridity (Mesti-bridity) as Struggle, Contest and Subversion in *Plácido* (1982) by Gerardo Fullea León

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The major objective of this paper is to investigate the extent to which the author, Gerardo Fullea León, problematises the concept of hybridity in his 1989 dramatic work, *Plácido*. It aims to identify the different ways in which race, class, nationhood, and even gender, all come to figure nineteenth-century Cuba as a hybrid state enduring struggle and contest. It uses Homi K. Bhabha's understanding of hybridity as a "third space" that constantly dialogues and clashes with its constituent selves, alongside Peter Wade's similar reasoning of the term as precisely a process of "struggle and contest". It finds that Fullea León carries out multiple acts of subversion in the text primarily through juxtaposition and irony in order to privilege an Afrocentric discourse and restore the dignity of Afro-Cuban subjectivity. It concludes that, by way of revisiting a controversial event—the killing of the mulatto poet Plácido—etched in Cuban history, the author achieves the feat of denouncing Cuba's racist past and memorialising the lifework and values of the tragic figure of Plácido.

To live in the Borderlands means you  
are neither *hispana india negra española*  
*ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata*, half-breed  
caught in the crossfire between camps  
while carrying all five races on your back  
not knowing which side to turn to, run from;  
Gloria Anzaldúa,  
"To Live in the Borderlands Means You"

Ser enemigo eterno del tirano,  
manchar, si me es posible mis vestidos,  
con su execrable sangre por mi mano.  
Derramarla con golpes repetidos;  
Y morir a las manos de un verdugo  
Si es necesario para romper el yugo.  
Plácido (Gerardo Fullea León, *Plácido*, 306)

## Hybridity and Mestizaje

In a broad post-colonial context, hybridity is the formation of new and mixed cultures and identities as a result of colonisation. It is to be understood more accurately in the context of the "transcultural rather than multicultural (crossing and fertilising rather than fragmented)" (Wisker), thus invoking an interrogation of the concepts of cultural difference and cultural diversity. Homi K. Bhabha, the leading post-colonial theorist of hybridity, delineates these said concepts in his essay "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences": "If cultural diversity is a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics, or ethnology, cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate, and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability, and

capacity" (206). To this end, hybridity separates itself from both cultural difference and cultural diversity, for, while the former conveys the idea of separateness of cultures, the latter does totalisation. Hybridity emerges, then, as the equal recognition of cultures and cultural expressions regardless of perceivable difference (Wisker).

One can already see how hybridity can be a slippery or difficult term to conceptualise. Bhabha, however, has nuanced it in such a remarkable way that it has gained fundamental purpose in cultural studies since the publication of his book *Location of Culture* in 1994. For Bhabha, all cultures are essentially hybrid, as they are all constructed in a Third Space, which is a "contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation" (Bhabha 208). As soon as cultures cross over and interact, he argues, there is an "unconscious relation" that transpires between or among them that produces the

effect of mixed or opposing feelings (ibid 208). To this end, there are truly no more binaries—I/You, Us/Them, Self/Other—but a complex process of negotiation with the possibility of blooming into a Self that is neither Self nor Other but both (ibid 209).

The most important thing about Bhabha's theory of hybridity is that it subverts colonial discourse by displacing the polarities it establishes to maintain its hegemony (Gyulay). According to this reasoning, there is no sound basis on which Europe can maintain its long-touted authority on the idea of difference and superiority to her colonised peoples and places because cultural contact inevitably leads to cultural similarity—the birth of a version of that European self. And in that discriminatory practice of ridiculing the perceived Other, Europe is essentially criticising its own Self. Although such a conception of hybridity has been cautioned against because of its homogeneous approach to culture, one post-colonial theorist, Robert Young, contends that its usefulness for political resistance makes it appropriate and acceptable (qtd. in Gyulay).

Another concern with hybridity is nomenclature, since efforts have been made to wield different conceptualisations of it under different names, such as the French term *métissage*, the Spanish term *mestizaje*, and the English terms miscegenation, transculturation, and creolisation. Joshua Lund notes one such example in Néstor García Canclini's gesture to separate the concepts of *mestizaje* and hybridisation (*hibridación*), and his retreat years later in that gesture because of a perceived equal validity and sameness of the terms. It is also interesting that Lund underscores that Bhabha's concept of hybridity was not a new phenomenon to Latin Americans and, in fact, "many wondered aloud what all the fuss was about." Latin Americans have always been familiar with the concept of hybridity under the cognate of *mestizaje*, and García Canclini, Argentinian theorist of Latin American studies in the fields of sociology and anthropology, did publish a ground-breaking work on hybridity in 1989 called *Culturas híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, preceding Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1994).

The concept of *mestizaje* is fundamental for understanding Latin American culture and societies. It goes back to the 16th century to denote the mixing of Spanish and Indian/indigenous blood, marking a "privileged category of mixed ancestry" among other mixed peoples of the colonial era. African peoples were also part of this racial mixing. The Spanish distinguished themselves from mixed people in the Americas so as to wield "order and control" in this new geographical space. Products of forbidden unions often between Spanish men and Indian women (and, less so, Spanish women and Indian men), mestizos were considered socially "illegitimate," often aberrant, but generally stronger than the Indians. Their social acceptance was subject to the discretion of the Spanish, who would act as patrons to some and exempt them from being considered mixed, naming them Spanish instead.

The power of this patron depended on his own social status in colonial society. As soon as more and more Africans arrived in the Americas, Afro-Europeans/mulattos emerged all over the Americas, leaving a large population of Afro-indigenous peoples in places where vast groups of Indians managed to survive Spanish colonisation. In such places as the Caribbean, Brazil and northern parts of South America, where little to no indigenous groups survived, mulatto people have come to be the prominent demo-graphic (Schwaller).

### *Mesti-bridity?*

Peter Wade, in his substantial article "Rethinking Mestizaje: Ideology and Experience," asserts that mestizaje is at one and the same time ideology and lived experience. For him, mestizaje as ideology is two-pronged: 1) scholarly/"official" rhetoric that racially and culturally categorises Latin American nationhoods as mestizo, thereby disregarding the oppression of minority groups such as the indigenous and the blacks; 2) a theory of resistance for oppressed groups to use racial taxonomies other than that of the coloniser's, creating one's own and relabelling oneself (242). In sum, it entails the definition of a nation as essentially racially and culturally mixed, so much so that it is nonsensical for racism and other conflicts regarding cultural difference to thrive. It generalises the nation as one—a homogeneous whole—regardless of its glaring diversity and differences.

Wade argues that mestizaje as lived experience is both the ideology of mestizaje itself alongside the embodied practices of racial-cultural difference, thus making this lived experience both "symbolic" and "structural" (239-240). He states that mestizaje is traditionally considered in the context of nationhood, but as lived experience foregrounds the individual and the family in the context of the nation (240).

Still, what makes mestizaje a complex term is the way in which it eludes precise definition in Latin American scholarship due to the way in which it treads thin lines between inclusion and exclusion, sameness and difference (Wade, 240). Wade highlights that the scholarship on mestizaje is unreliable because it is a discourse dominated by the "national elites" of Hispanic nations (241). Surely, their aim was to impose and foster a sense of national identity rather than account for the reality of colonial and post-colonial racial-cultural relations. But this whitewashing of the nation is untenable since, as Wade contests, "the very idea of mixture depends fundamentally on the idea not only of whiteness, but also of blackness and indigeness. The idea of the mestizo nation needs the image of 'los negros' and 'los indios' (or, given the gendered nature of *mestizaje*, one might say, of 'las negras' and 'las indias')" (243). And despite the fact that mestizaje as ideology enforces homogenisation, it doesn't quite attain it. Racial-cultural difference is not erased, because the upper classes must make these distinctions in



order to maintain their societal superiority. Therefore, blacks and indigenous peoples are, at one and the same time, marginalised and included in the mestizo nation (245-246).

For Wade, the concept of mestizaje seeks efficacy in that of hybridity. He argues that mestizaje as ideology is emboldened by contemporary notions of hybridity as a subversive phenomenon—subversive by means of dismissing polar identity constructs and inserting a third one. Yet, mestizaje as ideology cannot fully claim this subversive power since, in Latin America, it turns out to be oppressive and exclusionary to indigenous and black peoples (Wade 243). It seems, then, that what is necessary for the scholar is to act, much like Wade does, as ethnographer in the search for the subversive potential of mestizaje/hybridity (*mesti-bridity*) in terms of real-life practices, while not dismissing its discursive ideology.

The ultimate utility of Wade's paper manifests when he proposes that we see mestizaje, much like Bhabha's theorisation of hybridity, as:

...a space of struggle and contest. It is not a reason for automatic optimism or for Latin Americans to feel benevolent about their societies simply because mestizaje can have inclusive effects. It is a site of struggle to see what and who is going to be included and excluded, and in what way; to see to what extent existing value hierarchies can be disrupted. (ibid 246)

This submittal forms precisely the tenet and scope of my argument. In conjunction with the notion of “a space of struggle and contest,” I aim to analyse the Cuba in Fullea's *Plácido* as the “third space” to which Bhabha refers. In this space, and primarily through the protagonist Plácido, both African and Spanish racial and cultural identities eclipse to perform a process of negotiation of Cubanness, of national belonging. This negotiation is to be seen as contentious but promising insofar that white supremacy is challenged effectively though at a hefty cost.

Hence, my neologism “*mesti-bridity*” is an effort to treat mestizaje with the subversive quality that hybridity discourse offers. Much like the way in which races and cultures mix and become hybridised, “*mesti-bridity*” emerges as a multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary term. It is to be understood as both ideology and lived experience, as Wade suggests, but only in the context of Latin America since any effort to understand its cultures, peoples, and societies necessarily involves revisiting the concept of *mestizaje* and a *mestizo* Latin American sense of nationhood and identity. Of course, there will be implications for such a coined term, such as the generalisation of a Latin American historical experience. Surely, Latin America of the continent and that of the Caribbean share similar yet different stories, but it is the fact that *mestizaje/hybridity* (*mesti-bridity*) is premised on the notion of containing both sameness and difference that makes it a plausible concept.

### *Fullea and the Poetics of Mestizaje/Hybridity in Plácido (1982)*

It is important to note that *Plácido* emerged only a few years after Cuba's *quinquenio gris* (Five Grey Years, 1971-1975), which was a period marked by heavy repression of cultural and intellectual activity on the island. Reminiscing on her 11-year stay in Cuba under Castro's rule, Margaret Randall writes in her book that “[d]espite its name, most agree that this period lasted longer than five years—some would argue that vestiges remain—and that gray is too pale a description” (Randall 176). The major event leading up to this dark time for writers and intellectuals was the controversial Padilla Affair (1968-1971), in which famed poet Heberto Padilla was imprisoned for political dissidence in 1971. He had won one of the nation's prestigious writer's awards for his collection *Fuera del juego* (1968), which contained a plethora of political commentary deemed counterrevolutionary. Even before this, Padilla had clashed with government officials whom he chided for the new arbitrary policies which stifled the freedom of cultural and intellectual expression on the island.

Fullea was not exempt from this harsh climate for literary creativity, especially as an Afro-Cuban. He had lost a great part of his writer identity with the government shutdown of the *El Puente* young writer's group and their literary magazine *Lunes de Revolución* in 1965 to which he belonged. The group was markedly transgressive in its ideologies which spanned racial politics and sexuality. But Fullea is keen to justify in his interview with Linda Howe that *El Puente* was, rather than anti-revolutionary per se, “too revolutionary” (Howe 38)—that is, they were a force of revolution within the Revolution. Government repression was also meted out to a rising Black Power-inspired movement in the 1960s. Howe tells us that the term “Black Power” itself wilds, even today, such separatist and anti-revolutionary connotation under the perception of the revolutionary government, that writers remain wary of its use (76). Still, Howe mentions that many Afro-Cuban writings that proceeded the 1960s were inspired by the government's earlier negative reaction to Afro-Cuban writings that reflected the North American Black Power, Black Panther and Malcolm X milieu (7). Inevitably, we come to see Fullea's *Plácido* as one of these writings given the strong undertones of racial defiance that it carries, and we are further compelled to question the reason for its reversion to history, to 1835-1845.

There are several examples of black Cuban writers and intellectuals, and allies, who were maligned by government officials for their work on black matters: Walterio Carbonell for his struggle to have Afro-Cuban history represented in public schools' curricula; Sara Gomez for her filmic works which highlighted the continuation of racial prejudice despite the Revolution's claim to its eradication; and Tomás González (dramatist) and Alberto Pedro Díaz (ethnologist) for inciting radical black ideologies (Benson 235). It is no

wonder, then, that many of these individuals retreated to self-repression/self-censorship. Howe had the opportunity to have Tomás Fernández Robaina and Pedro Pérez Sarduy admit to doing this (91-92). It is arguable in this context, therefore, that Fullea's use of historical writing acts as a sort of camouflage for his present-day (1982) racial/writer's angst and criticism. By denouncing the injustices of the past, he is casting a gaze on the present and condemning it likewise—a defiant, transgressive act which manages to escape being politically offensive.

As earlier noted, the objective of this study is to investigate the extent to which the poetics of *mestizaje*/hybridity—as a process of negotiation, struggle, contest, and subversion—run throughout Gerardo Fullea León's play, *Plácido* (1982). I will argue that Fullea's purpose in this text is subversive, and that by revisiting a controversial incident of Cuba's colonial history, he attempts to reconstruct the notion of a Cuban national identity. Additionally, I aim to unravel his interrogation of the concept of *mestizaje* and cultural hybridity through the use of specifically chosen characters and their interactions, and how these characters mediate or negotiate between hybridity as ideology and as lived experience, i.e. how both their speech/beliefs and actions elucidate the racial and cultural complexities of the era.

*Plácido* is a fictional dramatic representation of the life and death of the famous Cuban poet Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés who goes by the pen name Plácido. Plácido only lived for 35 years; he was executed on June 28, 1844 in Matanzas, Cuba by colonial officials for alleged involvement in the conspiracy of a slave revolt known as *Conspiración de La Escalera*. He was a free mulatto who believed in the equal recognition of all races in Cuba, championing the cause for the involvement of Afro-Cubans in a predominantly Euro-Hispanic colonial Cuban nationhood. His way of death was quite ironic because of this very fact, and he died denying the accusation against him, terming it a *sello ignominioso* (ignominious seal) and a *mancha* (stain) in his poem “Plegaria a Dios” (“Supplication to God”) (Matibag).

Fullea revisits colonial Cuba in *Plácido* by constructing a racially stratified society (*sistema de casta*) with Plácido, a hybrid himself, at the centre of the plot. All the characters are carefully chosen in race and occupation to bring out issues of race, class, identity and nationhood in the play. There are *criollos/as*, *negros/as*, *pardos/as*, *morenos/as*, *esclavos/as*, *burgueses blancos* and *burgueses negros*, with the plot spanning the period of 1835-1845 in Matanzas and La Habana, Cuba. Plácido is precisely labelled an *ochavón*, bordering on white in skin tone but notably African in certain features, such as *bembón* (thick-lipped) and *cabellos encrespados* (curly hair). In the same way he appears split in racial and physical appearance, Plácido's character is moulded as controversial in his relations with the different ethnic people around him whom he must both identify with and separate himself from, that is, emerge as the other of his own self. Unequivocally, then, Fullea strikes up a discourse of hybridity imbued with a problematic unitary vision of the nation.

The poetic narrator of *Plácido*, Jesús, functions to transport Fullea's vision. We receive Fullea's purpose from the inception of the play through Jesús who announces the word *armonía* (harmony) and who adopts the word as a self-referential title for the rest of the play. Jesús/Armonía provides contextual information about Plácido, particularly that he was the product of a forbidden interracial relationship and consequently abandoned at birth. We are also predisposed to the unjust nature of his death and thus invoked to a sense that the work is a commemoration of his lifeworks and values. However, given the scepticism surrounding Plácido's character, the narrator halts to claim a non-didactic approach to the play, urging the audience to “mirar y luego opinar / y, con tacto, combinar / la lección que nos dé [Plácido] ahora” (42-43).

### *Characters Who Transgress Racial and Class Values*

From the first scene, Fullea demonstrates the skewed ideologies of *mestizaje* which govern the racial and class values of colonial Cuba by juxtaposing two creole characters to set an atmosphere of contestation. We witness the marked attitudinal difference towards race by two creole Cuban men, Don Braulio and Don Esteban, businessman and landowner respectively, who sit and drink at a house party. While Don Esteban talks about ongoing slave resistance and expresses a vengeful desire to murder the slaves, Don Braulio calmly disapproves: “Usted ya está pasado de rosca, amigo mío. No cabe duda” (187). Paulette Ramsay treats this moment of dialogue between the two men as a “typical discussion among landowners” (“On Page” 226), overlooking the irony that both men belong to the same social class yet defy the expectation that they should typify the same ideologies. This can be read as an effort on the part of Fullea to subvert pro-slavery ideology and expose the vulnerability of the power relations of that social class and its hegemonic rule, since their oppressive stranglehold might not have been as tenable as it seemed.

Similarly, in the said scene, the two men clash over the matter of forbidden sexual relations between the planter class and the slave class. The womaniser that he is, Don Braulio flirts and gropes at Mamá Inés, the maid, against her will. Don Esteban is stupefied and denounces the act as “ayuntamiento con las bestias” (188). This comment underlines the longstanding ideas of racism in Cuba—indeed, colonialism marked the beginning of racism in the New World. Furthermore, Ramsay highlights how the planters' sexual patronisation of slave women reflected the power imbalance of the era (“On Page” 227). However, for Don Esteban, Don Braulio's act threatens the power of the planter class: “Eso, eso es lo que nos impide mantener las distancias y las diferencias. Eso! ¿Cómo no se van a crear seres humanos, si les dispensamos el mismo deseo

que a personas de nuestra condición y raza?” (189). What is interesting here is how Fullea then uses Don Braulio to undermine this argument with sarcasm: “Muy bien dicho, don Esteban Santa Cruz de Oviedo, muy bien dicho. Demuestra usted ser un excelente cristiano y hacendado criollo, ilustrado por más decir...” (189). Surely, there is truth in Don Esteban’s assertion of the unsettling nature of hybridity given the socio-political context, and there is evidence in Don Braulio’s nonchalant nature that could characterise him as naïve to this truth, but the fact that Fullea allows Don Braulio to poke Don Esteban’s view with mockery by calling attention to his moral integrity effectively weakens his authority. Again, this is more powerfully achieved through irony, for in pointing out the “wrongdoing” of Don Braulio, Don Esteban turns the gaze on himself and Fullea effectively manages to invalidate his racist thinking.

It is also noteworthy that Don Braulio should comment, in the same moment of dialogue, that the flesh is uninhibited by racial differences: “... ila carne es un desastre! Ahí se vienen abajo todas las diferencias” (189). Don Esteban retorts that one has to control such desires regardless: “Pues ahí también hay que mantenerlas” (189), yet it is the same Don Esteban we see later in Scene IX having a secret romantic affair with his slave, Polonia. By portraying him as pretentious, Fullea manages to reveal how *mestizaje* as practice undermined discursive *mestizaje*, which prescribed stark levels of separation on the basis of race and class; the white “superior” planter class is exposed for its active involvement in the very thing that it claims to prohibit. Apart from the fact that it underscores the way in which racial mixing was more rigid in theory than in reality, it can also be seen as a way of remediating the black subject in light of a scorned colonial past and legitimising the concept of a mixed racial identity without vilifying the black component.

In continuing with the effective employment of juxtaposition of characters, Fullea uses Celia and Teté, two wealthy Creole women, to further show—but also undermine—the racial attitudes and class values of colonial Cuba. In said Scene I, Celia is seen to be more receptive to hybrid unions while Teté is totally disapproving of them. In their conversation about hybrid men at Minerva’s house party, Teté expresses her racial prejudice against men of colour: “... Yo aún soy virgen y creyente... y me aterran tanto esas cosas de pardos y morenos” (193). Although not outrightly denouncing Teté as prejudiced, Celia verbally jabs her as too “prudish”:

TETÉ: Yo no sé qué pueden verle las mujeres decentes a esos...

CELIA: Lo mismo que le verías tú, si no fueras tan mojigata. (193)

Again, by pitting one against the other, Fullea achieves the effect of subversion because of the marked discrepancy between their ideologies of *mestizaje*, despite belonging to

the same social class. Teté is made to be seen as particularly unlikeable because Celia, expected to express a similarly antagonistic view of the hybrid subject, does not conform to the social ethos. This is doubly effective because the contestation is not enacted by Other; it is Self that undermines Self and seeks to overthrow its own hierarchical establishment.

### *Female Tactics of “Negotiation” in the Hybrid Space*

Fullea uses certain women in *Plácido* to show a mestizaje in motion that regulated race and class construction in colonial Cuba. These women undertake transgressive acts to negotiate social mobility and ease tension and conflict in the volatile cultural space that they inhabit. By means of juxtaposition, we meet two free *parda* (of European, West African and Native American ancestry) women, Mercedes and Caridad, in Scene VII talking about their family life. But there is a notable disparity in their values. While Mercedes reflects romantically on her marriage, Caridad boasts about her daughter and the prospects that she shows for climbing the social ladder due to her marrying a *blanco* (white man):

CARIDAD: Fachada y nivel. Pues como bien dice mi marido. ¿Qué negocio no prospera en esta Isla, si al frente aparece un blanco y de buena cara?

MERCEDES: Todo parece muy bien. Pero... ¿no se les habrá olvidado algo?

CARIDAD: ¿Algo? Creo que no.

MERCEDES: Si tú lo dices...

CARIDAD: Y el amor... ¡Pues puede venir luego! Lo importante es lo otro.

MERCEDES: ¡No me digas! (252)

It is notable that Caridad envisions, through her daughter, a kind of desired whiteness which, in her eyes, is an achievement for its implications of racial purification and material wealth. While this corroborates with the way in which colonial Cuba enforced the concept of *blanqueamiento* (whitening) as a sign of social progress, Fullea makes her seem rather pitiful, for it is through the deft treatment of Mercedes in her own versioned stories and surprised outbursts that we receive Fullea’s implicit attitude of derision, which is potent for the overturning of a regressive colonial mentality that class should be dependent on race and colour.

Similarly, Fullea uses Polonia to underscore the way in which some slave women used their bodies sexually to manipulate the system of slavery. A black slave, Polonia envisions her escape from the harshness of her condition through sexual relations with her owner, which, she reasons while at the pub in Scene VIII with regular patrons, will consequently result in mixed-race babies and their own liberation from the slave condition. While it is factual that slave women were

coerced by their masters into performing sexual acts with them because of the gender power imbalance that existed then, Ramsay makes the important claim here that Polonia is complicit in her own subjugation (“On Page” 228). Her role is parallel in this regard to Mamy of Quince Duncan’s *La paz del pueblo* (1978), a slave woman of the Moody household who perceives her sexual involvement with the Moody men as a means of gaining power over them and, in addition, their white women (Ramsay, “From Object” 21). To this end, both women are victims and perpetrators of their gendered objectification. Fullea makes a notable effort to criticise this thinking when he uses Mamá Inés and Plácido to upstage Polonia’s character (271-273), foregrounding the point that the use of the female body as a site of resistance in this underhand way perpetuates white hegemony. That Mamá Inés and Plácido mock and jeer her to anger effectively transports Fullea’s subversive intent, and Polonia is made to seem rather pitiful. She has internalised white values so much that she is blind to the fact that she ends up hating and oppressing her own race. The use of the metaphor *culebra* (snake) appropriately conveys her cunningness, as we soon see her in Scene IX in romantic engagement with Don Esteban trading information with him about the planning of slave rebellions in a *santería*-like ritual performance. In this instance, it becomes clear that she is being used and is made to be seen as even more powerless in her status as black, woman, and slave.

Perhaps the most vivid and successful show of negotiation, this time in the political sense, is the patrons’ encounter at the bar in Scene VIII with the military officials. The bar itself serves as a site of resistance as we learn that it is a safe haven for runaway slaves, and it is for this reason that the military officials come searching for the slave Agustín Kongué, interrupting the revelry of the patrons. But it is the performance of rebellious acts, initiated by Plácido, that ensues that truly reflects the intricacy of the negotiation that hybrid spaces necessitate:

*Entran el Teniente y el Cabo.*

TENIENTE: Que nadie se mueva de su lugar.

¡Inspección militar! ¿Alguien aquí se llama Agustín Kongué, hijo de Amancio Kongué?

¡Vamos! ¿Quién es aquí Agustín Kongué? Que se muestre inmediatamente o luego le irá peor.

*Expectación general. Agustín va a pararse.*

PLÁCIDO: (*Adelantándose.*) Yo me llamo Agustín Kongué.

TENIENTE: ¿Usted?

CABO: No le haga caso, mi teniente, él es el poeta aquel que una vez...

TENIENTE: Sí, ya sé, lo recordamos muy bien. ¿Tiene ganas de bromear el mestizo? Ya veo.

PLÁCIDO: Dije que me llamo Agustín Kongué.

TENIENTE: ¡Ja, pero...!

CRESCENCIO: Yo soy Agustín Kongué.

CABO: ¿Cómo?

AMBROSIO: Yo me llamo Agustín Kongué.

CABO: Pero... ¿qué es esto?

TENIENTE: Se están buscando un encarcelamiento todos por burlar a la justicia. ¿Quién es realmente aquí Agustín Kongué? Si no acaban con la gracia, van a pagar justos por pecadores.

*Mamá Inés retiene a Agustín en su asiento.*

TODOS: Yo soy Agustín Kongué. (274-275)

Fullea’s use of parody here is very effective in the way it serves to confuse and undermine the presence of the colonial authorities. For Ramsay, it marks Fullea’s emphasis of “the urgency of individual agency” (“On Page” 235), and the act is indeed admirable.

However, despite the fact that Plácido is the instigator of this rebellious act, it is Mamá Inés’s role as woman which proves more outstanding. As the act intensifies, the Teniente and Cabo get more incensed and threaten to multiply their presence. Mamá Inés then asserts herself with wit and cunning to pacify the situation by singing a subversive lullaby (276-277). Her deployment of maternal instinct in the mother-baby allegorisation of herself and the colonial authorities respectively, effectively casts her as the power holder in this instance. She acts under the guise of a caring figure to assuage the tension at hand but what she is actually doing and does achieve is to beguile them into retreat. Fullea’s adeptness at language shows here: the rhyme pattern, the hard and soft sounds produced, and the repetition all serve to convey the credibility and conviction of Mamá Inés’s camouflaged verbal subversion.

### *The Adverse Politics of Interracial Relationships*

As earlier noted, the concept of *mestizaje* prescribed a rigid separation of social classes in Hispanic societies according to race, but individuals would defy this prescription and negotiate new social statuses. For a *mulato* like Plácido, it meant enjoying certain privileges of white society, like choosing white women as spouses, though still not immune to racial contempt. Ramsay notes in this context that “in the ethos of the period the male/female relationship was seen as a site where racial prejudices were played out—that is, people’s choice of spouses indicated their racial prejudices (“On Page” 227). Fullea makes an interesting case of this with Celia and Plácido. As a couple, the two are seen together in Scene II in a highly problematic love affair. In using Celia to typify the racist values of her Creole class, Fullea allows her to perpetuate a lot of black stereotypes, none of which Plácido embodies and which he therefore seizes the moment to invalidate. She comments how ugly Plácido looks in the daylight, calling attention to the curls of his hair. She later references Plácido’s race as cannibal in

nature when Plácido jokingly cautions her to not be so wild in her kissing him. But it is the song that she sings next that serves to expose her ignorance and consequently undermine her racial slurs:

CELIA: ¡Pero miren quién dice eso! ¡Los canibales son ustedes! ¡Ja! (*Canta.*)  
Tú y yo somos iguales:  
vamos juntos al jardín,  
tú cosechas los tomates  
yo los como en el festín.

JESÚS: La señora valora la compra de la mercancía. (206)

Fullea highlights here Celia's sub-conscious thought process which gives shape to the prejudice she verbalises. Her concept of equality is premised on the flawed notion of a subservient Other, the reaper, who ensures the well-being of Self, the superior consumer. The interjection of the narrator, Jesús, here serves to embolden the irony of this construct which Fullea seemingly suggests is the very antithesis of a positive hybrid construct.

The dramatist then activates once again the subversive latency of hybridity that lies in Plácido, allowing him to make one kind remark that manages to overturn Celia's ideology. In her unkind remark to Plácido that black people are equal to monkeys, Plácido simply expresses his unconditional love for her (207), which serves to place the villainous and ludicrous gaze on her and undermine her belief. Plácido's love is unconditional because it shows that perceivable racial differences do not inhibit how he feels for her, and in this way he is made to be seen as mentally liberated, which translates to Celia as mentally imprisoned. Of course, her mental imprisonment is buttressed on the social dictates of her time, as is reflected in her fear of being socially ridiculed if she does not opt to keep her relationship with Plácido clandestine (207-208). Here, the playwright conveys her as pathetic. She has embraced the precepts of racial hierarchy so much that she is blinded to the fact that love is supposed to be mutually beneficial instead of for selfish gain. That the reader and Plácido alike are able to discern her perverse definition of love—and she is not—effectively focuses the attention on Fullea's show of "colonial racial psychology."

The fact, then, that it is only in her imagination that true happiness with Plácido can be found makes for an interesting observation. In her fantasy world, she sees herself and Plácido in public spaces spending romantic moments together, but when the *cartucho* (balloon) that Plácido gives her as a promise of his return breaks, she returns to a miserable reality and immediately calls Plácido a "negro de mierda" (213). The bursting of the *cartucho* heightens the effect with which the binary of reality and fantasy is received, and it becomes clear that Fullea wants to call attention to the oppressive stranglehold of societal disapproval of interracial relationships of

colonial Cuba. Through Plácido, however, he demonstrates the practical possibility of surviving the oppression since, in both real and imagined worlds, Plácido is at peace with himself and his union with Celia; he chooses to look beyond differences, he chooses to look beyond Self and Other. Hence, when he decides to leave Celia's house and Celia asks if he still loves her, the rhetorical question with which Plácido replies is so pointed and poignant:

CELIA: No, aún es temprano. Plácido... ¿aún me quieres?  
PLÁCIDO: Sí... Pero... ¿es posible querernos? (*Sale.*) (213)

It is safe to say, however, that acceptance of Self and Other is much easier for someone like Plácido because he is the very embodiment of both and thus is more strategically poised to challenge the status quo.

One way of contesting colonial power is to re-version the (hi)stories of blacks against "official" Eurocentric ones. Here, Fullea uses Plácido to right the wrong of discursive *mestizaje*, to wrest it from arbitrary colonial control. When Celia tells Plácido one of her childhood memories of a slave boy who was beaten along with a maid for stealing, Plácido quickly seizes the opportunity to tell the story of an interracial love affair that, upon its discovery by colonial authorities, resulted in the severe and inhumane physical abuse of the African male partner (209-210). Celia's worldview represents the way in which much of the histories of Afro-Hispanics have been told from biased Eurocentric perspectives, and thus Plácido's act of contestation or re-versioning serves to obliterate that biased discourse. Plácido's story underscores the severe attitudes of Spanish settlers towards racial mixing in the colonial era, but the punishment meted out for "violations" of racial relations are never told or documented as brutality—that is, from an African perspective—but as just. In setting up this juxtaposition, then, Fullea effectively refracts the demonic gaze onto the coloniser.

Another interesting treatment of the complexity of interracial relationships in colonial Cuba is carried out with Plácido and his creole mother, Concepción Vazquez. Their relationship is a clandestine one, like his love affair with Celia, because Plácido is the product of her youthful "forbidden act." Though Plácido is quite disposed to disliking his mother given the circumstance of his frowned-upon mixed race and also his abandonment at birth, we see him shower her with love on his annual visit in Scene IV:

PLÁCIDO: (Entrando con una rosa en la mano.) Buenos días, señora.  
CONCEPCIÓN: Buenos días, siempre cumplidor.  
PLÁCIDO: Una flor para otra flor.  
CONCEPCIÓN: Y siempre tan galante, gracias.  
PLÁCIDO: Para mí es una dicha este día. Es la oportunidad de demostrarle mi respeto y sentimientos hacia usted. (222-223)

Here, Fullea notably corroborates with the history of the real-life Plácido who, according to Inés María Martiatu Terry, was always endearing of his mother (179). However, ironically, it is Concepción in the play who harbours ill feelings towards Plácido. When Rosales comes, interrupts their conversation, then leaves, it is a trigger of embitterment for her and she begins to blame Plácido for the life of public scrutiny that she has had to live as a result of giving birth to him (231). Clearly, this scorned treatment is unfair to Plácido, and it does say more about her character than that of Plácido. Like Gelia, she too has absorbed the colonial values of race relations and fails to recognise that her embitterment lies in her attitude to the situation and not in the situation itself. It is her inability to prevent social norms and dictates from infiltrating on and staining her motherly love that perpetuates her misery and remorse. Meanwhile, Plácido has absolutely no qualms about his mixed race, and it is this attitudinal indifference that defines him as calm and easy-going, hence the appropriateness of his very name. Fullea thus suggests Plácido as an exemplar, as noted in Plácido's kind advice to Concepción that she forgets about the past instead of lamenting about it:

PLÁCIDO: No se atormente usted.

CONCEPCIÓN: Son los demás los que me han atormentado siempre.

PLÁCIDO: ¡Olvídelos, viva! (225-226)

It would seem that Fullea's intent is not to vilify Concepción's character but merely to show how untended negotiation within the "third space" in which she exists can effect a particular kind of haunting fate; for Concepción can be seen as redeemable and a victim of her circumstance. When Rosales comes by, she is forced to pretend Plácido is her hairdresser and not her son. Ramsay identifies Concepción as "pathetic" in this instance ("On Page" 233); however, she is to be seen as admirable in the way she takes offence, releases her inhibitions, and tries to verbally undermine Rosales's presence after he insults and discriminates against Plácido:

ROSALES: ¿Cómo recibes a ése aquí? No están las cosas para tener de visita a gente de su ralea. Ya basta con soportar a esa Belén.

CONCEPCIÓN: Él es una persona decente y...

ROSALES: El mestizo más decente es ladrón.

CONCEPCIÓN: Y el blanco un hijo de puta.

ROSALES: ¿Cómo?

CONCEPCIÓN: Nada. ¡Bromas! ¿Quieres esperarme en la saleta, eh? Enseguida estoy contigo. (229)

Even though she ends up relenting, it is the effort that she makes to contest colonial values that makes the reader a little more empathetic to her struggle.

### *Plácido and the Hybrid Gaze*

It is interesting to note the different attitudes towards Plácido when he makes his first appearance at Minerva's party. As a hybrid subject, he manages to awe, intrigue and unsettle the patrons all at the same time. For Teté, he is a disappointment because of his social class and physical hybrid appearance: "Pero no. Si es un pobretón liberto y pardo" (199). For Don Esteban, he is an unwelcome threat because of his known political values: "¿Pero cómo han traído aquí a ese... ¡a ese antiesclavista! (200). For Minerva, he is a charm because of his poetic skills: "¡Ah, beso la cruz! Qué delicia poder oírlo. ¡Quién lo diría!" (202). For Mamá Inés, he is an anomaly for the contrast between his Afro-Cuban aesthetics and his erudite command of the Spanish language: "Pero... ¿de dónde sacó tal lindura ese mulato?" (204). This multi-layered gaze on Plácido precisely underscores Bhabha's delineation of the hybrid subject as both "contradictory and ambivalent" (Bhabha 208). In this case, it is not Plácido who must reconcile with his complexity, but those around him.

Apart from his physical appearance, it is Plácido's use of language which is most reflective of his unsettling double image. Fullea aptly employs sarcasm and wit to bring out this effect. At Minerva's party, Plácido manages to undermine Don Braulio and Don Esteban in a conversation about his occupation as poet:

DON BRAULIO: ¿Pero no traje guitarra?

PLÁCIDO: Vengo con mi talento.

DON BRAULIO: ¿Qué nuevo instrumento es ése?

PLÁCIDO: Uno que quizás usted nunca haya tocado...

DON BRAULIO: ¿Cómo?

PLÁCIDO: ...porque su cuerda es más opulenta y terrena.

DON ESTEBAN: ¡Ja! Tiene talento el poeta.

PLÁCIDO: Pero no mayor ingenio que usted.

DON ESTEBAN: ¡Seguro!

PLÁCIDO: Pero recuerde que el suyo marcha gracias al sudor de nosotros.

DON BRAULIO: Es simpatiquísimo. (201)

Here, Plácido is seen as very openly subversive. This is buttressed by the historical information of the real-life Plácido, who is said to have sported deliberate transgressive attitudes, especially in the way he dressed (Martiatu Terry 180). That Don Braulio interprets his transgression as *simpatiquísimo* (very nice) carries a double meaning; maybe it is an attempt at ridicule through sarcasm, or maybe Plácido's meaning escapes him. In either case, it serves to reinforce the subversive power that Plácido carries.

Similarly, in his notable pursuit of racial equality, Plácido seizes another opportunity to deride hegemonic racist discourse at Minerva's party when Teté asks if he knows English. Plácido responds: "Sólo algo de francés: *Liberté, égalité, fraternité...*". Y, todo lo que está lejos de aquí,

por suerte, *madame...*" (202). The subsequent argument and confusion that ensues around Plácido's intentions upon saying this underpins the unsettling nature of Plácido's character. Through his later satirical speech, he is characterised as a man to be feared:

PLÁCIDO: La tierra es como los hombres.  
Y por eso se los traga.  
Para devorar, mantiene.  
Para destruir, halaga. (205)

Fullea's use of simile here to parallel the destructive unpredictability of the land (Plácido) to the ignorance and vulnerability of man (the Creole class) is quite effective in transporting the idea that Plácido operates under ruse and pretense because of the very fact that his free coloured status blurs the line of racial allegiance.

### A White Cuba

Nineteenth-century Cuba was a very racist society in which the call for a "white Cuba" rose to particular prominence at the realisation that blacks were fast outnumbering whites because of the expansion of slave labour and because of the evidences of *mestizaje* in the society. It did not matter that the island had the highest number of whites in all the West Indian plantation colonies, for whites alone could not meet the demand for plantation labour (Knight 181). The subsequent recourse to fervently attract white emigration to the colony would effectively fulfil the ideal of social and moral progress, as it was believed that blacks only tainted the sovereignty of the colony. Haiti, having successfully toppled the system of slavery to establish its independence and become the first black republic of the New World in 1804, was a constant reminder of the possibility of what could happen should the Spanish colonists not assert themselves. To this end, leading intellectual of the era José Antonio Saco propagandised in his writings, "To whiten, to whiten, to whiten and soon to demand respect" (Morales Domínguez 52).

Fullea revisits the era's social ethos in *Plácido* to undermine its exclusionary premise and racist view of a national Cuban identity—in effect, its *mestizaje* ideology. In Scene V, we see three young Creole intellectuals—Alfredo, Orestes, and Claudio—sit by a river making racial commentary on colonial Cuba. Typifying the views of his social class, Alfredo strongly asserts that the solution to Cuba's racial problem is a whitening of the nation. It is then that Plácido enters the scene and interrupts this line of reasoning with his hybrid presence and sarcastic use of language:

PLÁCIDO: (*Entrando.*) ¡Eh, qué grupito tan selecto y armonioso! Desde la otra orilla se oyen sus gritos.  
¿Qué, arreglan al mundo? (234-235)

Though not a radical denouncement, the effect of sarcasm here properly emphasises Plácido's opposition. It not only infers the moral disdain that characterises such ethnocentricity but also suggests a vision for Afro-Cubans to be included and accepted equally in the recognition of a Cuban national identity. The inherent divisiveness of a polarised white Cuban national identity is effectively evoked by the fact that Plácido hears their opinions "from the other side" of the river, and Fullea purposely disrupts this anti-progressive thinking and replaces it with a more positive discourse of *mestizaje*.

Another treatment of anti-Black sentiment within the context of national identity is made with Plácido and Arcino, the latter typifying the colonial mimic-man. By means of juxtaposition, the two ensue in an argument in Scene VII over foreign and local culture—that is, European and Cuban. While Plácido makes a case for the inclusion of Afro-Cuban aesthetics in national Cuban culture and identity, Arcino, of African descent himself, takes serious offence and deems Plácido's view as regressive and an indignation (260). That he refuses to accept African-derived culture as part of Cuba's cultural fabric underscores his internalisation of colonial white values, which puts him at odds with his own self and exposes him as mentally colonised, much like the previously elaborated case of Polonia. This points to the way in which some Black Cubans of the era denied their blackness for acceptance by the white superior class. That Fullea uses Plácido, however, to lyrically jab Arcino highlights Arcino as pitiable. The metaphoric imagery of the glass ceiling (*vidrio del tejado*) and stones (*piedras*) effectively captures the irony of his belief and nullifies his reasoning.

### Plácido's Death: The Struggle for Nationhood

The event of Plácido's execution and, by extension *La Escalera*, was a most perverse show of white hegemony—a testament to the toxicity of the colonial hybrid space. On hearing rumour of an impending slave revolt in 1844, Spanish general Leopoldo O'Donnell sanctioned the torture and hanging of hundreds of slaves and mulattoes and sought to eliminate the free coloureds by exiling more than 700 of them, removing them from positions of authority and confiscating all their possessions. Despite the ambiguity in which it is enveloped, the incident has been denounced a "travesty of justice," for, according to one captain-general of the era, José de la Concha:

The findings of the military commission produced the execution, confiscation of property, and expulsion from the island of a great many persons of color, but it did not find arms, munitions, documents, or any other incriminating object which proved that there was such a conspiracy, much less on such a vast scale. (qtd. in Knight 95)

The incident was therefore one motivated by fear to inflict fear. Franklin Knight notes that the period of 1820 and 1844 had witnessed a number of small slave uprisings in Cuba because of the boom in plantation slavery (96). Locked in the middle of the growing tension between planter and slave were the free coloureds who, according to Knight, had had a considerably good relationship with the planter class prior to the recent events (95–96). The free coloureds were known to be involved in the rebellions. But, according to Cuban historian Eduardo Torres Cuevas, their involvement was not as driven by race and class issues as it was by a desire for national independence since they envisioned an autonomous state that paid equal respect to each citizen's ideas regardless of race (qtd. in Martiatu Terry 182). This vision of nationhood was a serious threat, for it implicated the dispossession of the power of Spain and the hegemonic creole class. To this end, the free coloureds were doubly opposed and demonised, their only allies being the non-white oppressed groups.

In the play, therefore, Plácido's struggle to clear himself of the alleged conspiracy is a futile one. It does not matter if he is guilty or not; the very fact that he is a free coloured who wants equality for all is sufficient reason for the hegemonic powers to eliminate his transgressive presence. We learn of his accusation in Scene X immediately after Scene IX, in which Polonia informs Don Esteban of a slave conspiracy, and can thus deduce that Don Esteban is the one who submits the accusation to the military powers, Teniente and Cabo. It is noteworthy that Don Esteban has never liked Plácido, as we witness from the very first scene his rash attitude towards him at Minerva's party: "Pero cómo han traído aquí a ese... ¡a ese antiesclavista!" (200), and this would suggest his willingness to connive against Plácido. The Cabo implicates Plácido as guilty by association: "No cabe duda, sus continuos viajes al interior tenían un carácter conspirativo" (285), showing a bias in his sweeping generalisation which is convenient for the faulty conclusion that all subversives must be dealt severe punishment. The Teniente announces that this punishment is to maintain white hegemony:

Para acallar de una vez por todas las ínfulas de los criollos enemigos de la trata; para dominar la violencia de los esclavos que buscan destruir con terror y la fuga nuestro cristiano y buen orden; para detener el ascenso de pardos y morenos libres que tratan de igualarnos y ambicionan superarnos social y económicamente" e impone la necesidad de un fuerte escarmiento. (287)

This indicates that justice was blighted by a longstanding power struggle, and by fear and racial prejudice.

Still, Plácido's defiance in the face of death obfuscates the bid to label him as martyr. While his execution potentially serves to cement such status, it is the fact that he dies proclaiming his non-involvement in the conspiracy that leads one to be biased towards seeing him as innocent. If he

is innocent, then he is not killed for something he actually did, and martyrs and heroes are hailed for the evidences of things they did, which are later absolved by history. Is there, then, a true premise on which history can seek to absolve Plácido? Ramsay argues that what Fullea (and Sergio Giral, the filmmaker of the filmic version of *Plácido*) try to do is look beyond the uncertainty of his involvement in the conspiracy to highlight the larger significance of his transgressive presence in the era—the fact that there was some effort to help those marginally oppressed by Spain ("On Page" 232). In this respect, Plácido may be recognised not as a martyr of the conspiracy itself but surely a martyr of the struggle for Cuban nationhood.

### Conclusion

The discourse of *mestizaje* exists both in practical and theoretical forms—in Peter Wade's own terms, as "ideology and lived experience." To marry this Hispanic discourse with its Anglophone equivalent, hybridity (as we come to understand it principally through Bhabha's lenses), is to activate a certain subversive potency that it cannot wield on its own due to the white colonial machinations that undergird it. Fullea constructs in this brilliant historical piece, *Plácido*, an exemplary site for observation of racial, cultural, sexual, class, gender and nationhood politics in nineteenth-century Cuba. Fullea allows for a contradictory, chaotic, complex and subversive view. Several characters clash with each other, even if they belong to the same race, class or gender; they spout varying ideologies that are inconsistent with their doings; they "negotiate" their subjectivities with each other through language and bodies, acting purely from self-interest. Plácido, the main character, is not the only but the most self-aware individual in the text, as he serves mainly as Fullea's counter-voice for correcting official discourses of *mestizaje*. In this way, the play stands out as a highly subversive historical piece which is relevant for all racial discussions about Cuba, even today.



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Book Review

*Hiding in Plain Sight: Black Women, the Law, and the Making of a White Argentine Republic*  
by Erika Denise Edwards

Brandon Blakeslee • University of Texas at Arlington

Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2020. 184 pages. \$54.95, Hardback. ISBN: 978-0-8173-2036-2.

In *Hiding in Plain Sight: Black Women, the Law, and the Making of a White Argentine Republic*, Erika Denise Edwards answers the question of the disappearance of black Argentinians. Argentinian exceptionalism celebrates that unlike most other Latin American countries, the nation has a heterogeneous European population. When asked what happened to the black population, the standard response is that they “disappeared.” Erika Denise Edwards argues that it is not that black Argentinians passively disappeared but rather they actively sought to and eventually did attain whiteness. She further argues that African descendants “ascended” to whiteness by forming partnerships with civic and ecclesiastical authorities. Church leaders and Civil administrators sought to “whiten” Argentina through education and familial bonds.

Edwards focuses her study on women of African descent living in the provincial capital of Córdoba, in the heart of Argentina. In Spanish tradition, women were the guardians of the home and the family and in return her family would provide for her. There were three major ways a woman could attain whiteness for her family. First, a woman could marry someone whiter than herself. During the Colonial period, if a woman married a Spaniard, she achieved the status of *doña* regardless of her previous position and enjoyed the trappings of being Spanish. Second, while the system of *castas* relegated Indians to a lower class, their freedom was protected under Spanish law. If a woman of African descent could establish Indian ancestry, it would confer freedom to her and her children. Third and finally, the early leaders of the Argentinian Republic emphasized the role of motherhood in “institutionalized grooming.” People needed to learn what it meant to be a citizen of the Republic and if you taught a woman the appropriate behavior, then she would

teach it to her family, or so the argument goes. As such, women were afforded access to education more readily than men were, which led to a further whitening for her family or her future family.

Edwards divides *Hiding in Plain Sight* into six chapters that fall roughly into two sections. Chapters one and two chronicle the development of the system of *castas* in Colonial Argentina and their adaptation in early years of the Republic. Together, the first two chapters establish the institutional and familial worlds designed to maintain a social hierarchy. The remaining four chapters serve as case studies demonstrating the various ways that Afro-Argentines navigated the world of the *castas* and how they used those systems to secure their benefit.

In chapter one (“Miscegenation, Marriage, and Manumission in Córdoba”) and chapter two (“Regulating and Administering Freedom in Córdoba”), Edwards follows the changes of the use of the term “black” and “white” from one that is focused primarily on skin color to its contemporary usage. Chapter one covers the early and middle colonial period highlighting the development of the system of *castas*. Spanish law reserved education, trade, and political office for “Spaniards” and tried to make sure that people married within their own status. Despite the ban, miscegenation was the norm rather than the exception in Córdoba. The church also provided Afro-Argentines a certain level of social mobility by intervening to ensure slave families stayed together. Families were then able to accumulate wealth and purchase freedom for certain members who then moved up in the caste system. As a result of two hundred years of miscegenation, the line between the *castas* became blurry.

Chapter two “Regulating and Administering Freedom in Córdoba,” discusses what Edwards refers to as “social grooming.” Two hundred years of miscegenation introduce more variety than the system of *castas* could handle and a large free black population. The “Edict of Good Governance”

passed in 1785 attempted to incorporate the free population into society as subjects and then as citizens of the Republic. Through education and sumptuary laws, African descendants were encouraged to emulate “white” behaviors and customs while condemning “black” behaviors and customs associated with slavery.

In chapter three, “Her Best Performance: From Slave to Señora” and chapter four, “A Women of her Class: Contested Marriages,” Edwards discusses how women of color used legal and illegal means to gain status and privilege. A lawsuit brought up against a priest, José Lino de León, and an enslaved woman, Bernabela serves as a case study for how a woman could use an illicit relationship to gain status. The reason the couple were brought to court was not because the two were having an affair but because José Lino was treating Bernabela like a *señora*. The two were cohabitating and she wore clothing that was generally reserved for nobility. Being a priest, José Lino could not marry Bernabela but Edwards uses this case study to demonstrate how illicit relationships could confer markers of status for women of African descent.

As the decades progressed, the Spanish court tried to make interracial marriage more difficult by granting parents final say in their children’s marriage. In chapter four, Edwards examines how women used the courts to remove the stain of “mala sangre” or having an enslaved ancestor. The most successful tactic was to demonstrate Indian ancestry which would confer freed status on them. If a woman was successful in defending her identity as a free person, the court could overrule the parent’s refusal and the couple could be married.

In Chapter five and six, Edwards focuses on motherhood and the whitening process. Chapter five (“(En)gendering Freedom”) discusses freedom suits in matters of inheritance. The most successful women appealed for their freedom based on years of faithful service and not necessarily for themselves, but that their children might be freed. In chapter six, “Lessons of Motherhood”, Edwards studies the process of “institutionalized social grooming” in the early years of the Republic. Thinking that slavery was out of step with republican values, early Argentinian leaders set up segregated schools for girls of African descent. The point of these schools was to encourage civic (code for white) behavior that the girls would then pass along to their families when they became mothers. The integration project apparently successful because in 1858 the segregated schools were replaced by schools that served commuter students (which tended to come from poorer neighborhoods) regardless of skin color.

*Hiding in Plain Sight* contributes much to the historiography of Argentina as well as Latin America. Edwards challenges the notion that Afro-Argentines simply and passively disappeared in history. She argues that people of African descent sought to and succeeded in attaining the privileges conveyed by whiteness and became agents in their own erasure. There will be a few readers who critique or lament

what can be construed as traitorous behavior of women of African descent. Edwards pre-emptively counters such criticisms in her conclusion by reminding us that “people have to make choices from the options they are given,” and we should not disparage people seeking to improve their own position as well as the position of their family.

Edwards also augments the historiography of Latin America picking up where Ann Twinam left off in *Purchasing Whiteness* (2015). Like Edwards, Twinam looks at whitening but at an administrative level and in the Caribbean. Twinam looks at subjects who petitioned, and purchased, a white label to gain a position reserved for Spaniards. Since Erika Denise Edwards focuses on a single provincial capital, Córdoba, she is free to explore how whitening affected the everyday life for the women she studied, something that is absent in *Purchasing Whiteness*. Women who were successful could wear clothing reserved for a *señora*, perform the duties of a *señora*, and most significantly (for them) ensured a better life for their children.

*Hiding in Plain Sight* is suitable for a Latin American history class. The book not only discusses what the Spanish system of *castas* was but also how it was created as well as the cracks in the system. However, it is often hard to tell if the case studies presented are exceptional or normal. In the affair between the priest José Lino and his slave Bernabela, the latter was considered attractive by European standards which was one of the reasons the priest pursued her so vigorously. When available, Edwards makes good use of census records to paint a broad picture of options available to women of African descent, but the case studies seem exceptional rather than normative. The fact of the matter is that Argentinian women of African descent did attain whiteness by one way or another and disappeared themselves from the historical narrative.

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## Contributors

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**Brandon Blakeslee** received his BA from Calvin University where he doubled majored in History and Spanish. He also has a MA in Transatlantic History from the University of Texas at Arlington and is currently a PhD candidate at the same University. He has an interest in Latin America and the state creation efforts that gripped the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. His dissertation is tentatively titled “Football! Turning Colombian boys into Patriotic men: How Sport and Education Developed early Twentieth-Century Colombian Nationalism.”

**Yvonne Captain** is a lifelong student of the works of Manuel Zapata Olivella. In addition to her 1993 study, *The Culture of Fiction in the Works of Manuel Zapata Olivella*, she continues her analysis of his works and importance through numerous publications and talks. She is also a specialist in Afro-Latin America as well as south-south relationships between the whole of Latin America and Africa.”

**Darrelstan Fitzwarren Ferguson** will be a second-year graduate student of Spanish at the University of Pittsburgh this August (2019). Darrelstan graduated from The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus in 2018 with an M.Phil. in Spanish. His aim is to become a professor of Spanish language and literatures.

**Tyra Lewis** (Managing Editor) began her educational journey at Boston College where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English literature and a minor in Black Studies. Looking to further her education, she began taking Spanish literature classes when she became fascinated with Afro-Hispanic literature. Wanting to learn more, her passion grew and led her to the University of Missouri – Columbia. While working towards her Master of Arts in Spanish and Spanish American literature, Tyra became actively involved with the Afro-Latin/American Research Association. After graduation,

Tyra moved back to her home state of Connecticut. Heading the call for a new adventure, she then made the decision to move to Texas. There, she sought out other interests which included teaching introductory college level Spanish grammar and working with a local migrant worker program. Although she enjoyed her time in Texas, Tyra moved back to Connecticut where she pursued a Master of Arts in International Studies with a focus in Latin America at the University of Connecticut. During this time, she helped to create and establish Afro-Latino week, a celebration of Afro-Latino culture which included inviting leaders in the field to present, connecting with various agencies on and off campus and marketing the event. Tyra Lewis is currently serving as the Assistant Director for Academic Advising at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. She is also teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages and working on various projects related to her research.

**William Mina Aragón**, filósofo de la Universidad del Valle, Doctor en Sociología y ciencia política de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, profesor titular de la Universidad del Cauca, Facultad de Derecho, Ciencias Políticas y Sociales. Ha entrevistado a personalidades como Fernando Savater, Edgar Morín, Alain Touraine y Cornelius Castoriadis. Ha escrito en revistas como la *Afro American Review* y *Palara*; además cuenta con una extensa lista de publicaciones con respecto al tema afrodiaspórico, con libros como: “Historia, política y sociedad” (1997); “Poesía y filosofía política” (1999); “El pensamiento Afro - Más allá de Oriente y Occidente” (2003), “Afrocolombianidad: ensayo sobre arte, cultura y política” (2008), “Derechos humanos afrocaucanos” (2009), “Las gestas del afro por la libertad” (2010), “Manuel Zapata Olivella: un humanista afrodiaspórico” (2014), “La imaginación creadora afrodiaspórica” (2014), “Un legado intercultural” (coautor y editor, 2016), “Novela, sociedad y cultura” (2017) y “El escritor y la política” (2019).

**George Palacios** is an Associate Professor of Spanish at Clemson University. His broad research and teaching interests encompass the literatures, cultures, philosophy and political thought related to the African diaspora in the Americas. He is particularly interested in the relations between Afro-Hispanic (i.e., Colombia, Central America, and the Caribbean islands), Afro-Brazilian and African-American literatures and cultures (i.e., the Harlem Renaissance). He is the author of *Manuel Zapata Olivella (1920-2004): pensador político, radical y hereje de la diáspora africana en las Americas* (Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana).

**Paulette Ramsay**'s research into the little known, but significant literature and culture of Afro-Hispanic societies in general, and Afro-Mexico in particular, has made an

important contribution to the overall debunking of myths about race and class in Latin America, to bring the Afro-Latin American experience to the fore and to expand the debate about issues of migration, ethnicity, identity, nation, belonging, agency and self-definition in Latin America and the hispanophone Caribbean. As an award-winning writer of fiction, Professor Ramsay's novel *Aunt Jen* can be found on international literature syllabuses, having been translated to German and Italian. She currently teaches Spanish Literature in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at the University of the West Indies, Mona.

**Antonio D. Tillis**, Ph.D. is Interim President of the University of Houston-Downtown. Dr. Tillis is an internationally acclaimed scholar and author with specializations in Latin American, Afro-Latin American and African Diaspora literature. He is the author, editor, and co-editor of the following: *The Afro-Hispanic Reader and Anthology* (with Paulette Ramsay, Ian Randal, 2018), *The Trayvon Martin in 'US': An American Tragedy* (with Emmanuel Harris, Peter Lang, 2015), *Critical Perspectives on Afro-Latin American Literature* (Routledge, 2012, paperback 2013), *Manuel Zapata Olivella e o escurecimento da literatura latino-americana* (State University of Rio de Janeiro Press, 2013), *(Re)Considering Blackness in Contemporary Afro-Brazilian (Con)Texts: A Cultural Studies Reader* (Peter Lang, 2011); *Caribbean-African Upon Awakening: Poetry by Blas Jiménez* (Mango Publishing 2010); and *Manuel Zapata Olivella and the "Darkening" of Latin American Literature* (Missouri 2005). Dr. Tillis' work has been

featured in top journals, including *Callaloo*, *Hispanic Journal*, *Mosaic*, *CLA Journal*, and *Transit Circle*.

**Manuel Zapata Olivella** (1920-2004) nació en Lórica, Colombia en 1920. Es autor de cerca de ocho novelas, entre ellas *Corral de negros* (1963), *En Chimá nace un santo* (1963), y *Changó, el gran putas* (1983). Escribió así mismo obras de teatro, colecciones de ensayos y libros de viajes, la mayoría los cuales estaban relacionados con sus estudios etnológicos sobre el folclore africano. Zapata Olivella recibió el Premio Casa de las Américas, el Primer Premio Nacional de Teatro de *Espiral*, junto con el Primer y Segundo Premio Nacional de Novela de la Academia Colombiana de la Lengua. A la par de su carrera literaria, trabajó también como médico y psiquiatra. Enseñó y dictó conferencias en varias universidades, entre ellas Howard University, Kansas University, y la Universidad de Toronto. También fundó la revista literaria *Letras Nacionales*. Zapata Olivella murió en Bogotá, Colombia en 2004. <https://www.loc.gov/item/n86845576/manuel-zapata-olivella-colombia-1920-2004/>

**Miguel A. Valerio** is an Assistant Professor of Spanish at Washington University in St. Louis. His research has appeared in *Afro-Hispanic Review*, *Confraternitas*, *Slavery and Abolition* and is forthcoming in *Colonial Latin American Review* and the *Journal of Festive Studies*.

**Elizabeth Vargas Holguin** is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge. Her dissertation explores the writings by Afro-Pacific authors Alfredo Vanín, Gregorio Martínez and Antonio Preciado.

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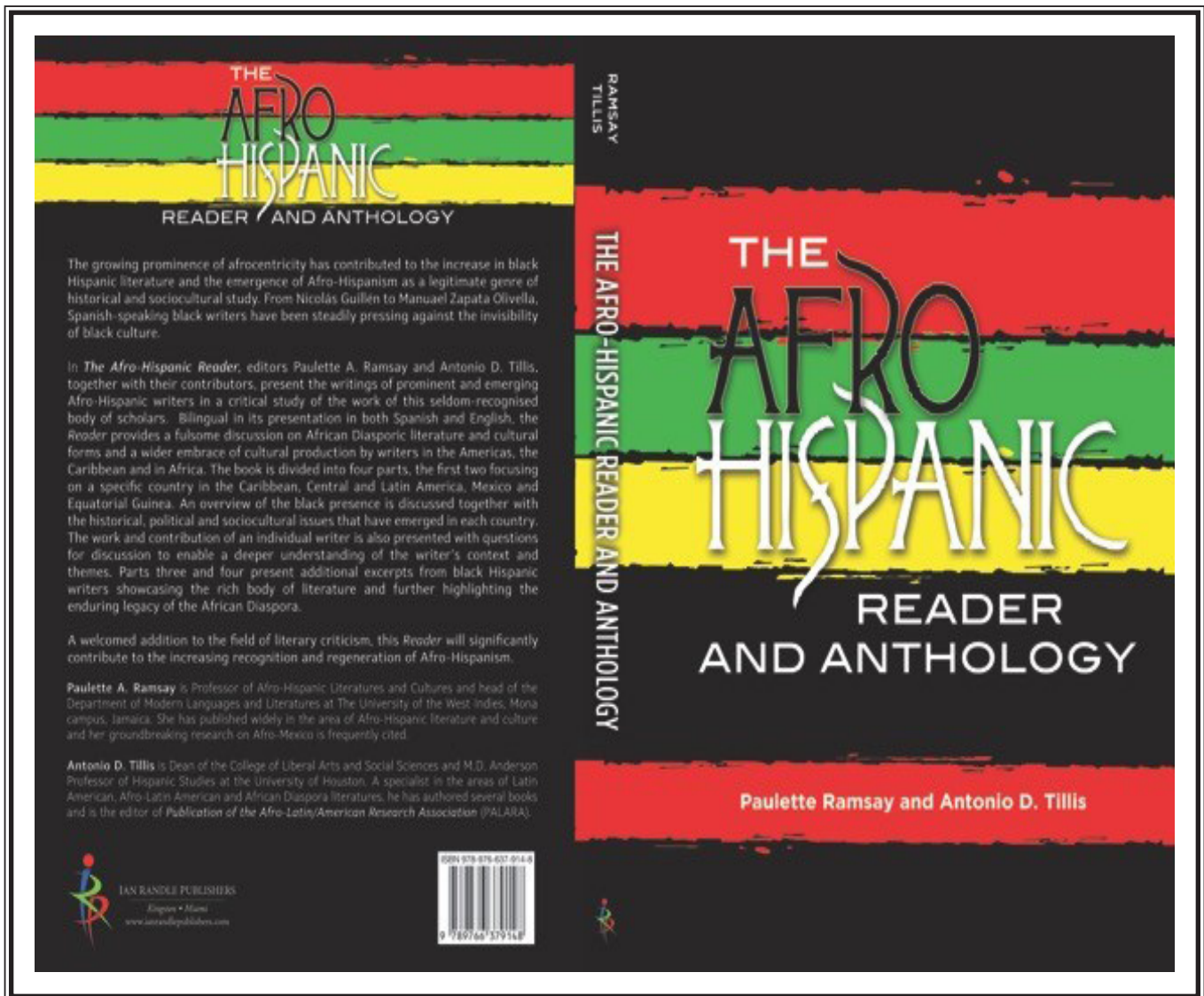
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ISSN 2639-1295