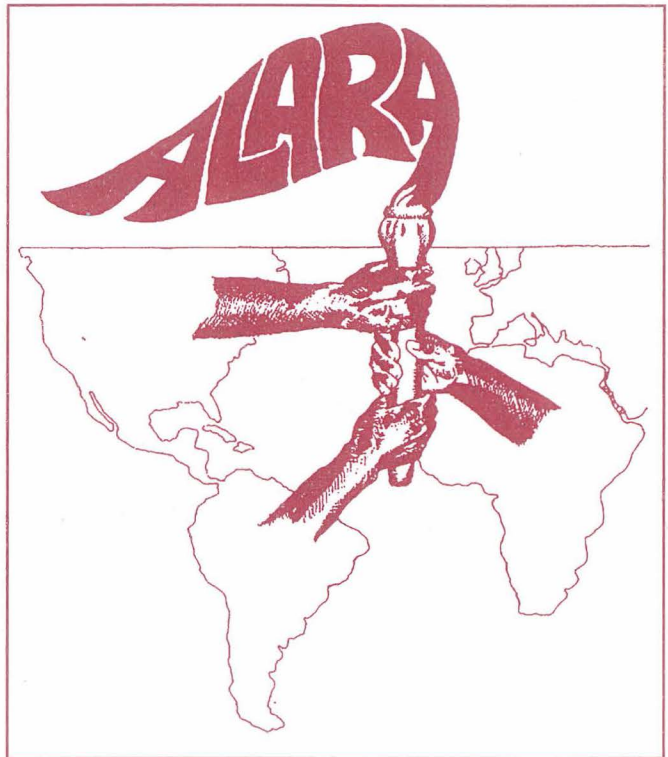


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Con bote o *Cumboto* de Ramón Díaz Sánchez: cimarronaje, supervivencia y simbiosis socio-cultural

“Cumboto” es a la vez el título de la novela de Ramón Díaz Sánchez publicada en 1950 y también el nombre de la aldea venezolana Cumboto. En la novela, desarrollada en gran parte en la hacienda y pueblo del mismo nombre, se explica que Cumboto es la deformación de “con bote”, y que los autores de tal deformación fueron unos negros cimarrones venidos de las Antillas en busca de libertad. Llegados a las costas, los colonos españoles les preguntaban cómo habían llegado y ellos contestaban cum boto, cum boto, para decir con bote que significa barca. El subtítulo *Cuento de siete leguas* puede deberse a que la hacienda Cumboto donde se desarrolla la acción de la novela medía siete leguas.

Es una novela que narra la historia de dichos cimarrones llegados mediante balsas frágiles hechas de troncos por ellos mismos y que les sirvieron antaño de medio de transporte y de supervivencia. Una heroica destreza que, como bien afirma el narrador, “creaba una nueva forma para la historia del mundo” (Díaz Sánchez 10).

El propósito de este trabajo es analizar los elementos que confluyen en el proceso de adaptación e integración de estos “migrantes forzosos” en la sociedad venezolana. Además, dada la importancia de la música en la novela y su contribución en tal proceso de transformación, este trabajo se propone estudiar la función del piano y su simbolismo en dicho cruce cultural. Lo cual nos permitirá refrendar la estrecha relación que hay entre la música y el mestizaje que está erigido en la novela en emblema de integración socio cultural y de solución al problema racial.

Cimarronaje y supervivencia

Cumboto en sí es un signo de resistencia y superación de unos esclavizados negros que deciden trasladarse a las costas venezolanas para poner fin a las atrocidades de la esclavitud.

Como pionero de los estudios afros en Venezuela, Juan Pablo Sojo sostiene en *Temas y apuntes afrovenezolanos* (1986) que existe una diferencia entre el afro venezolano y el del resto de América debido a los accidentes históricos que afectaron a su llegada e integración en la sociedad venezolana. Es decir, si la gran mayoría de los negros vinieron directamente de África durante la esclavitud, los negros venezolanos en cambio llegaron después de haber pasado por Cuba, Jamaica y Haití. No obstante, este paso por las Antillas no supuso para ellos la pérdida de sus costumbres y creencias, lo cual seguramente molestó a los sacerdotes católicos quienes, según el mismo Sojo: “pusieron particular interés en transformar el alma del negro. Tal vez mucho más empeño que el que pusieron en catequizar a los indios. Les enseñaron las prácticas de la religión católica, les obligaron a aprender el catecismo, las oraciones y los cánticos de memoria” (Sojo 6).

Si bien es cierto que a Venezuela los negros llegaron desde las Antillas y otros puntos del Caribe, también hay que señalar que otros investigadores como el historiador y novelista mexicano Vicente Riva Palacio¹ o el historiador ecuatoriano Modesto Chávez Franco², entre otros, defienden la existencia de africanos en la América prehispánica. De acuerdo con Shirley Jackson (2003): “según las investigaciones del historiador y novelista mexicano Vicente Riva Palacio, figura la raza negra entre los primeros grupos étnicos que poblaban las tierras hispanoamericanas” (Jackson 18).

¹ Cf. VICENTE RIVA PALACIO. *México a través de los siglos*. México : Balleca y Compañía Editores, 1889.

² CARVALHO-NETO, P. De (Coordinador). *Estudios afros: Brasil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Ecuador*. Caracas: Instituto de Antropología e Historia, Facultad de Humanidades y Educación, Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1971.

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Cumboto hace alusión a una de las partes más significativas de la historia del negro en el Nuevo Mundo: el cimarronaje. El cubano Miguel Barnet lo plasmó más ampliamente en *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966) que retoma la vivencia de los cimarrones a través de la voz del antiguo cimarrón Esteban Montejo. Esta forma de resistencia llegó a ser el primer paso hacia la libertad, dado que los cimarrones que, guiados por su instinto de libertad y supervivencia se fugaban individualmente, se agrupaban después para urdir estrategias de lucha contra los amos y contra la esclavitud. Dichas estrategias variaban según las circunstancias.

De estas resistencias nacieron los palenques conocidos en Brasil como “quilombo” o “cumbe” en Venezuela y que eran los lugares donde se concentraban los esclavizados fugitivos. Los cimarrones creaban una nueva forma de vida autónoma que les permitía conservar su música, su religión y sus costumbres, en una palabra, su cultura. De ahí, la importancia de los palenques en la conservación de la herencia cultural africana.

Glissant (2002) habla de *migrantes desnudos* traídos a la fuerza al Nuevo Mundo y despojados de todo, incluso de sus idiomas pero que sobrevivieron gracias a sus ganas de libertad y a la memoria que, según Arocha (1999) era lo único que los esclavizadores no pudieron quitarles: “ellas [las memorias] acicatearon el cimarronaje y demás búsquedas tempranas de la libertad, las cuales, a su vez, cimentaron los procesos de adaptación a los paisajes y sociedades que los cautivos jamás habían imaginado” (Arocha 171-172).

Como lo ya mencionado arriba, Juan Pablo Sojo (1986) opina que los africanos que llegaron a Venezuela, pasaron primero por el Caribe donde ya habían aprendido algo de español y que esto facilitó más o menos su integración en la sociedad venezolana. Sojo subraya al respecto que: “el proceso de fusión racial resultó más rápido y global en Venezuela que en otras partes de la América” (Sojo

6). No obstante, hay que tener en cuenta que esta fusión racial no estuvo exenta de prejuicios.

Mestizaje como redención del negro

La novela *Cumboto* es un elogio del mestizaje como rescate al negro. El mensaje principal es que la solución al problema racial pasa irremediabilmente por el mestizaje racial.

En *Cumboto*, uno de los personajes mulatos llega a afirmar lo siguiente.

Mi padre estaba persuadido de que hay que emanciparse no sólo de la tutela de los blancos sino de este horrible pigmento que pesa sobre la vida de los hombres mucho más que un delito (...) Su padre – era cierto y no lo negaba – había querido casarse con una blanca por mejorar la raza, “para emancipar a sus hijos” (Díaz Sánchez 106).

En su artículo “Ramón Díaz Sánchez: Primitive or Creator?”, Alan Persico reconoce el complejo de inferioridad de los personajes negros de Díaz Sánchez y su obsesión en casarse con mujeres blancas, aunque señala que dicho comportamiento está más patente en *Cumboto* que en *Mene* (1936), la otra obra de Díaz Sánchez: “the ‘dreams’ of Alberto, Angela’s brother, is to possess a white woman (...) This particular question is not fully developed in *Mene*. It is however the main issue dealt with in a later work, *Cumboto*” (Persico 16).

Juan Pablo Sojo, también paisano de Díaz Sánchez, se refiere en su novela *Nochebuena negra* (1943) a este empeño en “mejorar la raza”. Se trata en este caso de un personaje negro que dejó de enamorarse de su novia negra porque quería casarse con una mujer blanca para “mejorar la raza”: “usté comprende, el colorcito... Hay que mejorarlo, vale. Yo la he corrió en Caracas, y sé lo que es una

buena hembra. Además hoy soy otro; me he civilizado; antes usaba alpargatas barbonas, liencillo y andaba jediondo. Ahora tú pué ve!” (Sojo 276).

Los acontecimientos en *Cumboto* son narrados por el negro Natividad. Debido a este hecho insólito, Roberto Torres habla de “privilegiación de la presencia africana en el texto” (Torres 14). Según él, al dar a Natividad el poder de la palabra, Díaz Sánchez confiere al negro el privilegio de construir o moldear la identidad racial del blanco Federico Zeus, lo cual convierte a este último en el Otro. Natividad tiene el privilegio de conocer la historia de Federico y la de Cumboto.

La conversión de Federico Zeus en Otro se funda en su carencia de conocimiento de la historia de su propio pasado y del de Cumboto. Necesita del sujeto para ser nombrado, para ser inscrito en la realidad epistemológica que comprende a los Lamarca, a Cumboto, en general. De esta forma, Natividad será, virtualmente, el sujeto, y Federico, el Otro. (Torres 12).

Es cierto que la historia de Federico y, por ende, la de Cumboto nos las revela el narrador Natividad, pero sería exagerado considerar este hecho como un privilegio dado que Natividad no es más que un espión, una sombra de Federico, que vive por y para su amo Federico. Natividad ha llegado a afirmar que, de verdad, no había vivido como un hombre: “no fui más que un reflejo de Federico, algo menos que un perro. El perro, al fin y al cabo, posee cierto albedrío, se emancipa cuando lo acucia la urgencia del sexo. Yo no supe nada de eso. Era una sombra” (Díaz Sánchez 116). Natividad es un mero subordinado, mejor una especie de cámara oculta que va paseando por Cumboto bobinando y rebobinando para recrear la historia de Federico y, de paso, la de Cumboto para justificar su propia existencia y la de los suyos.

La posibilidad o el “privilegio” del narrador de construir la identidad de su amo Federico transformándole, en este caso, en el Otro como apunta Torres, no es

realmente un privilegio sino más bien una necesidad para el mismo narrador porque al moldear la identidad racial de Federico, Natividad está al mismo tiempo dando sentido a su vida y a la de los negros de Cumboto. Por eso se pregunta: “¿Qué sería de ti si él muriese?; ¿Qué sería de todos nosotros?” (Díaz Sánchez 110).

El investigador Marwin Lewis, citado por Torres, no considera a Federico como Otro sino más bien a Natividad: “Since Natividad is the narrator, how does one justify his apparent negative opinion of blackness? Or is he merely a vehicle for the author to espouse deep-seated feelings of color and class or the superiority of the mulatto to the negro?” (Torres 13).

La principal meta de Natividad, quien vive entre dos aguas, es alejarse de las costumbres de sus parientes negros porque las considera como soeces, irracionales y violentas. El narrador cuenta con el blanco Federico para lograr su propósito de desvincularse de las costumbres de los negros.

La finalidad rescatadora y homogeneizadora del mestizaje en *Cumboto* está en consonancia con el imaginario latinoamericano ya que, de acuerdo con Peter Wade en *Raza y etnicidad en Latinoamérica* (2000), esta pretendida homogeneidad nacional mestiza es una forma de incluir al negro como ciudadano pero negándole un estatus específico. Lo que Richard Jackson (1975) consideró como “Ethnic Lynching” (Jackson 3). Aunque cabe mencionar que Janet J. Hampton no ve tal “linchamiento” o negación de un estatus al negro sino más bien la continuidad de la estética negra a través del mulato encarnado por el hijo de Federico y Pascua “I see the mulatto in Cumboto as the symbol of continuity of a black aesthetic, an aesthetic which endures through syncretism with its European counterpart, transforming and being transformed by that counterpart in the creative process symbolised by Pascua and Federico’s son” (Hampton 8).

El piano como símbolo de mestizaje

La música representa uno de los más importantes medios de protesta de los esclavizados en las Américas. A través de ella expresaban sus reprimidos sentimientos. De hecho, el Jazz y el Blues eran mutaciones de los sonidos que los negros desarrollaron para lamentarse, a su manera, de sus condiciones de seres oprimidos. Recordemos que durante la esclavitud, se prohibía a los esclavizados tocar la música.

La base du jazz au sens large, c'est la musique folklorique des Noirs créée au temps de l'esclavage. C'est la musique des champs du Sud, des cabanes des esclaves et des églises de campagnes... Dans cette musique-là, ils introduisirent les rythmes de l'Afrique, demeurés dans les mémoires et transmis de génération en génération; ces rythmes transformèrent les ballades et les hymnes qui avaient traversé l'Atlantique avec les immigrants venus des quatre coins de l'Europe occidentale. C'est ce mélange qui produisit les spirituals et les blues, qui réunit les tambours vaudou et les fanfares françaises à la Nouvelle-Orléans (Erllich 7-8).

“La base del jazz en su amplio sentido, es la música folklórica de los Negros creada durante la esclavitud. Es la música de los campos del Sur, de las cabañas de los esclavos y de las iglesias de pueblos... En esta música introdujeron los ritmos africanos que quedaron en las memorias y transmitidos de generación en generación; dichos ritmos transformaron las baladas y los ritmos que habían cruzado el Atlántico con los inmigrantes llegados de todos los rincones de la Europa Occidental. Fue esta mezcla la

que produjo los espirituales y los blues, la que reunió los tambores vudú y las tocatas francesas en Nueva-Orleáns.

La sublevación de los esclavizados en Matanzas, Cuba, fue liderada por la heroica Carlota³ y por otros dos esclavizados llamados Evaristo y Fermina. El mensaje fue transmitido a través de un tambor parlante. Al oír el sonido del tambor, los negros entendieron el mensaje y se sublevaron. Carlota era una esclavizada cubana que desempeñó un papel crucial en el proceso de la liberación de la Isla. No obstante, no hay mucha información sobre ella porque los estudios no mencionan su participación en la guerra de Liberación en Cuba.

El importante papel de comunicación que la música y los instrumentos musicales desempeñan en la cultura del africano se puede confirmar en la obra *Tambores en la noche* (1940) del afrocolombiano Jorge Artel quien, a través de su poesía, aborda la función de comunicarse con los antepasados negros que la música de los tambores otorga:

Los tambores en la noche / son como un grito humano. (...) / Los
tambores en la noche / parece que siguieran nuestros pasos /
Tambores misteriosos que resuenan / en las enramadas de los
rudos boteros (...) / Los tambores en la noche, hablan. / ¡Y es su
voz una llamada / tan honda, tan fuerte y clara, / que parece como
si fueran sonándonos en el alma. (Artel 57-58).

Gabriel Ferrer Ruiz añade que la música en la obra de Jorge Artel: “se explica por la construcción de una identidad negra, mestiza y mulata que el hablante lírico desea lograr. La música, especialmente la percutiva, es un aspecto mediante el cual, desde la Colonia, la raza negra se autoidentificaba y se hacía

³ Cf. www.afrocubaweb.com/carlota.htm. Consultado el 21 de mayo de 2008.

reconocer ante los demás” (Artel 25). De modo que la música era un medio por el cual se podía reivindicar las raíces africanas y la identidad negra que la esclavitud arrebató al esclavizado.

En *Cumboto* hay dos categorías de instrumentos musicales: el piano de la casa blanca, símbolo de la música de los blancos y los tambores entre los cuales el llamado pujao y que representan la música de los negros. La música del piano está descrita como una música “agradable”, “alegre”, “amable”, “culta” y “suave”, mientras que la música que emana de los tambores de los negros es para el narrador Natividad, una música “desbordante”, “diabólica”, “epiléptica”, “frenética” y “ronca”.

El piano, además de representar la música de los blancos, está rodeado de secretos familiares todos relacionados con el mestizaje. Beatriz Lamarca, mujer del dueño de la Hacienda Cumboto se enamoró del mulato Jaime Rojas que era su profesor de piano. De este amor secreto nació un hijo secreto llamado Cruz María y que fue repudiado y criado en la casa del negro Cervelión. También, es el mismo piano que Federico, hijo de Beatriz, toca para la negra Pascua con quien acaba teniendo un hijo.

La música preferida de Federico era la de Beethoven, pero también afirma el narrador, tocaba: “la de otros compositores apasionados - los preludios corales y la *Partita* en do menor de Bach, la *Sonata* en fa mayor de Haydn, los *Arabescos* de Schumann, la *Sonata* en si bemol mayor de Mozart, las *Mazurcas* de Chopin, las *canciones sinpalabras* de Mendelssohn” (Díaz Sánchez 113). De esta música, el narrador Natividad, un negro criado en la casa de los blancos, asegura: “la belleza de esta música era en aquellos días ininteligible para mi mente, dolorosa para mi espíritu. Nada había de común entre sus armonías y nuestros ritmos roncós y truncos surgidos de la matriz de la tierra” (Díaz Sánchez 94).

El desdén por la música de los negros refleja el imaginario social de la época en toda América Latina. En *Juyungo, historia de un negro, una isla y otros negros* (1943) del ecuatoriano Adalberto Ortiz, se hace alusión a esta estigmatización de la música negra y, por ende, de la cultura africana: “Que tales manifestaciones de salvajismo sean radiofundidas ¿Qué pensarán afuera, de nosotros?- Pensarán que aquí no viven más que negros- contestó un exportador, ofendido” (Ortiz 136). Finalmente, en la novela, las autoridades prohíben los bailes de marimba.

Esta ficción plasma fielmente el pensamiento del momento en lo que se refiere a la cultura de origen africano que era objeto de rechazo en buena parte de América Latina:

Las formas de música, danza y movimiento corporal basadas en lo africano- samba y capoeira en Brasil; rumba y son en Cuba; candombe, milonga y tango en Argentina y Uruguay; merengue en la República Dominicana- fueron rechazadas por las élites blancas y las clases medias en el siglo XIX y tildadas de primitivas, bárbaras y cercanas a lo criminal; en el siglo XX, éstas mismas músicas y danzas fueron adoptadas como símbolos centrales de la identidad cultural nacional. Lo mismo aconteció con las religiones de raíz africana- santería, candomblé, umbanda- (Reid Andrews 25).

Lo que sí es innegable es que los colonos hicieron todo lo posible para despojarles de su cultura fundamentándose en las tesis racistas del siglo XIX sobre la inferioridad del negro. Mariano Picón Salas explica en su libro *Pedro Claver, el santo de los esclavos*, la misión del jesuita español Pedro Claver de convertir a los “negros brujos” en fieles de la religión católica: “¿y cómo marchan sus brujos? – suelen preguntarle al Padre, amigos y gentes curiosas” (Picón Salas 106) y él suele

contestar: “– se dejaron del oficio o acaso no lo tenían. Les están blanqueando y purificando las buenas obras” (106).

En *Cumboto* los dos ritmos musicales están opuestos e irreconciliables según Natividad. En la novela, dichos ritmos encarnan la cultura blanca y la negra. Sólo el mestizaje será capaz de reconciliar estas dos culturas y crear una nueva forma para la humanidad y esta misión la cumplirá el hijo del blanco Federico y la negra Pascua: “¿Por qué no tratas de componer una música tuya, en la que haya algo de nuestras canciones, de nuestros tambores, de [Sic] nuestro campos y ríos? (Díaz Sánchez 113), le decía Pascua a Federico sin saber que su hijo mulato encarnará dicha simbiosis. Para Janet J Hampton Federico y Pascua se complementan a través de la música de él y el baile de ella: "Federico's love for Pascua is expressed through his music, European classical music; through it, he wins her love. Her love for him is expressed in dance, the dance of her African heritage (Hampton 4).

Esta gran misión de simbiosis socio cultural y finalidad de la novela *Cumboto* la lleva a cabo el hijo mulato de Federico y Pascua. El último capítulo de la novela titulado “El mensajero” y punto culminante del mestizaje, tiene una connotación divina al mismo tiempo que resume la idea general de la novela; de ahí, la importancia de dicha misión. “El mensajero”, es decir el mulato, tiene una misión, un encargo que realizar; y esta misión consiste en unir a las dos culturas a través del mestizaje que él mismo encarna.

El destino ha encomendado al mulato la misión de acercar la cultura de los negros a la de los blancos, de crear una fusión racial para producir “una nueva forma para la historia del mundo” (Díaz Sánchez 10). Al final de la novela es el mulato quien toca el piano: “pero esta vez [afirma el narrador] no es ya la voz límpida, estilizada de la música culta, la que brota del piano, sino el gemido del *pujao* y el júbilo petulante de los pequeños tambores” (Díaz Sánchez 128).

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La nueva composición musical tocada por el joven es la *Aurora*. La palabra aurora es la luz que precede a la salida de sol, es decir el amanecer, pero también significa comienzo de algo. Lo que sugiere el amanecer de una nueva era que, además, simboliza la esperanza del pueblo venezolano de solucionar el problema racial a través del mestizaje tanto cultural como racial representado por el piano. A propósito de esta misión Natividad afirma: “y mi corazón tiembla ante la magnitud de la empresa que [al joven mulato] le ha encomendado el destino” (Díaz Sánchez 128).

El principal mensaje de *Cumboto* no es sólo la erección del mestizaje como solución al problema racial sino también la consideración de la mezcla de sangres como redención de los negros. Conviene recordar que Rufino Blanco Fombona, intelectual venezolano y paisano de Díaz Sánchez ya aseguró en 1912: “Venezuela no tiene salvación a menos que resuelva cómo alcanzar la condición de país de blanco. Ésa es la clave del futuro”. (Reid Andrews 197). A pesar de lo evidente que parece ser la función del mestizaje en la novela, hay quien, como Roberto Torres, piensa que: “la crítica parece centrar toda su atención en el tema del mestizaje como si éste fuera el móvil detrás de la configuración ideológica del texto de Díaz Sánchez (...) La novela *Cumboto* no es un texto construido expresamente para privilegiar la idea del mestizaje como ideología en su discurso” (Torres 11).

Gracias a la música, negros y blancos que antiguamente miraban en sentidos contrarios, se unen y miran a la misma dirección escuchando la misma música tocada por el joven mulato quien: “mira hacía la ventana donde asoman como un racimo de frutas monstruosas las cabezas de los negros que acuden a oírle y sonríe” (Díaz Sánchez 128).

Conviene subrayar que las teclas del piano en sí simbolizan esta fusión de los dos grupos étnicos a través de sus colores que son el blanco y el negro.

Curiosamente, al fijarse detenidamente en las teclas del piano nos damos cuenta de que el color blanco domina sobre el negro. Incluso a simple vista, las teclas blancas tienen más presencia que las negras. Es más, el blanco representa la base o el pedestal sobre el cual se fijan las teclas negras. Además, musicalmente una tecla blanca vale $\frac{1}{2}$ de redonda mientras que una negra vale $\frac{1}{4}$ de redonda. Una nota blanca dura dos tiempos y una negra dura un tiempo.

Hampton asegura que "like the piano which requires both black keys and white to produce music, these men, black and white, must pull together to survive" (Hampton 3). Conviene añadir no obstante que en el piano, las teclas negras y las blancas no tienen la misma función ni desempeñan el mismo papel aunque Hampton afirma que el piano necesita tanto las teclas blancas como las negras para producir música. Las teclas negras están para reforzar el papel de los blancos.

Las teclas blancas se llaman notas naturales mientras que las negras son derivadas de las notas blancas y se llaman notas alteradas (sostenidas o bemoles). Sostenido signo que indica que debes tocar la tecla más cercana a la derecha de la nota escrita en el pentagrama. Bemol signo musical que indica que debes tocar la tecla más cercana a la izquierda de la nota escrita en el pentagrama. El sostenido eleva la nota, el bemol baja la nota mientras que el natural, es decir el blanco, anula el valor del sostenido y del bemol⁴.

Por consiguiente, la elección del piano como símbolo de mestizaje en la novela *Cumboto* no parece ser pura casualidad sino más bien una elección muy bien calculada y meditada por parte del autor de la novela para transmitir sus ideas acerca del mestizaje. El piano como símbolo de fusión racial perpetúa la subordinación e inferioridad del negro al mismo tiempo que permite conjeturar que en este cruce de culturas entre el blanco y el negro, este último aporta menos que el

⁴ Cf. Miles, John C. *Mi primer libro de piano*. Madrid: Susaeta, 1993.

blanco. Domina la imagen o idea de que es el blanco quien rescata al negro mezclándose con él para ayudarlo a mejorar su cultura. No se trata de una fusión de igual a igual sino de una liberación del negro. Lo que está en consonancia con la idea general de *Cumboto* donde el negro Natividad vive subordinada y la cultura negra está infravalorada. Lo cual refleja el imaginario latinoamericano de la época. Por esta razón, Richard Jackson acierta cuando afirma:

"The author, Ramón Díaz Sánchez, makes a strong plea for better race relations by calling for a partnership between the black and white races. His theory is that each race would contribute an important aspect o human nature the other allegedly lacks. The black man is to bring intuition and primordial vitality, the white man, reason and intelligence, which, according to the author, are totally foreign to black people" (Jackson 57).

Alejandro Solomianski asevera en *Identidades secretas: la negritud argentina* (2003), que, dentro de la cosmovisión racista de la "supremacía blanca", el mestizaje es un proceso que permite al negro "elevarse" socialmente y, a lo largo de las generaciones, alcanzar la "blanquedad": "en el caso del proceso identificador racista se trata de hacer del 'otro' algo no humano, negarle su humanidad, construirlo como negación. Y si bien es evidente que la 'blanquedad' se autoconsidera lo humano y designa a la 'negritud' como lo subhumano" (Solomianski 54).

En consecuencia, la utilización del piano como símbolo de unión racial en *Cumboto* no es una mera coincidencia. En este sentido, conviene decir siguiendo a Édouard Glissant que: "les éléments culturels mis en présence doivent obligatoirement être "équivalents en valeur" pour que cette crólisation s'effectue réellement" (Glissant 17). (Los elementos culturales que concurren deben obligatoriamente ser "equivalentes en valor" a fin de que esta criollización se

efectúe realmente”. De lo contrario, es decir, si alguno de estos elementos culturales está infravalorado en comparación con los demás, la criollización se producirá pero en un modo “bâtard” et “injuste” (bastardo e injusto) (17).

Conclusiones

Cumboto es una perfecta representación del proceso de integración de los africanos en la sociedad venezolana, desde su llegada como cimarrones a las costas de Venezuela en busca de libertad hasta su simbiosis socio-cultural. Dicha simbiosis refleja el pensamiento socio-político de la época que consistía en buscar una solución al problema racial en Latinoamérica. Solución que, según el imaginario de entonces, llegaba a través del mestizaje.

Sin embargo, dicho mestizaje sirve para redimir al negro considerado como inferior y dependiente del amo: “en la Casa Blanca hace falta una señora que garantice la prolongación de la casa del amo. Los negros temen que llegue un día en que la muerte se presente a cobrar sus cuentas y los halle desamparados” (Díaz Sánchez 126). De ahí la significativa misión del mensajero (el hijo del amo y la negra), no sólo de prolongar la estirpe del amo sino también de ayudar al negro a “elevarse” socialmente hasta ascender en una escala de “mejoramiento étnico”, retomando la expresión del mexicano José Vasconcelos.

El estatus de narrador de la historia de *Cumboto* no le exime al negro Natividad de ser el Otro. No en vano Marwin Lewis a quien cita Torres alega que Natividad es un “cultural spy” (Torres 13) y un “narrador negro con mentalidad de blanco” (Torres 13).

Si bien es cierto que *Cumboto* de Ramón Díaz Sánchez es una obra de ficción, hay que tener en cuenta que la ficción y la realidad están estrechamente vinculadas, y la realidad del momento era el rechazo de la herencia cultural africana. Por lo tanto, *Cumboto* no constituye una ruptura con las obras de su época, en lo que al tratamiento del tema del negro se refiere. Las teorías sobre las

“razas superiores” y las “razas inferiores”, basadas en el racismo científico del siglo XIX y principio del XX, habían desgraciadamente moldeado el imaginario social latinoamericano.

Gracias al contraste creado a través de las teclas blancas y las negras del piano, Díaz Sánchez podría ser comparado con un mago que crea ilusiones visuales que Stephen L. Macknik y Susana Martínez-Conde definen como “percepciones visuales subjetivas que no se ajustan a la realidad del mundo que nos rodea” (Stephen et al. 12).

En resumen, se puede decir que la cultura africana ha sobrevivido en Venezuela en particular y generalmente en América Latina, sorteando los obstáculos sembrados en el camino hacia la integración socio cultural gracias a la memoria y a las ganas de supervivencia y de resistencia de los negros.

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¿Es *La negra Angustias* una afirmación de lo afro-mexicano o una invisibilidad?

La negra Angustias (1944) es una obra de Francisco Rojas González (1904-1951), autor mexicano que recibió el Premio Nacional de Literatura en 1944¹. La novela narra la vida de Angustias Farrera, hija de Antón Farrera, una afro-mexicana que por vivir dentro de una sociedad patriarcal, se ve forzada a escapar después de matar a Laureano, un pretendiente que intenta violarla al ser rechazado por ella². Angustias se une a las fuerzas de la Revolución Mexicana y, allí, se convierte en coronela, oficio que la enfrenta a múltiples vicisitudes³. Por consiguiente, un gran número de artículos y textos sobre *La negra Angustias* han sido dedicados a la problemática del género sexual, su papel como revolucionaria, sus semejanzas y diferencias con otras novelas y su representación en el cine comparada con la obra escrita⁴. Otros críticos no se han limitado a los temas estudiados anteriormente, sino que han presentado y discutido el aspecto racial.

Stephanie Davis-Lett, en su artículo "The image of the Black Woman as a Revolutionary Figure; Three Views", dedica la primera sección al análisis de la obra de Rojas González discutiendo el rol de Angustias como mujer negra revolucionaria. Davis-Lett concluye que la figura de Angustias al final de la obra no circunscribe su compromiso con la Revolución y no destaca al personaje como símbolo revolucionario que representa la población negra. Contrariamente, Laura Kanost en su artículo "Viewing the Afro-Mexican Revolutionary: Francisco Rojas Gonzalez's *La negra Angustias*", debate que la aparente reversa de Angustias de ser mujer negra comprometida con la revolución a ser mujer negra sumisa, se ve a través de la narración que objetiviza a dicho personaje. Además, destaca el hecho de que Angustias se apodera del poder, al reconocer una herencia negra y lo manifiesta a través de diferentes momentos en la historia en la que Angustias se aprovecha de la

circunstancia de ser negra y lo hace visualmente a través de las diferentes instancias que mira a los demás y que hace que la miren. La importancia del artículo de Kanost estriba en el análisis del espacio ambivalente de la escritura y reescritura de Angustias en el que se destacan nociones que afirman y niegan un discurso nacional. Los estudios anteriores son presentados desde un punto de vista feminista, nacional y postcolonial, pero no plantean el devenir de estas acciones de la locura patriarcal donde la mujer se sale del control de lo que estipula dicha sociedad y la identidad negra internalizada que perpetúan patrones coloniales de invisibilidad y marginalización para el personaje y, hasta cierto punto, de la población afro-mexicana.

En su libro *The Erasure of the Afro Element of Mestizaje in Modern Mexico: The Coding of Visibly Black Mestizos According to a White Aesthetic In and Through the Discourse on Nation During the Cultural Phase of the Mexican Revolution, 1920-1968*, Marco Polo Hernández Cueva, citando a José Vasconcelos y su libro *La raza cósmica* (1925), dice que la invisibilidad de Angustias es el resultado de la ideología dominante. Asimismo, plantea que, de acuerdo con Vasconcelos, la homogenización de las etnicidades se plasma a través de la representación del afro-mexicano como inferior y caricaturesco, lo que hizo que éste se sintiera realmente inferior y se hiciera completamente invisible, por lo menos hasta los años 40, al igual que sus contribuciones culturales (19-20). Por esta razón, se puede decir que actualmente, a pesar del mestizaje, se ha tratado de dar visibilidad a la población negra al intentar educarla en torno a “la tercera raíz”, según lo planteado por Odile Hoffman en su artículo “Negros y afromestizos en México: viejas y nuevas lecturas de un mundo olvidado” (114). Sin lugar a dudas, lo anterior pone al descubierto que la visibilidad del negro debe ser establecida; pero, contrariamente, sustenta de cierta forma lo planteado por Vasconcelos, puesto que lo que ha hecho el gobierno con estos estudios es dar un

“reconocimiento del aporte de las poblaciones de origen africano a la cultura nacional” (Hoffman 114), pero no de institucionalizar los aportes y al afro-mexicano en sí.

El análisis de esta investigación se centrará en la relación que se da entre la historia relatada y los efectos de la misma a través de la teoría postcolonial. El argumento principal es que *La negra Angustias* ha servido como un elemento representativo de lo afro-mexicano, pero de forma estereotípica, como amenaza contra la hegemonía. Por lo cual, la novela no reafirma el elemento racial negro, sino que plantea como solución la invisibilidad. El estudio consiste en una lectura de las secciones de la obra en las que se habla de la negra Angustias y en cómo el texto expone los temas de la experiencia colonial tales como: locura patriarcal, violencia y raza, plasmando cierto perfil negativo del personaje al punto de negarle una visibilidad.

***La negra Angustias* y su herencia colonial**

Antes de continuar con la investigación se debe tomar en consideración el título de la novela, por las diferentes connotaciones sobre su significado. En primer lugar, *La negra Angustias* con relación al ser social pues se le trata peyorativamente. En segundo lugar, como referente a la angustia que vive el personaje y que, a su vez, delimita el camino que le espera: marginada por ser mujer negra. El libro además de plantear un problema racial y de género se puede entender como uno con un propósito indirecto.

Eso se sabe no sólo en Mesa del Aire, sino en toda la sierra... No más véale la color. Mulata como usted. La madre —que en paz del Señor descansa— era blanca y fina; de ella sacó Angustias las facciones y de usted los ademanes, la resolución y lo prietillo. —Es verdad... En la sierra no había entonces más mulato que yo; pero “allá abajo”, de donde fueron mis padres, hay muchos que de vez en vez caen por

acá..., ¡y mi mujer—Dios la perdone— sola, triste y con la debilidad que sentía por los mulatos!... (Rojas 13-4).

El escrito sirve como guía para que los lectores conozcan y entiendan no sólo la localización de las personas de raza negra en México, sino también las relaciones que se daban con sus habitantes y, más aun, el resultado de esas relaciones raciales. La voz narrativa deja claro que su historia no está limitada a la Revolución Mexicana y a los indígenas, sino también al negro. Indirectamente presenta ante el lector un texto inofensivo en su relato, pero tiene una intencionalidad. *La negra Angustias* aparentemente parece dar visibilidad a la población negra de México; pero no es así porque la novela de Rojas lo que hace es aminorar los grupos racialmente negros. De igual manera, el estudio de Aguirre Beltrán sobre la población negra en México (1942), plantea que "...no existe ya el negro como grupo diferenciado" (7) lo cual da luz y validez a un mundo desconocido no sólo para México sino para toda Latinoamérica, con relación a la población afro-mexicana. Así mismo se aprecia en el *Primer viaje de Cristóbal Colón según su diario de a bordo* (1972), en el cual las descripciones que hace de las tierras descubiertas y sus habitantes son idealizadas por el único contexto conocido por Colón: Europa. Él "[e]ntendió también que lejos de allí había hombres de un ojo, y otros con hocicos de perros, que comían los hombres, y que tomando uno lo degollaban y le bebían su sangre, y le cortaban su natura" (47). En lo sucesivo se estereotipa a estos desconocidos como monstruos pues se salen de lo conocido por Cristóbal Colón. De igual forma, la imagen que se presenta del negro en *La negra Angustias* no es auténtica, pero tiene un gran impacto a nivel literario y socio-histórico⁵. El lector, al encontrarse con los diferentes lugares visitados por Angustias (el personaje principal instaurado por la voz narrativa) durante la Revolución Mexicana podrá apreciar, desde un punto de vista postcolonial, un panorama complejo de la interacción que se da entre escritura, historia y su entorno. El lector sólo verá a través de la voz

narrativa, lo cual implica una visión poco objetiva sobre los hechos y sobre la imagen del negro. En este caso, se puede cuestionar si *La negra Angustias* es una novela o un planteamiento sobre la situación del negro en México. Algunos escritores ven el texto como una obra literaria otros como un texto histórico.

En el libro *Africans in Colonial Mexico* (2005) de Herman Bennet, se hace referencia a hechos históricos que supuestamente, justifican la explotación por parte de los colonizadores hacia ese “otro” de raza negra⁶. Además de indicar que para 1640 Nueva España tenía la segunda población más grande de esclavos africanos y la más grande en número de negros libertos en las Américas. Es aquí donde se infiere la intención de Rojas González de presentar un texto que sirva para plantear un problema racial y de género o indirectamente de “guía” para ver lo que pasa en ese momento en un determinado espacio postcolonial y, desde la presente investigación, la invisibilidad de lo afro-mexicano.

En lo que respecta al retrato de la raza negra se puede decir que fue una imagen creada. Los colonizadores trajeron a las Américas una gran cantidad de esclavos para su propio beneficio al explotar las tierras. Bennet, al hacer mención de la cantidad de negros en México, ayuda a entender porque los negros representaban una amenaza no sólo cultural, sino física. En términos generales, los negros fueron traídos para hacer el trabajo que los indígenas no podían realizar. Esto implica directamente que eran más fuertes que los indígenas, además de ser mayores en cantidad. En la colonización los negros representaban un problema si se sublevaban o si se les daba el mismo trato que a los indígenas. De igual manera, Rojas González hace referencia a la cantidad de negros y mulatos que habitaban en la zona de Mesa del Aire. Aquí, se crea esta misma amenaza no sólo por la cantidad de negros que habitaban dicha zona, sino también a través de los roles violentos asignados a los personajes negros, específicamente a Antón Farrera y a Angustias. De esta forma, la voz narrativa creó

una imagen negativa de los negros, estableciendo que éstos no eran dignos de ser otra cosa que lo más bajo entre las castas, al describirlos como bárbaros. Aunque en principio, se refirió a los blancos con la debilidad hacia los mulatos (atracción física), como se ve en el caso de la madre de Angustias, también se aprecia el castigo de haberse unido a un mulato que tiene como resultado el nacimiento de Angustias, una afro-mexicana.

El nacimiento y castigo de la afro-mexicana en estudio se puede remontar a la colonización de Nueva España. La población negra fue presentada con el dilema fundamental de definir qué eran. El hecho de haber sido secuestrados en África y colonizados en América los hace ser el fruto de una opresión que los había obligado a ser otros y no como lo que eran: seres humanos. Esta idea es una continuación de lo planteado por Edward Said en su artículo "Orientalism" al indicar que Occidente ha establecido todo su conocimiento, incluyendo la arqueología, la lingüística, la filosofía, la teoría política, la historia, la ficción e historiográfica, con el propósito de dominar a sus colonias (90). Allí empezó la discusión sobre "colonial discourse" entendido como el conjunto de recursos discursivos y aparatos de producción simbólica con los que los colonizadores producen e inventan a los colonizados como otros (Zevallos 965).

Estas características son establecidas como forma de borrar la memoria del pueblo trasplantado de África, por lo cual la dominación de los negros sólo se logrará al borrar o no aceptar sus elementos discursivos. En el caso del indígena, tiene una posición superior al negro al conocer la lengua castellana. En contraposición, los negros no tenían intérpretes. El hecho de no enseñarle en un principio la lengua muestra de cierta manera la negación casi absoluta del negro, de no ser aceptado en la sociedad y el tipo de control que el español tuvo sobre la educación de esta población. En *La negra Angustias* se hace la pregunta indirecta de quién era el negro al manifestarse el cuestionamiento y el origen racial de Angustias manifestando un problema de

identidad ante la hegemonía y ante el lector por plantear el devenir racial de estudio, no sólo de las razas mencionadas, sino más bien del negro mismo y su alteridad en el nuevo país, México. La excesiva manipulación de los repertorios discursivos establecidos, incluyendo la educación, para dominar a los negros se presenta cuando Manolo (el maestro de Angustias), le pregunta: "... Angustias... ¿Entiendes?", y ella responde: "A medias, Manolo, pero ya procuraré irme dando cuenta de lo que quieres, para servirte y agradarte..." (200). Como ya se ha indicado, los negros eran lo más bajo en el estrato social, y el hecho de presentarlos como incompetentes para el entendimiento por la poca educación les da una connotación negativa. A pesar de Manolo haber educado a Angustias, el acceso a la palabra a medias hace referencia a la inutilidad de los negros de poder incorporarse por completo a la sociedad. Es aquí donde se puede observar una dominación colonial totalizante a nivel lingüístico y simbólico.

En este caso, se hace referencia al por qué, a la importancia y a cierta justificación de la creación del otro (lo desconocido, lo salvaje) por parte del colonizador y las consecuencias que esto conlleva. Algunas de sus derivaciones pueden ser el dominio ejercido por los colonizadores sobre los negros de manera no sólo física, sino también a nivel del imaginario y la imagen negativa que se transmitió de los negros⁷. Por lo que al análisis respecta, esto es importante, pues los negros son alejados de un referente que es el país natal África ya en México fueron esclavizados, donde se crea cierta idea errónea del negro.

La complejidad que se desencadena se puede entender si se piensa en el artículo de Said, mencionado previamente, que critica la noción de percibir Oriente como la base de todo conocimiento en comparación con Occidente. Said plantea que lo que se conoce en este momento de Oriente ha sido a partir de la construcción hecha por el europeo. Éste usa la cultura oriental para autodefinirse como ser superior y ubicarse

en el centro; los demás, terminan siendo parte de la periferia. Por lo tanto, el europeo está “más capacitado” para tomar decisiones, pues es poseedor no únicamente de la educación formal sino del conocimiento; cualquier otra raza sería incapaz de ser racional y objetiva. Es por cual Angustias tiene el interés de aprender a leer y escribir, es su deseo y necesidad de saber qué se ha escrito en los carteles con respecto a la Revolución y de cierta forma logra cierta paridad con los que tienen el poder. Similar es la situación de quienes, a la par con la protagonista, están luchando en la Revolución, y preguntan a varias personas por el significado de un “manifiesto: colocado en una pared y su contenido, nadie de su grupo ni de clase baja supo informarle” (150). Es evidente entonces el analfabetismo entre la clase baja, campesina y negra. Esto indica que sólo tenían acceso a la educación los miembros de la clase alta o la burguesía (blancos o criollos como Manuel), y era nula para los indígenas y negros.

La función principal de esta dialéctica es legitimar la superioridad del europeo. El problema que se presenta al nombrar al ser desconocido es que el concepto, en este caso de negro, va a estar sujeto a la agenda política de quién lo ha definido. El sujeto de color negro es presentado como lo opuesto al colonizador; esto, para separarlos no sólo racialmente, sino también para mostrar a los negros como seres inferiores, más aún que los indígenas, en todo el sentido de la palabra. Angustias, al igual que sus ancestros, ha sido desposeída de su propio entorno y hasta de su cuerpo, y lo que trata de hacer es recuperarlos. En el artículo, “The Bodies that Were not Ours” se describe este proceso:

Black people's entry into the symbolic order of Western culture hinged on the theft of their bodies, the severing of will from their bodies, the reduction of their bodies to things, and the transformation of their sexuality into an expression of otherness (5).

Relacionar el pasado esclavista con el personaje en estudio, es pensar en lo planteado por Franz Fanon, al ver el mundo colonial como uno “essentially polarized,

Manichean”, lo que Amílcar Cabral desarrolló como “Dialectical Theory of Identification” en la cual:

From the very beginning of brutal European presence in the region there had been two words, two cultures, two literatures, one scribal, the other oral, one proper to the dominant minority, the other emanating from the oppressed majority (Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature 12).

Angustias es negra, pero ha sido educada para pensar como blanca, lo cual le crea una disyuntiva. Es esto lo que justifica el proceso de aprendizaje que el personaje enfrenta en la historia: Angustias no ha tenido educación. Su analfabetismo se presenta, en primera instancia, como la posición o relación de opuestos entre ella y su maestro Manuel, también llamado Manolo. Además, esta situación la predetermina como un ser “oprimido”, por no poseer el conocimiento que, supuestamente, tiene la figura hegemónica representada por Manuel.

La violencia y su pasado

El personaje de Angustias desde el inicio nos plantea la idea de un pasado patriarcal heredado por la colonización. Al comienzo Angustias indica que tiene el color de su padre don Antón (14). Aquí la voz narrativa no sólo da constancia de la herencia africana de Angustias, sino que también es lo que asegura la paternidad de don Antón dentro de la sociedad patriarcal. De igual forma, el cuerpo de esta mujer afro-mexicana hace eco a un pasado colonial de opresión y de violencia. “La vida de Angustias pasaba los días entre las faenas domésticas y el cuidado de cincuenta o sesenta cabras que habíanle encomendado,...que servían para aumentar las flacas rentas de Antón Farrera (17). Angustias, no sólo cuidaba de la casa y ayudaba con el sustento económico, sino que también en algún momento dado tendría que casarse para cumplir con las normas de dicha sociedad patriarcal. En su condición de ser oprimida, Angustias debía casarse, pero cuando Rito Reyes la solicita en matrimonio, ella lo

rechaza (27). Su rechazo se debe a los efectos causados por la negación hacia el sexo como consecuencia de que, tanto su madre como su cabra, murieron dando a luz el fruto de los encuentros sexuales (18).

Lo importante para el análisis es el hecho de Angustias se negara a casarse con un mestizo blanqueado por el dinero y el poder, lo cual ubica, tanto a Rito Reyes como a su padre Eutemio, por encima de Angustias pero también de su padre, por considerarlo, en oposición a ellos, “el horrible mulato de antecedentes vergonzosos?” (28). La actitud de Angustias genera en el pueblo rumores negativos: “Algo horroroso debe pasar al otro lado de las paredes de la casa de los negros...Diose en decir que la mulata despreciaba a los machos porque las mujeres la atraían en forma pecaminosa” (29). Por esta circunstancia, Angustias es rechazada al no ajustarse a las normas que le impone la sociedad de la que hace parte. La sexualidad de la negra Angustias son rasgos que fueron adjudicados a su mezcla racial: “...*mulatos* and blacks were commonly accused of and associated with sexual perversity throughout the early colonial period and there are countless cases against them in the Inquisition records” (Arce 1091). Así, la voz narrativa pretende justificar la opresión hacia Angustias y lo perpetua en la descripción física:

Su cintura, perfectamente contorneada, tuvo movimientos felinos, por elásticos y graciosos, cuando echó hacia atrás su admirable torso...Iba por la soledad del campo respirando a pulmón pleno la tibia y húmeda atmosfera que venía de la costa; de “allá abajo”, cerca del mar en donde había tanta gente igual a ella en color, en gusto... (41).

Angustias se resiste a la idea de sentirse atraída por el hombre blanco, de esta manera, entonces, se sale de los papeles impuestos a ella por la sociedad patriarcal que, indirectamente, la señala como loca⁸.

Con el propósito de purificarla y hacer que sea aceptada en el pueblo, Crescencia, la hechicera le hace a Angustias una limpieza y, al igual que don Antón, le dice: “Te falta algo para ser hembra completa, para poder cumplir el mandato que Dios le dio en el Paraíso a nuestra madre Eva, que fue la primera hembra del hombre..... ¡Quien busca, jalla! (38). Los comentarios tanto del padre como de la hechicera, muestran a Angustias como un ser incompleto por no tener a un hombre a su lado. Al inicio del texto Angustias tiende a reproducir el sistema patriarcal al cuidar de su padre, y racista fruto de la colonización al representar el papel típico de la mujer, pero también acaba por resistir el pasado de hegemonía colonial. Esto se puede percibir al rechazar a Rito Reyes un “mestizo tirando a blanco” (24). Es importante que Angustias lo rechace, ya que según la voz narrativa ella provocaba a los hombres: “La mulata, provocativa y aparentemente despreocupada, pasó casi rozando con sus caderas las piernas de Laureano, que obstruían la estrecha senda. El hombre no tuvo más que estirar la mano para cogerla por el brazo” (44). Al asesinar a Laureano, quien trató de forzarla sexualmente, se vio obligada a escapar del pueblo. Son estas experiencias traumáticas las que hacen que Angustias rompa con los patrones establecidos para las mujeres negras por la herencia colonial. En lo sucesivo, Angustias vestida como hombre se une a la Revolución. “Al adoptar las ropas del hombre, las mujeres soldaderas brincaban las barreras, los límites que el ordenamiento genérico les imponía. (Lau 38). Su vida anterior a la Revolución quedó en el pasado. Ella se ha enmascarado en su nuevo rol⁹.

Como consecuencia de lo anterior, Angustias es situada al margen del patriarcado por su actitud de violencia no sólo hacia los hombres, sino también hacia las mujeres. En un momento dado una mujer le pide clemencia a Angustias por su pareja, el cual la coronela mando a fusilar. El pedido de la mujer lo ha justificado con su embarazo. Angustias responde a su pedido de la siguiente forma: “...porque usted me

sigue provocando vómitos y eso debo castigarlo a nombre de las mujeres” (Rojas González 111). Posteriormente, Angustias azotó a latigazos a la mujer blanca embarazada. Se puede plantear, entonces, en palabras de Laura Kanost que “[t]he beating enacts a reversal of the colonial legacy of oppression of mestizos and Afro-Mexicans by White elites, and constitutes a shocking attack on the Mexican ideal of motherhood” (560). Igualmente, y de acuerdo con lo planteado por Phyllis Chesler, esta novela justifica la locura de las mujeres afro-mexicanas que representaban tanto el papel femenino como el masculino.

Angustias, se defiende de todo. El hecho de que Angustias se haya resistido al poder del blanco de forma violenta es como un reflejo de un pasado esclavista de colonización en México. El pasado de la mezcla racial en el afro-mexicano se ve en la novela, cuando Angustias se enamora de Manolo, se casa con él y tiene un hijo suyo. La aceptación de su nuevo rol de madre tiene como consecuencia dejar de ser sujeto, pues pasa a ser propiedad de Manolo: “Dentro de poco, Angustias Farrera, dejarás de ser mocha para hacerte hembra completa, porque tu corazón te ha avisado ya la cercanía del que ha de quebrarte, del que ha de acompletarte” (Rojas 193). Así, Angustias recordará que su padre y la hechicera le hablaban de ese algo que le faltaba.

Ese recuerdo se puede observar cuando sale de la casa de Crescencia, e inicia una etapa en la que el recuerdo de su infancia lo integra con su presente al lado de Manuel: “Ella lo tomó enérgicamente del brazo al par que salían de sus labios palabras ya envejecidas, tanto, que se habían transformado en maravillosa fórmula: “Allá, entre las breñas, como los chivos y como las pastoras” (194). Con el matrimonio, Angustias se completa como mujer ante la sociedad patriarcal mexicana que la juzga, pero al mismo tiempo se perpetua su rol de santa o sometida ante la figura masculina del esposo, quien representa esa misma sociedad patriarcal, como lo plantea Jean Franco

en *Plotting Women: Gender & Representation in Mexico* (87). En su texto *Women in Mexico: A past Unveiled* (1999) Julia Tuñón Pablos señala respecto al matrimonio que:

Through marriage women were placed under the authority of their husbands. According to civil law, the wife had to obey her husband and waive her rights regarding most legal actions, properties, and financial gains, and even subordinate in her domestic activities. (31).

Angustias, entonces, como esposa y madre, tendrá que obedecer a Manuel en todo. Según Elizabeth Salas en *Soldaderas in the Mexican Military: Myth and History* (1990), “[i]n submitting to the teacher, she discover her true identity as wife and mother” (86). De esta manera, Angustias se presenta como ser en tanto está sometida a su esposo. Al mismo tiempo, Angustias se debate entre: el amor por Manolo y el amor por ella misma como sujeto. Lo cual hace que surja en el análisis un cuestionamiento contemporáneo sobre la visibilidad o invisibilidad de la afro-mexicana.

La herencia colonial en Angustias le otorga invisibilidad al afro-mexicano

A través de la crítica y de varios ejemplos en *La negra Angustias* se han visto, ideas y formas de actuar de los personajes de raza negra que se asumen como ciertas dentro de la sociedad mexicana. Resulta difícil considerar que estos personajes representan aspectos negativos de su condición racial, y que estos modelos se puedan internalizar en sus receptores habituales como algo aceptable por asumirlo como una herencia colonial. Los colonizadores ocuparon una posición importante dentro de la sociedad, ya que se encargaron de producir y distribuir conocimientos, información y cultura, tal y como fue planteado anteriormente por Fanon y Cabral. La opresión sufrida por el colonizado, da una justificación de por qué la voz narrativa se expresa de forma despectiva. La razón de ello es que el negro está oprimido por la clase dominante y por su lenguaje oficial. Aquel que utilice el lenguaje popular o no oficial “no será aprobado ante la sociedad”, la misma que ha sido construida bajo el modelo del

colonizador. Toda la nueva población se expresa dentro de los parámetros que han sido establecidos por el colonizador. El negro, quien se encuentra en el peldaño más bajo de la sociedad, es como si no existiera: no tiene ni voz popular ni oficial. Rojas González le niega esa “arma” a la negra Angustias. Esto se puede interpretar de dos formas: la primera sería que su voz no tiene cabida dentro de la visión de mundo que transmite al lector (la supremacía de la raza blanca frente al afro-mexicano). La segunda sería que al darle voz a la población afro-mexicana, ésta reclamaría su lugar dentro de la sociedad.

El establecimiento de una voz “no oficial” evidenciaría cierta posibilidad de cambio en la hegemonía, pero no es posible en la medida en que nadie puede estar al mismo nivel que el español. En la novela de Rojas González el afro-mexicano no tiene voz, aspecto que puede ser interpretado como otra prueba de la imagen negativa que se proyecta y transmite en dicha obra. Si las palabras son civilización y poder, el afro-mexicano aquí no tienen ni una ni otra. Al no tener voz propia dentro de la historia, se puede plantear que lo que se conoce de la población negra es solamente la visión creada por la voz oficial, es decir por aquellos que sustentan el poder hegemónico. Si el afro-mexicano tuviera voz daría cuenta de su realidad de opresión lo que resultaría en un cuestionamiento histórico-social del abuso de poder, por el maltrato injustificado y dominación hacia la raza negra.

La opresión ocurre si se piensa en lo planteado por Fanon sobre la adquisición de una lengua: “A man who has a language consequently possess the world expressed and implied by that language... Mastery of language affords remarkable power” (18), cuando el afro-mexicano no sabe la lengua. El poder que se adquiere es la habilidad de comunicarse en más de un idioma, y poder denunciar el abuso sufrido y su autenticidad cultural. En *La negra Angustias* el negro no puede hablar, por no pertenecer al grupo que tiene el poder, tal como ha sido cuestionado en el ensayo “Can the Subaltern

Speak?” de Gayatri Chacravorty Spivak. Aquí se cuestiona el hecho de que el subalterno no puede hablar sin que ello implique una forma de autoridad, o más bien no puede hablar sin alterar las relaciones de poder y conocimiento, lo que pondría al subalterno a la par del europeo.

Los planteamientos anteriores han sido muestra de cómo se fueron creando representaciones discriminatorias contra el afro-mexicano para justificar el abuso cometido por los colonizadores. El problema de la imagen del negro y el prejuicio existieron y sus efectos pueden ser trascendentales. El problema no existiría si no fuera por una serie de actitudes racistas que, en ese entonces, crearon la idea en la cual ciertos miembros de la sociedad, por ejemplo el negro y el indígena, aparecen con características negativas. Es decir, se les atribuyeron ciertas características a los negros, creando una discriminación hacia ellos. Los efectos sociales del prejuicio racial de entonces fueron varios: en primer lugar, fue la causa de aislamiento, enajenación y falta de identidad o de una imagen auténtica del negro. En consecuencia, se generaron en el negro inseguridades y complejos que limitaban su integración a la sociedad¹⁰. En su afán por superar la etapa de conquista y de colonización, los negros mexicanos optaron por la negación de su herencia africana. Lo más importante para ellos se convirtió en ser descendientes de españoles o europeos, para no ser catalogados con deficiencia moral o inferioridad intelectual.

Con relación a la visión de los negros, Frantz Fanon indica que: “persons of African heritage tend to desolate and be ashamed of their own race not because of any intrinsic inferiority complex but as the result of being made inferior” (503). Esto refuerza una vez más que los afro-mexicanos no tenían acceso a la libre expresión de su identidad porque desde muy temprano les fue negada. El negro estaba totalmente marginado y como resultado eran muy pocas sus aspiraciones, metas y, por ende, sus

logros eran mínimos. Los parámetros sociales y de oportunidad de movilizarse dentro de la sociedad estaban a merced de los blancos.

La estructura fuertemente mestiza de la sociedad mexicana pone de manifiesto la Otredad del personaje principal. La propia Angustias es reflejo de dos razas. Aunque Rojas González dedica muy poco a las descripciones físicas del personaje de Angustias, doña Crescencia al inicio sí hace mención del color claro de su piel, pero a través de la lectura se destacan los rasgos de raza negra y de forma negativa. No es únicamente el aspecto de la violencia que expresa Angustias, sino que incluso el hecho de estereotipar a la mujer negra con mucha sexualidad, como se discutió previamente. Incluso antes, en el siglo XVIII, Europa ya percibía el cuerpo de la mujer africana como "a spectacular example of anatomical abnormality and sexual deviance" (Williams 53). Lo cual tiene como efecto final una representación equivocada no sólo del pasado colonial y del presente, sino que da cuenta del discurso de invisibilizar a la población afro-mexicana.

En la novela en cuestión hay cierta visibilidad de Angustia cuando ejerce el poder como coronela, sintiéndose orgullosa por su herencia negra. Sin embargo, se hace invisible cuando esa misma herencia negra es la causa del rechazo de Manolo: "En otras palabras, que mi unión con usted sería considerada por la gente más que como un matrimonio como una cruz absurda... ¿Me entiende usted?" (172). De esta manera, Angustias se ve como el fruto de la unión del blanco y el negro, lo que ocasiona que intente mejorar la raza. Es así como decide negar su identidad y centrarse en ese papel inmóvil para ella, pero de movilidad para su hijo al ser más blanco, si pensamos en lo planteado por Fanon. Al final, la descripción del hijo y el hecho de mantenerlo oculto demuestra que no hay un espacio para la población afro-mexicana en la novela de Rojas y que esto, según Arce, refleja la realidad mexicana.

...there has been an overwhelming invisibility that marks the place held by blacks in Mexico, bearing testament to the fact that Mexico as a nation, and

Mexicans as a populace, do not accept the substantive contributions of

Africans and their descendants, including the *mulata*, to their culture (1087).

Esto quiere decir que el hijo de Angustias no mejora la raza, más bien, con el personaje de Angustias y su descendencia se trata de invisibilizar las características auténticas de los afro-mexicanos.

Conclusión

En conclusión, en su novela *La negra Angustias*, Francisco Rojas González logra representar parte de la historia mexicana, teniendo como protagonista a una mujer negra. El hecho de que Angustias sea un ejemplo de compromiso político y un sujeto activo en la lucha contra el régimen político-social de ese entonces, le otorga cierta visibilidad. Por otro lado, Alain Touraine dice que parte de la invisibilidad de la población afro-mexicana actual en México se debe a que no existe un movimiento social de reivindicación de la identidad negra que pueda justificar un enfoque analítico en términos de movimiento social y político (1988). También, esa problemática quizá, según Paulette A. Ramsay, en su artículo “Cross-Cultural Poetics: Debating the Place of Afro-Mexican Poetry in the Context of Caribbean Literary and Cultural Aesthetics”, se deba a que no fue hasta los 80 y los 90 que la herencia afro-mexicana se convirtió en fuente de estudio para el gobierno (199). De igual forma, en el libro de Rojas González se justifica, en parte, el hecho de que Angustias no debe ser estudiada, cuando al final de la novela Angustias firma el documento de la pensión sin entender lo que está escrito allí (207). Aquí, dicho personaje que representa no sólo a la mujer negra sino a todo afro-mexicano, es presentado como un ser incapaz. Así también, *La negra Angustias*, presenta los diferentes niveles de poder del blanco y del negro, la violencia y los cambios sociales por la herencia colonial y patriarcal. Estas representaciones hacen hincapié en la invisibilidad casi justificada del afro-mexicano dentro y fuera del libro en cuestión.

Notas

¹ La novela fue escrita en 1944, pero la versión que se utilizará en el análisis es de 1984.

² En este análisis se entenderá por sociedad patriarcal lo definido por Sylvia Walby: “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” (21).

³ En un principio las soldaderas realizaban un rol muy típico para la mujer dentro de la Revolución Mexicana: eran quienes se ocupaban de las necesidades del soldado o esposo. También, se ha encontrado que eran mujeres que peleaban en el campo de batalla.

⁴ Guadalupe Ríos de la Torre, en el texto *Literatura y género: Santa, Los de Abajo y La Negra Angustias* (2001), la importancia del texto de Ríos de la Torre estriba en el hecho de examinar todos los aspectos de la obra que han sido problemáticos tales como la subversión del género femenino, la cultura, la Revolución Mexicana y la prostitución. Al igual que Ríos de la Torre, Janet J. Hampton destaca la supuesta subversión de género que es denunciada por *Angustias*, pero lo examina desde la crítica feminista, para concluir que *Angustias* efectivamente es una heroína con defectos, ya que el autor la representa como el otro: “Making her an exotic, anomalous-read black-transgressor who is punish severely” (31). También, Rachel Chang-Rodríguez en su artículo “Trayectoria y símbolo de una revolucionaria: La negra *Angustias* de Francisco Rojas González”, analiza cómo se acerca y aparta el personaje de estudio a los modelos tradicionales que debe desempeñar la mujer, pero por otra parte destaca cómo ella se convierte en símbolo de la Revolución. Chang-Rodríguez concluye con la similitud que se da entre la Revolución y *Angustias* al destacar que al final vence el *status quo*. Asimismo, existen otros críticos que han trabajado el texto de Rojas González por sus semejanzas y diferencias con otras novelas. Richard Jackson con su escrito “Notas sobre *Los de Abajo y La negra Angustias*”, manifiesta que existe una influencia de Mariano Azuela sobre la obra de *La negra Angustias*. Por otro lado, Christine Arce en “La negra *Angustias*: The mulata in Mexican Literature and Cinema” se acerca mucho a la representación de raza que destaca la obra en estudio al analizar las diferentes escenas de silencio en la película *La negra Angustias* con escenas del libro que demarcan la ausencia del aspecto racial negro en la cultura mexicana, pero plantea que esa noción de raza es diferente a la experiencia vivida en el Caribe. Arce plantea la hipótesis que desliga la noción de raza presentada en la novela a la del Caribe, mostrando así la irrelevancia de la misma para el nacionalismo mexicano.

⁵ Marcel Velásquez Castro en *Las máscaras de la representación* (2005) analiza la dinámica que se da entre literatura y el efecto sociocultural al indicar que: “La amplia mayoría de los estudios desde las ciencias

sociales no considera a la dimensión discursiva literaria como una fuente productora de imágenes que refractan y rigen la comprensión de la realidad; por ello no hay mayores referencias a la política de la representaciones de la cultura afroperuana. En contraparte desde los estudios literarios tampoco se integra la perspectiva socio-históricas ni se consideran las variables políticas” (40). Es importante recalcar que aunque el texto de Rojas González no es peruano tiene las mismas implicaciones a nivel literario.

⁶ En el presente ensayo se entenderá por raza como lo discute Ruth Hill en *Hierarchy, Commerce, and Fraud in Bourbon Spanish America* (2005), como un término de América poscolonial, “racial thinking” (197-204).

⁷ En el libro de Serge Gruzinski *La colonización de lo imaginario* (1991), se habla la idea de lo imaginario de la “realidad” colonial: “A decir verdad, las brechas que separaban los sistemas de representación o los sistemas de poder se derivaban de una separación más global, subyacente y latente, vinculada a la manera en que las sociedades enfrentadas se representaban, memorizaban y comunicaban lo que concebían como la realidad o mejor dicho su realidad” (186).

⁸ La idea de locura aquí es aplicada al tomar en cuenta lo planteado por Dolores Alcaide Ramírez en su artículo “I’m Hispanic, not Black”: Raza, locura y violencia en *Geographies of Home* de Loida Maritza Pérez citando a Phyllis Chesler, “for a women to be healthy she must ‘ajust’ to and accept the behavioral norms for her sex even though these kinds of behavior are generally regarded as less socially desirable [...] Female adolescents and adults run serious risks when they persist in ‘male’ activities” (68-9).

⁹ En esta investigación se entiende por enmascarado lo establecido por Octavio Paz en su libro *El Laberinto de la soledad* (1959) en el cual señala que el mexicano lleva una máscara. Mostrar su verdadero yo, representaría para el mexicano rajarse, lo cual no es “aceptado”. Si Angustias se presenta como la mujer típica mexicana no sería aceptada como coronela en el campo de batalla.

¹⁰ Para entender ese punto habría que considerar lo que propone Quince Duncan en “Pensamiento y práctica histórica del racismo en los estados nacionales”, al señalar el cambio de españoles netos a criollos, los cuales estaban protegidos por el sistema de castas para ser catalogados como españoles. En consecuencia, estos nuevos blancos, desarrollaron una eurofilia, lo que al mismo tiempo ocasionó una etnofobia que se entiende como el rechazo a la diversidad de etnias (Duncan 131).

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**(RE)TRADUÇÃO INTERCULTURAL DE LITERATURA
AFRODESCENDENTE E SEUS CONTEXTOS**

Introdução

Em pesquisa em Literatura Comparada, investigo obras da autora afro-americana Maya Angelou (1928-2014) e da escritora afro-brasileira Mãe Beata de Yemonjá (1931-). Respeitando as semelhanças e diferenças entre essas mulheres negras, postulo a possibilidade de se traduzir em leitura crítica textos e contextos que se aproximam e se distanciam culturalmente, em especial quando materializados em literatura afrodescendente. Apesar de a ancestralidade de ambas ser proveniente da África, a realidade de cada uma delas exige consideração quanto às suas especificidades, razão pela qual as formas culturais locais são comparadas com a devida atenção à sua história própria. Atenta-se para as imagens, mitos e tradições presentes em suas narrativas que, empregadas como armamento de luta cultural, possibilitam a superação dos limites impostos à sua subjetividade afrodescendente. Desta forma, o trabalho crítico articula encontros de escritas que ainda não foram cotejadas, ampliando a compreensão de espaços comparatistas nos estudos de literaturas contemporâneas.

No presente artigo, propõe-se o exercício experimental de tradução intercultural de textos e contextos dessas autoras afrodescendentes, a fim de enfatizar a necessidade de releituras políticas de termos significativos para as experiências de afirmação da negritude, especialmente por parte de sujeitos contemporâneos que produzem literatura na diáspora africana em consonância com os legados de seus ancestrais e com a formação de sua identidade em ambientes hostis.

Yemonjá (Beatriz Moreira Costa) cresce em uma das regiões de maior presença africana no Brasil. Seja porque a maioria de seus filhos possui ascendência genética africana (Silva *et al.*, 2010, 414), seja porque sua tradição oral é abundante (Fraga Filho, 2006, 63), seja porque a cidade portuária de Salvador (sua capital) é uma das localidades que receberam o mais expressivo contingente de escravizados (Myers, 1999, 302), o Recôncavo Baiano constitui um espaço privilegiado de formação cultural para alguém que viria a se tornar uma ialorixá, isto é, uma sacerdotisa do candomblé.

Tendo migrado para o estado do Rio de Janeiro em busca de melhores condições de vida, atualmente, Mãe Beata reside no bairro de Miguel Couto, na cidade de Nova Iguaçu, localizada na Baixada Fluminense, na região metropolitana da capital, logradouro também de seu terreiro, Ile Omiojuaro. Trata-se de uma localidade notória pela falta de serviços públicos básicos e pobreza de muitos de seus habitantes. Nos tempos coloniais, esta área era conhecida como Recôncavo da Guanabara, suprimindo a cidade do Rio de Janeiro com mercadorias provenientes de fazendas e engenhos movidos a mão de obra escrava (Bezerra, 2010).

Usada para denominar os dois principais contextos da autora afro-brasileira em tela, a palavra *recôncavo* é formada pela agregação do prefixo *re-* ao adjetivo *côncavo*. De procedência latina, o prefixo *re-* denota “movimento para trás, repetição, reciprocidade, *intensidade*” (Bechara, 2009, 367, grifo meu), emprestando nova significação ao radical *côncavo*, cuja etimologia remonta ao vocábulo latino *concauus*, resultado da junção do prefixo *con-* ao adjetivo *cavus*, que indica “cavado, côncavo, oco, profundo” (Faria, 1962, 171). Se como preverbo *con-*, tal como *cum*, designa “companhia, simultaneidade, reunião”, é certo também que “[p]or vezes, exprime apenas o aspecto modificado, designando o processo chegando a seu termo: acabamento, *intensidade*” (*ibidem*, 266, grifo meu). Logo, a palavra *recôncavo* não apenas mantém intensa a ideia de profundidade guardada na

imagem que a palavra latina *cavus* expressa (*côn-cavo*), mas também, mediante o prefixo *re-*, volta a comunicar intensidade na noção de cavidade profunda.

Assim, as paisagens em volta da Baía de Todos os Santos (Recôncavo Baiano) e Baía de Guanabara (Recôncavo da Guanabara) possuem uma profundidade intensa que a palavra *recôncavo* não deixa de comunicar. As cidades atlânticas de Salvador e Rio de Janeiro possuíam as principais baías para se aportar na costa brasileira, fazendo de seus recôncavos verdadeiros portais culturais. Tendo desembarcado em portos como carga humana, os africanos escravizados dispunham apenas de seus corpos para sobreviverem no hostil ambiente colonial brasileiro. Toda a materialidade de suas culturas precisou ser retraduzida por meio de ressonâncias e rememorações. Desta forma, sujeitos negros contaram a seus filhos narrativas que puderam ser lidas no que havia de África em seus gestos mais cotidianos, assim como em sua música, dança, drama, fala e mitos.

A propósito, as formas culturais produzidas por sujeitos negros diaspóricos já foram descritas como “stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal” (Gilroy, 1993, 3) por Paul Gilroy, que, com isso, fazia referência ao que compreende como “black Atlantic world”, ecoando Robert Farris Thompson, que cunhou o termo em seu célebre estudo sobre arte e filosofia de origem africana. Nas palavras de Thompson: “The rise, development, and achievement of Yoruba, Kongo, Fon, Mande, and Ejagham art and philosophy fused with new elements overseas, shaping and defining the black Atlantic visual tradition” (Thompson, 1984, xiv). A fusão de tradições africanas a novos elementos nas Américas produziu formas culturais que fariam surgir no mundo atlântico um verdadeiro mundo atlântico negro.

A história cultural do atlântico negro está repleta de encontros. Ao olhar as águas atlânticas do Caribe, “prefácio ao continente americano”, Édouard Glissant vê “um mar que difrata e leva à efervescência da diversidade”, não se tratando “apenas [de] um mar de trânsito e de passagens, mas é também um mar de encontros e de implicações” (Glissant, 2005, 17). Estes encontros ocorridos no

Caribe durante três séculos são encontros de elementos culturais provenientes de horizontes variados. Ao se imbricarem e se confundirem um no outro, estes elementos se crioulizam, dando à luz algo imprevisível e novo. A imprevisibilidade desta nova realidade crioula pode ser observada no Brasil, em costas caribenhas e no sul estadunidense, formando uma Neo-América que

vive a experiência real da crioulização através da escravidão, da opressão, do desapossamento perpetrados pelos diversos sistemas escravocratas, cuja abolição se estende por um longo período (mais ou menos de 1830 a 1868), e através desses desapossamentos, dessas opressões e desses crimes realiza uma verdadeira conversão do ‘ser’ (*ibidem*, 18).

Tal “conversão do ‘ser’” que desembarca nas Américas despojado de tudo, inclusive de sua língua africana, provoca o surgimento de um fenômeno novo. Afinal, por efeito das dificuldades de se conservar qualquer herança cultural específica, o africano deportado “criou algo imprevisível a partir unicamente dos poderes da memória, isto é, somente a partir dos pensamentos do rastro/resíduo, que lhe restavam [...]” (*ibidem*, 20). As linguagens crioulas bem como a composição de formas de arte como o jazz demonstram como rastros/resíduos de origem africana lançam os fundamentos de um novo sujeito. Trazido à força da África, este “migrante nu” constitui “a base do povoamento” do que Glissant denomina “circularidade fundamental”, característica do Novo Mundo. Por sua “irradiação” e “espiralidade”, tal circularidade, que se alastra em várias direções, se diferencia do caráter de “projeção em flecha” que distingue processos de colonização. (*ibidem*, 17)

Na leitura que realizo dos textos e contextos de Mãe Beata de Yemonjá, retraduzo a *circularité fondamentale* glissantiana como o que entendo se tratar de uma reconcavidade negra, à luz da história dos deslocamentos de tradições e

sujeitos africanos que pela geografia de recôncavos entraram no Brasil na condição de escravos. Quando se pensa em reconcavidade negra, nota-se que dois recôncavos se unem para formar uma só unidade cultural. Em outras palavras, quer na Bahia, quer no Rio de Janeiro, a negritude está na ordem do dia. Mãe Beata declara: “Eu costumo dizer que eu fui gestada na Bahia, no Recôncavo Baiano, e parida na Baixada Fluminense [antigo Recôncavo da Guanabara], em Nova Iguaçu” (Beata de Yemonjá, 2011). Verifica-se, nesta imagem descrita por Mãe Beata, uma formação cultural consolidada em territorialidades de gestação e parto. Se a afirmação da identidade negra é um processo em formação, a história de deslocamentos dos afrodescendentes exige constante tradução e retradução.

Apenas se pode falar em um contexto cultural denominado Recôncavo Negro se Salvador for sua capital. No mapeamento que J. Lorand Matory faz das capitais do mundo atlântico negro, ele assegura: “this trans-Atlantic [black] nation possesses no greater American metropolis than Salvador da Bahia, which one priestess famously called the ‘Black Rome’” (Matory, 2005, 40). A alcunha “Roma Negra”, primeiramente citada por Ruth Landes em obra publicada em 1947, tem procedência na fala de uma ialorixá soteropolitana: “Uma negra eminente havia mesmo chamado a cidade de ‘Roma Negra’” (Landes, 2002, 351). Apesar de Landes ter traduzido a expressão “Roma Negra” como *Negro Rome* em sua produção em língua inglesa, a ialorixá em destaque, Mãe Aninha Oba Biyi, na verdade, recorrera à expressão “Roma Africana” para ilustrar Salvador como o centro do candomblé (Pinho, 2004, 44). Nota-se que a tradução intercultural de um contexto em que a presença africana se faz viva à força da raça e religião afrodescendentes demanda um olhar atento à afirmação da identidade negra. Primeira capital do Brasil, a cidade que fora nomeada para homenagear a figura de Jesus como Salvador, instituição teológica máxima do cristianismo, é rebatizada na fala de uma sacerdotisa de uma religião historicamente perseguida pelo catolicismo. Na Bahia, a Roma é africana, ou africanizada, traduzindo

politicamente identidades de negros que não somente hibridizaram sua herança africana com a fé cristã como também criouliizaram suas tradições nas religiões afro-brasileiras. O gesto de se apropriar do título do centro de uma grande religião para se referir a uma cidade que é a mais importante metrópole do mundo atlântico negro se repete na expressão “Meca da Negritude”. Carregada de implicações políticas e identitárias, o epíteto se tornou referência cultural para afrodescendentes fora da Bahia:

Trata-se de um termo mais recente e que tem sido promovido principalmente por militantes negros e produtores culturais de outros estados do Brasil que consideram a Bahia a principal fonte de cultura africana do país. Pais e mães de santo de São Paulo e do Rio de Janeiro frequentemente vinculam a ancestralidade de seus terreiros, bem como a sua ‘feitura’ religiosa, a terreiros e ialorixás baianos. O mesmo acontece com grande número de academias de capoeira cujos mestres associam o seu aprendizado aos velhos capoeiristas baianos como forma de conferir legitimidade ao seu jogo. Da mesma maneira, os fundadores dos primeiros blocos afro têm emprestado seus conhecimentos de cultura afro-baiana através de serviços de consultoria a grupos culturais negros situados em outros estados do Brasil (*ibidem*, 44s).

Cunhados por pessoas de origem africana, termos como “Roma Africana/Negra” e “Meca da Negritude” revelam a força cultural irradiadora que Salvador (também tratada de Bahia por estrangeiros) possui no mundo atlântico negro, sendo “now the capital of African inspired religion in Brazil and a pilgrimage site for practitioners and scholars from the United States, the Caribbean,

Argentina, France and Nigeria itself” (Matory, 2005, 40s). Evidentemente, em matéria de turismo cultural, a região sempre corre o risco de ver sua rica cultura se tornar “a commodified commodity for public consumption” (Tillis, 2011, 4). Por outro lado, o deslocamento de afrodescendentes está relacionado ao processo de afirmação de sua identidade. A propósito, entre os estudiosos nigerianos interessados na cultura afro-brasileira, destaca-se Niyi Afolabi, distinto professor de origem iorubá, que atua nos Estados Unidos, o qual deu o seguinte depoimento no arremate de um artigo sobre o candomblé na cultura afro-brasileira:

In my teaching and research, I find myself constantly oscillating between Brazil and Africa, Siamese cultural spaces that have continued to be inseparable in my own experiential and professional life. Bahia is for me what Africa is to many dislocated Afro-Brazilians. It is my own Rome, my own Mecca. It is a diaspora in reverse, a place where my Yoruba culture is vibrant and fascinatingly preserved even after many centuries of dispersal and dispossession through the Middle Passage into the New World (Afolabi, 2005, 121).

Ao descrever a Bahia como “my own Rome, my own Mecca”, Afolabi ecoa o gesto político dos afro-brasileiros de retraduzirem a localidade como referência fundamental para sua negritude. A cultura iorubá africana sobrevive de modo vibrante na diáspora graças à luta de muitos descendentes de escravos que se negaram a abrir mão de sua herança africana. Com isso, tornaram-se verdadeiros “guerreiros” na produção de sua cultura.

The performer in this context is a warrior on stage and on the streets. The fine artist visualizes a world that may not be immediately feasible in reality, but he or she conjures it up through the stroke of the brush and

imagination, paying homage to the gods, and asking them to bring about change in a world that is resistant to change. Likewise, intellectual producers, writers and professors alike, are warriors who use the pen instead of spears and guns to combat the enemies of progress (Afolabi, 2009, 4).

Neste exército de guerreiros culturais, encontra-se Mãe Beata, que, mais nova, ao desejar ser iniciada na religião dos orixás, ouviu do próprio pai que “preferia que eu fosse uma prostituta, uma mulher da vida, uma mulher de *rendez-vous*, mas que não fosse de candomblé” (*apud* Costa, 2010, 71). Todavia, ela revela que jamais abandonou a luta pelo legado cultural africano ao dizer: “Minhas armas passaram a ser minha palavra, meu corpo e minha voz. Uma resistência que vem dos meus ancestrais, que lutavam mesmo em surdina, não se entregavam facilmente e preservaram na oralidade os nossos valores culturais e espirituais” (*ibidem*, 72). Quando finalmente se tornou uma filha dos orixás, a consciência militante negra desta guerreira cultural já estava formada: “Hoje, eu sou uma omorixá e uma lutadora de minha religião e de minha raça. Meu nome: Beata de Yemonjá” (Beata de Yemonjá, 2008, 122). Assim, nas narrativas de vida de uma ialorixá-escritora, o Recôncavo Baiano e o Recôncavo da Guanabara constituem um contexto afro-diaspórico único, em virtude de proporcionar a formação de uma identidade negra que se afirma em luta por sua herança cultural.

Do Recôncavo se chega a Stamps. Nascida em 1928, em Saint Louis, Missouri, Maya Angelou (Marguerite Annie Johnson) e seu irmão Bailey foram enviados por seus pais a Stamps, Arkansas, onde cresceram na companhia da avó e do tio. Nomeada em homenagem a um antigo colono da área, Hardy James Stamps, à luz da experiência de opressão sofrida pelos afro-americanos, a cidade guarda no seu nome um significado para além da designação de um lugar.

A origem mais remota da palavra *stamps* está no primitivo vocábulo *stampen*, um verbo do inglês antigo que denotava “to pound, crush”¹, e ainda “to pound in a mortar”², tratando-se de um cognato com o termo alermão *stampfen*, que indica “to stamp with the foot, beat, pound”. A noção de colocar o pé em cima de algo se mantém no atual uso da palavra *stamp* como verbo. Já o significado de “impress or mark (something) with a die” foi registrado primeiramente em 1560³. Assim, a palavra *stamp* possui sentidos⁴ em sua história que comunicam mensagens: quer como verbo, isto é, bater, esmagar, pisar, marcar, carimbar etc; quer como substantivo, ou seja, marca, selo, carimbo etc.

As acepções da palavra *stamp* abrem caminho para se discutir o ambiente cultural de Maya Angelou. Seus passos na cidade de Stamps foram definidos por marcas legadas por um passado de escravidão, em que pessoas de origem africana, marcadas na pele a ferro e fogo, eram submetidas a uma subvida através de violência física e psicológica. Abolida a condição de escravos, os afrodescendentes continuaram sob o jugo de um sistema social que os inferiorizava por meio de marcas que definem seu ser e não ser. Em uma cidade que preserva a memória do colonizador branco escravocrata em seu nome, o isolamento forçado dos negros se conservou de tal maneira que Angelou admite que quando criança, os brancos eram parte de outro mundo que não fazia parte de sua realidade: “I remember never believing that whites were really real” (Angelou, 2004, 24). Afinal, Stamps é signo de uma supremacia branca, que impõe não somente a marca do medo, mas também da hostilidade aos afro-americanos, como se lê:

In Stamps the segregation was so complete that most
Black children didn't really, absolutely know what
whites looked like. Other than that they were different,

¹ Ver vocábulo *stamp* em <<http://www.dictionary.com>>.

² Ver vocábulo *stamp* em <<http://www.etymonline.com>>.

³ Ver vocábulo *stamp* em <<http://www.dictionary.com>>.

⁴ É possível que o sobrenome Stamps também esteja historicamente relacionado com a cidade Etampes na Normandia. Ver <<http://www.surnamedb.com/Surname/stamps#ixzz3gvJQ9gzy>>.

to be dreaded, and in that dread was included the hostility of the powerless against the powerful, the poor against the rich, the worker against the worked for and the ragged against the well dressed (*idem*).

Contudo, a pequena Stamps também legou a Maya as marcas do senso de comunidade. Sua principal obra autobiográfica, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, não apenas narra suas experiências de vida do inesperado ponto de vista de uma mulher negra que crescera na segregada região sul dos EUA, mas também “describes the Southern Black community as one that nurtures its members and helps them to survive such an antagonistic environment” (McPherson, 1990, 35). A dedicatória de *Caged Bird* é destinada a seu filho Guy Johnson e “all the Strong Black Birds of Promise Who Defy Odds and Gods and Sing Their Songs” (Angelou, 2004, 3). Todos estes fortes pássaros negros representam uma comunidade afro-americana que sobrevive em luta, desafiando quaisquer adversidades em sua jornada de vida.

Uma das pessoas mais importantes para Angelou foi sua avó Annie Henderson, que lhe ensinou a sobreviver em um mundo no qual os negros eram vítimas de racismo. Em sua obra, lemos a história de três meninas brancas que tentaram humilhar sua avó com diferentes tipos de grosseria. Neste episódio, as crianças brancas usaram seu poder racial para tentar reduzir a dignidade da senhora Henderson a um nível infantil. No entanto, as jovens racistas perderam a batalha, posto que a vítima não reagiu à hostilidade sofrida. Pelo contrário, ela permaneceu cantando um hino em toda a cena e tratou com respeito as meninas brancas que tentavam lhe ofender. Depois que as ofensoras saíram, enquanto Maya chorava de raiva, sua avó estava feliz e seu rosto era como “a brown moon that shone on [her]” (Angelou, 2004, 29). Então a senhora Henderson cantou as linhas triunfantes de um hino: “Glory, glory, hallelujah, when I lay my burden down” (*ibidem*, 30).

PALARA

O fardo do racismo não duraria para sempre. A avó de Maya foi capaz de comemorar a sua vitória sobre o ódio racial. Ambas as palavras litúrgicas *glory* e *hallelujah* expressam a sua alegria de ter esta sobrecarga retirada de seus ombros. Observar tal felicidade faz Maya chegar à conclusão de que sua avó alcançou a condição de vencedora: “Whatever the contest had been out front, I knew Momma had won” (*idem*). A senhora Henderson usou uma arma defensiva que provou ser poderosa contra os agressivos instrumentos psicológicos de poder racista. McPherson lê esta arma escolhida como “the dignified course of silent endurance” (McPherson, 1990, 33). Em outras palavras, “[s]eeking to preserve her own integrity and to transcend the ugliness of their actions, Mrs. Henderson wins a psychological victory by using this weapon to transcend the limitations of her social world” (*idem*). Em suas orações, a avó de Angelou pede ajuda “to put a bridle on [her] tongue” (Angelou, 2004, 11), revelando que está se preparando para uma batalha diária contra os limites impostos à sua condição humana como mulher negra vivendo em Stamps.

Se havia um local de muita relevância para os negros na cidade, este era a loja da senhora Henderson, “the heart of black socializing in Stamps” (Lupton, 1998, 58). Nesta localidade, a comunidade afro-americana encontrava uma senhora sempre disposta a lhe ajudar, inclusive durante a Depressão, ocasião em que os recursos eram escassos. Assim, a comunidade negra cuidava de seus membros em todos os aspectos, de modo que as limitações impostas pelos brancos não impedissem que os negros encontrassem meios de sobreviver.

In Maya Angelou’s vision, both with respect to the Black community and to herself, what is kept consistently in focus is the attempt to preserve and celebrate humanity in the face of seemingly impossible odds. *Caged Bird* testifies to the amazing resilience of

Black Americans and their ability to cope with the inequities of American racism (McPherson, 1990, 37).

Tendo crescido neste contexto, Maya Angelou produziu uma literatura que narra histórias de luta e superação, conforme ela mesma afirma: “All my work is meant to say, ‘You may encounter many defeats but you must not be defeated.’ In fact, the encountering may be the very experience which creates the vitality and the power to endure” (*apud* Wall, 2014, 944). A experiência de dez anos vividos na comunidade negra no Arkansas formou uma identidade que se construiu mediante tal vitalidade e poder de superação.

Diante das lutas de uma comunidade negra que, apesar de ameaçada pelo racismo, cuidou de encontrar formas de sobrevivência, a presença negra em Stamps pode ser retraduzida interculturalmente como African Stamps. A respeito deste africanismo de Stamps, Angelou testifica:

[...] Nana Nketsia said that when he went to Tuskegee an anthropologist there told him that if he really wanted to see Africanisms, he should go to Stamps, Arkansas. And Nana had never known that I was from Stamps. [...] And especially at that time in Africa. Stamps was there with me, but it was so far away, although I kept feeling that I was in Stamps, which may be one of the reasons I could sense that I felt more at home in Ghana than I had ever felt in my life; I couldn't accept Stamps, but I could accept it in Ghana (*apud* McPherson, 1990, 152).

O tempo em que Angelou viveu em Gana fez com que a memória de Stamps se tornasse cada vez mais viva em seu imaginário. Com isso, os africanismos de Stamps puderam ser percebidos. Entretanto, não se trata apenas de externalidades, mas de uma herança identitária, pois, como ela afirma, “Stamps

were there with me”. Em *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes*, a autora narra seu deslocamento para a África e como são complexas as questões da identidade negra na diáspora. Tal viagem configurou um processo de confronto identitário entre o significado da África para uma pessoa afrodescendente e o seu contexto diaspórico: “It is not surprising that her sojourn in Africa helped her understand herself both as an African and as an [African] American” (Wall, 2014, 945). Ao decidir deixar Gana para retornar aos Estados Unidos, Angelou manifesta fortes laços com uma herança cultural que nunca deixou de ser africana:

Many years earlier I, or rather someone very like me and certainly related to me, had been taken from Africa by force. This second leave-taking would not be so onerous, for now I knew my people had never completely left Africa. We had sung it in our blues, shouted it in our gospel and danced the continent in our breakdowns. As we carried it to Philadelphia, Boston and Birmingham we had changed its color, modified its rhythms, yet it was Africa which rode in the bulges of our high calves, shook in our protruding behinds and crackled in our wide open laughter (Angelou, 2004, 1051).

Com isso, a presença africana no Novo Mundo é uma presença traduzida interculturalmente. Mesmo que as cores tenham sido mudadas e os ritmos tenham sido modificados, esta África retraduzida continua a ser cantada, gritada e dançada nos ambientes culturais de vivência dos afro-americanos. Destarte, quer pregadores, quer músicos, quer cantores de *blues*, os poetas negros – “Black known and unknown poets” (*ibidem*, 143) – sobreviveram e narraram seus contos africanos traduzidos desde os tempos da escravidão. As canções e danças de herança africana, sejam cantadas na igreja, sejam dançadas no *blues*, registram a história de

um povo que sobrevive em luta: “A stranger to the music could not have made a distinction between the songs sung a few minutes before [in church] and those being danced to in the gay house by the railroad tracks. All asked the same questions. How long, oh God? How long?” (*ibidem*, 104). Se é certo constatar que desde o tráfico de escravos, a arte africana cantada e dançada atravessou os mares (Thompson, 1984, ix), não se pode perder de vista que a sobrevivência cultural por meio de hibridismos e outras estratégias esteve sempre ligada a uma luta pela própria sobrevivência dos sujeitos negros cuja liberdade fora cerceada, donde se levanta uma mesma pergunta: “How long?”. Observando este *leitmotiv* negro também na produção literária de Angelou, busca-se na expressão African Stamps uma retradução de um contexto que se sobressai como um espaço de luta, sobrevivência e afirmação de identidade.

Tradução de leituras e culturas

Recôncavo e Stamps são palavras que traduzem contextos. Se, entretanto, o intuito for retraduzir contextos através de palavras carregadas de sentido e história, então, as palavras em questão podem ser relidas como, por exemplo, Recôncavo Negro e African Stamps. Quando se trata de refletir sobre palavras, sempre há espaço para questionamentos a respeito de sua própria leitura. Se perguntarmos até que ponto seria possível ler a acepção de uma palavra, inevitavelmente, moveríamos a discussão para o campo da tradução. Por sinal, a própria preocupação acerca da leitura de palavras conduz o filósofo estadunidense Stanley Cavell a um gesto tradutório:

[I]f we translate the idea of bringing words back
[Wittgenstein's idea] as *leading* them back,
shepherding them; which suggests not only that we
have to find them, to go to where they have wandered,
but that they will return only if we attract and

command them, which will require listening to them

(Cavell, 1989, 35, grifo do autor).

A imagem pintada por Cavell de “levar palavras de volta” e “pastoreá-las” está associada ao gesto de “escutar” o que as palavras têm a dizer. Tal escuta nada mais é do que tradução: “But the translation is only a little better, because the behavior of words is not something separate from our lives, those of us who are native to them, in mastery of them. The lives themselves have to return” (*idem*).

Se, como se pode aferir, a tradução compreende tanto o gesto de “trazer de volta” (“*leading them back*”) palavras distantes como também de “retornar” as “vidas” de quem as lê (“The lives themselves have to return”), torna-se possível, então, evocar novamente uma autora que se distingue por oferecer aos seus leitores uma incursão a uma “distant land”, segundo descrição de Henry Thoreau. À imagem de uma “distant land” – descrita por Thoreau ao afirmar que se cada escritor “has lived sincerely, it must have been a distant land to me” –, Dolly McPherson recorre para introduzir a obra autobiográfica de Maya Angelou, cujo mundo “is that ‘distant land’ in which the retrospective imagination engages experience with its historical actualities and fictive possibilities” (McPherson, 1990, 8).

Em uma das ocasiões em que Angelou comenta a respeito de sua experiência de aproximadamente cinco anos de mudez voluntária como uma das consequências do estupro que sofrera na infância, a autora afro-americana revela que a ausência de fala não a impediu de recorrer à linguagem. Se ela confessa que “there were times when I would talk”, não há memória de outro interlocutor que não fosse seu irmão: “I can’t remember talking to any particular person other than Bailey” (*apud* McPherson, 1990, 149). Na verdade, a fim de tentar reconstituir a lembrança de quando a jovem Maya quebrava o silêncio, Angelou cita a revista *Liberty*, na qual havia contos, embora não saiba precisar se os lia em voz alta: “I don’t know whether I read them aloud to myself, but I keep thinking of *Liberty*, in particular which was my favorite” (*ibidem*, 150). Nota-se ainda que a leitura nunca

perdeu sua sonoridade nos ouvidos da criança, pelo contrário, a linguagem se manteve viva por meio da audição, conforme o seu relato: “I don’t know; but probably because I didn’t talk, the language was so important, so important. And I formed a habit of listening, a habit which is still with me today” (*idem*).

Ora, é exatamente deste “hábito de escutar” que um leitor lança mão com o intuito de porventura percorrer o caminho entre seu mundo e aquela “distant land” de quem escreve. Novamente, fala-se de tradução. As experiências pessoais de Maya Angelou e Mãe Beata de Yemonjá procuram transmitir sabedoria aos leitores, mantendo a arte viva com suas vidas. Isto é o que está assinalado no subtítulo bicéfalo de *Caroço de dendê*, de Mãe Beata: “a sabedoria dos terreiros: como ialorixás e babalorixás passam seus conhecimentos a seus filhos”. A partir do verbo *passar*, alcança-se outras ideias em movimento, expressas em palavras como *passado*, *passagem*, *passos*. Angelou, ao ser perguntada se é uma pessoa sábia, responde: “I’m en route. I am certainly on the road.” (Angelou, 2000) A sabedoria se desnuda, pois, em imagens a serem passadas, quando se está a caminho, na estrada. Por sinal, já na raiz latina da palavra *tradução* encontra-se a noção de “conduzir”, semelhante ao termo grego *metaphorein*, “que envolve o sentido etimológico de ‘carregar’, ou seja, levar uma ideia ou relação de um campo de referência para outro” (Tymoczko, 2013, 128). Pode-se, logo, concluir que mulheres negras que carregam, conduzem, passam e transmitem ideias/experiências/sabedoria a caminho não se detêm a uma localidade, mas estão em encruzilhadas, produzindo narrativas.

Sendo parte fundamental da experiência humana, a tradução é o meio através do qual ocorre a comunicação. Paul Ricoeur (2011, 33) já observou que o ato de traduzir pode ser entendido de duas maneiras, a saber, a) a tradução no sentido estrito, que significa transferir uma mensagem verbal de uma língua em uma outra; e b) a tradução no sentido amplo, que corresponde à ação de interpretar todo conjunto significativo dentro da mesma comunidade linguística. A condição

humana de acesso limitado ao outro estimula a descoberta de possíveis trocas nas fronteiras entre línguas, culturas e palavras. Dada a complexidade da língua, expressar-se inteligivelmente é essencial quando se ocupa o lugar de falante, enquanto que, como ouvinte, busca-se compreender o discurso de alguém. Por isso, a língua está fortemente vinculada à tradução, que por sua vez é parte do discurso, ou o próprio discurso.

Havendo discurso, há também contexto(s). Afinal, ambas a fala e a audição acontecem a partir de determinado lugar e momento histórico. Em uma frase que Kwaku A. Gyasi (1999, 75) toma por empréstimo de Roland Barthes, lê-se que “a linguagem nunca é inocente”, principalmente porque “as instituições sociais, políticas e culturais são refletidas na linguagem.” Com isso, argumenta-se que a linguagem está relacionada tanto ao contexto do falante como à maneira por meio da qual se reage a este contexto com base nas experiências de vida. Por possibilitar vivências, a fala não se restringe a um processo meramente comunicativo, mas é um “ato ético” *per se*, como pondera Henri Meschonnic (2008, 88): “Há então que se pensar que falar é um ato ético e que as línguas não são, em primeiro lugar, meios de comunicação, mas, sobretudo, meios e maneiras de viver.”

Neste sentido, um paradigma cultural amplo é necessário para se efetuar o que se pode denominar tradução intercultural. Tal paradigma busca “considerar a cultura em sentido amplo, antropológico, de passar de uma reflexão centrada sobre o vínculo cultura-nação para uma abordagem da cultura dos grupos sociais” (Mattelart & Neveu, 2006, 13s). Desta forma, a tradução assume os problemas da representação do outro por meio da língua, um exercício que pode apresentar novas possibilidades de interpretação, pois interfere no próprio processo de leitura de culturas.

Tradução experimental de literatura afro-brasileira

Em experimentos de tradução de textos literários afro-brasileiros de lavra de Mãe Beata de Yemonjá para a língua inglesa, levados a cabo pelo autor do presente artigo, a literatura exigiu uma seriedade para além dos aspectos formais do texto, bem como um abandono da dissociação – reconhecida como “falaciosa” (Coutinho, 2011, 8) – entre o texto e o contexto. A tradução revela, pois, o quanto a cultura problematiza as áreas do saber, reivindicando sempre a interdisciplinaridade. Afinal, “a tradução, tal como a literatura comparada, nos lembra vigorosamente das alteridades que falam através de qualquer texto” (Bermann, 2009, 443). Ao falarem, as alteridades problematizam concepções e estereótipos culturais que podem formar determinadas leituras, incluindo a leitura de quem traduz. Como já notou Maria Aparecida Andrade Salgueiro, “pesquisas e estudos das últimas décadas têm mostrado que a tradução não é apenas um processo interlingual, mas fundamentalmente, uma atividade intercultural” (Salgueiro, 2010, 98). No caso específico da tradução de obras afro-brasileiras para a língua inglesa, o gesto tradutório se localiza em uma encruzilhada de culturas que influenciam o processo de afirmação da identidade negra em contextos expressivos da diáspora africana, especialmente, Brasil e Estados Unidos.

Um exemplo da demanda de uma perspectiva interdisciplinar na tradução está em um conto da ialorixá Mãe Beata de Yemonjá, intitulado “O samba na casa de Exu”, cuja versão traduzida para o inglês é apresentada ao final deste artigo. Verter este conto para a língua inglesa aproximou a tradução dos estudos culturais. Tratou-se, na verdade, de tradução intercultural, para além da problemática intralingual e interlingual, pois ao tradutor coube a tarefa de ser conduzido pelas próprias imagens culturais apresentadas pela literatura em questão.

De início, a pergunta que se faz é: Como traduzir o nome Exu, partindo do contexto de uma cultura cujo domínio católico historicamente associou este nome à imagem judaico-cristã do diabo? Nota-se que esta é uma pergunta essencialmente

cultural, pois questiona os desdobramentos de narrativas sociais estereotipadas a respeito de uma divindade iorubá em diferentes momentos históricos. Reginaldo Prandi (2005, 97) detalha que “[n]as décadas de 1930 e 1940, pelo menos, a identificação de Exu com o diabo não era nada sutil, e ser filho de Exu era realmente um grande problema, que devia ser ritualmente contornado nos atos de iniciação.” No processo de cristianização dos orixás, a condição de diabo foi imposta a Exu pela visão maniqueísta do catolicismo a respeito do bem e do mal, estereótipo mantido no imaginário evangélico emergente. Todavia, quando se trata de pesquisa em estudos culturais, tudo “depende das perguntas que são levantadas, e as perguntas dependem do seu contexto” (Nelson *et al.*, 1992, 2). Sem a pretensão de responder definitivamente àquela pergunta inicial, mas também sem abandonar a necessidade de reflexão que tal questionamento levanta no ato tradutório de culturas, o contexto exige um movimento em direção à literatura, deixando que as palavras se comuniquem e se traduzam na própria leitura.

Na literalidade do texto fonte, encontra-se uma imagem cultural peculiar de Exu pintada por Mãe Beata de Yemonjá (2008, 99): “Exu não gosta de ver ninguém em paz, nem muito bem e feliz. Para a pessoa adquirir tudo isso tem que fazer um acordo com ele, senão nada vai bem.” Exu surge, então, como uma figura mitológica de quem corrige o esquecimento das tradições. O orixá é assim descrito também em outro conto de Mãe Beata, “Exu e os dois irmãos”, no qual o personagem Exu se revela indignado com dois negros que deixam suas raízes e “só vão rezar”. Ele questiona: “Será que eles acham que os mitos dos nossos ancestrais não vão lhes ajudar e não têm força?” (*idem*). Decidido a ensinar uma lição aos dois irmãos, que haviam plantado no dia de São José para colher no dia de São João, Exu troca as sementes de lugar, provocando uma contenda fraterna. Ao final do conto, o orixá protagonista se revela:

– (...) Eu sou Exu. Eu quis mostrar para vocês dois que os mitos das suas raízes, do país de que vocês

chegaram até aqui, têm os mesmos valores que os outros, e talvez até mais, pois são milenares. Como vocês acham que os outros, não os da sua cultura, podem ter mais força? (Beata de Yemonjá, 2008, 100).

A imagem de Exu como protetor da cultura e das tradições afro-brasileiras manifesta apenas uma entre as várias possíveis descrições desta complexa figura. Pertencente a uma narrativa mais ampla da mitologia iorubá, este curioso ícone do trapaceiro (*trickster*)⁵ divino tem representações diaspóricas em países como Nigéria, Benim, Brasil, Cuba, Haiti e Estados Unidos. As imagens culturais narram uma tradição de uma personagem mutável. Com várias qualidades, mas sem a predominância de nenhuma delas, como observa o crítico afro-americano Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1989, 6),

linguisticamente, Exu é a cópula suprema, conectando a verdade e o entendimento, o sagrado e o profano, o texto e a interpretação, a palavra (como uma forma do verbo ser/estar) que liga um sujeito ao seu predicado. Ele conecta a gramática da adivinhação às suas estruturas retóricas.

A complexidade desta narrativa se mantém nas mãos de Mãe Beata. Seu conto “Exu e os dois irmãos” transparece como uma das possíveis leituras e releituras do mito “Os dois amigos”, que, segundo Gates, se trata de “uma das narrativas canônicas que sobreviveram à Passagem do Meio (*Middle Passage*)⁶ e é tão familiar às culturas iorubás do Brasil e de Cuba como o é na Nigéria.” (*ibidem*, 32)

Na Nigéria, esta figura é chamada de Esu-Elegbara. Já entre os Fon no Benin, o orixá é tido como Legba. Em Cuba, seu nome é Echu-Elegua. Papa Legba

⁵ Para uma introdução ao termo *trickster*, consultar o verbete no *Dicionário de figuras e mitos literários das Américas* (Bernd, 2007, 641-647).

⁶ Trata-se da rota comercial triangular por meio da qual milhões de pessoas oriundas da África foram enviadas para as Américas, como parte do comércio de escravos no Atlântico.

(pronuncia-se La-Bas) é como se denomina esta divindade no Haiti e nos Estados Unidos.

Na tradução do conto “O samba na casa de Exu” para o inglês ora apresentada, mantém-se a representação do nome como está na versão local. Com isso, respeita-se a narrativa da autora, que atribui significado a esta figura mitológica. Apesar da preferência de Gates pela nomenclatura Esu-Elegbara, na tradução do conto de Mãe Beata para o inglês, lança-se mão da possível variação Exu para manter o personagem identificado com sua raiz cultural afro-brasileira.

Partindo de um contexto que hostiliza tais tradições culturais, percorre-se o caminho da autora, que, já no subtítulo do seu livro de contos, define bem sua missão: “como ialorixás e babalorixás passam conhecimento a seus filhos” (Beata de Yemonjá, 2008). Mesmo dominando o iorubá liturgicamente, o suficiente para fazer uso de vários termos deste idioma em seus escritos – como cabe a uma ialorixá –, Mãe Beata não quis recorrer à grafia iorubana Èsù para se referir a tal divindade. Este gesto pode estar para além de fortuito, quando se interpreta que a versão aportuguesada mantém a divindade dentro de um contexto, embora a narrativa deste orixá se mova e esteja presente em todo o Atlântico negro, ou diáspora africana. A preocupação primordial é manter toda esta problemática cultural na tradução.

“O samba na casa de Exu” notavelmente é um conto que Mãe Beata dedica à sua Mãe do Carmo. Nesta narrativa, lê-se sobre uma mulher que gostava tanto de sambar que se esquecia da casa, dos filhos e do marido: “Pegava uma garrafa de cachaça e se mandava, não podia ouvir o barulho da viola ‘tim... tim... tim...’, e do pandeiro ‘bakatum... bakatum... bakatum...’” (*ibidem*, 27).

Ao traduzir este trecho para o inglês, a cachaça não deixou de ser cachaça, mas recebeu uma nota de rodapé explicativa: *It is a Brazilian alcoholic drink distilled from sugarcane*. Não se trata apenas de mero detalhe técnico. Tal bebida é

um elemento cultural afro-brasileiro que, no conto, catalisa mudanças na personagem, substituindo, pois, o vinho nas celebrações desta figura dionisiaca.

A onomatopeia usada por Mãe Beata reverbera a própria língua iorubá, sobretudo porque, neste idioma, há uma preocupação com o som e o tom na comunicação. O “tim... tim... tim...” da viola e o “bakatum... bakatum... bakatum...” do pandeiro se afinam aos ouvidos afro-brasileiros. Obviamente, há uma tentativa de se conservar tal efeito sonoro na tradução com o uso do gerúndio em *the thrumming of the guitar* e *the clashing of the tambourines*.

Ao verter o conto em tela para a língua inglesa, as expressões iorubás *Agô* e *Agô yá* são conservadas, novamente empregando a nota de rodapé para elucidar que *agô* é um pedido de permissão para entrar, sair passar, etc; e *agô yá* é o mesmo que licença concedida.

Ler a literatura de Mãe Beata é se deixar levar por um caminho repleto de palavras deste idioma africano. Trata-se de uma língua tonal, isto é, que não considera apenas o som, mas também o tom das palavras. A palavra iorubana guarda seu saber musicalmente⁷, possuindo acentuações grave, média e aguda associadas às notas musicais (Napoleão, 2011, 5). Por não possuir registro escrito até o século XIX, a tradição oral manteve sua musicalidade. Mãe Beata de Yemonjá conta como herdou esta arte de cultivar a fala:

Todo mundo sabe que o forte das culturas africanas – sim, porque são muitas Áfricas – é a transmissão oral, e assim foi desde os tempos mais remotos. Uma das pessoas mais importantes, talvez a mais importante depois do soberano em qualquer reino, era o *griot*, aquele que narrava o rigor das batalhas, a fartura da colheita, os embates amorosos. Ele era a voz que fazia

⁷ Aos tons alto, médio e baixo das sílabas da língua iorubá correspondem, respectivamente, as notas musicais mi, ré e dó. (Napoleão, 2011, 5; Beniste, 2011, 11)

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história. [...] Escrevendo meus livros, trato de documentar pelo menos um pouco da nossa trajetória que vem passando de boca em boca desde os navios negreiros (*apud* Costa, 2010, 126).

Como ambulante, o *griot* personifica a presença da poesia e da música em todos os lugares justamente por não ter um lugar fixo. Em navios negreiros, a leitura aconteceria no não lugar de uma tradição oral já sedimentada na dinâmica deste cronista que também se articulava no universo mágico-religioso. Este contar histórias em constante deslocamento traduz, portanto, a arte da transmissão oral.

Aqui Mãe Beata se revela como uma tradutora de cultura. Assumindo o não lugar de um *griot*, esta autora tem a liberdade criativa de se deslocar no caminho das palavras para contar suas histórias. Disposta a documentar trajetória, em sua escrita, ela resgata o sentido da palavra latina *documentum*, que vem do verbo *docere*, ou seja, “ensinar”. Se cada conto é uma lição, as palavras possuem saberes a serem aprendidos. Contar para Mãe Beata é embarcar nesta trajetória de saberes. Seu gesto de documentar trajetórias é um gesto tradutório. Desta forma, a cultura é uma verdadeira estratégia de sobrevivência, como afirma Homi K. Bhabha (2010, 241):

A cultura como estratégia de sobrevivência é tanto transnacional como tradutória. Ela é transnacional porque os discursos pós-coloniais contemporâneos estão enraizados em histórias específicas de deslocamento cultural [...]. A cultura é tradutória porque essas histórias espaciais de deslocamento [...] tornam a questão de como a cultura significa, ou o que é significado por cultura, um assunto bastante complexo.

Sendo a escrita narrativa de Mãe Beata uma estratégia de sobrevivência cultural das tradições afro-brasileiras, ela é transnacional e tradutória. É transnacional precisamente porque figuras e imagens como a de Exu se deslocam culturalmente em vários contextos da diáspora africana. É tradutória pelos desafios que seu texto e contexto apresentam no ato de leitura.

A tradução experimental de textos de Mãe Beata constitui, portanto, uma inevitável tentativa de deixar texto e contexto se traduzirem, de se comunicarem enquanto discursos. Tal gesto revela a complexidade das questões culturais, fazendo da tradução um exercício de leitura e interpretação de culturas.

Empregar interdisciplinaridade nos estudos literários permite que texto e contexto se traduzam em diferentes línguas. Para além dos aspectos formais e técnicos, as imagens culturais querem se traduzir no próprio processo de leitura. Vertê-las para outra língua, como o inglês, reforça a conclusão de que a cultura problematiza as áreas do saber, reivindicando sempre a necessária interdisciplinaridade ao ser analisada.

Conclusão

Assumindo lentes de leitura que não privilegiam nenhuma abordagem além da interdisciplinar, a tradução intercultural aproxima culturas, não fugindo ou resolvendo de modo apressado os problemas da representação do outro. Cabe ao tradutor a tarefa de articular e rearticular imagens, palavras, sons e gestos na arena de textos e contextos, jamais considerando definitivo e findável seu trabalho.

Neste provisório exercício de comunicação, talvez se possa descobrir que, quando se trata de traduzir culturas, a figura de um *trickster* – como é entendida a figura de Exu, como “responsável pelo movimento, transporte, intercâmbio e comunicação” (Napoleão, 2011, 75) – venha a calhar. É possível que, em momento oportuno, o tradutor seja convencido de que a intraduzibilidade queira ser preservada no processo de sobrevivência de culturas, sobretudo no que tange a contextos da diáspora africana no Novo Mundo. A seguinte leitura de um *oriki*

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(saudação) a Exu revela o cuidado que palavras, movimentos e enunciados demandam em um processo de tradução e retradução. Desloca-se, assim, a epígrafe para o fim, após o qual o texto fonte e a tradução de um dos contos de Mãe Beata de Yemonjá são ofertados:

*Esu, do not undo me,
Do not falsify the words of my mouth,
Do not misguide the movements of my feet.
You who translates yesterday's words
Into novel utterances,
Do not undo me,
I bear you sacrifices.*

(Ayodele Ogundipe *apud* Gates, 1989, 35)

Exu, não me desfça,
Não falsifique as palavras da minha boca,
Não desencaminhe os movimentos dos meus pés.
Você que traduz as palavras de ontem
Em novos enunciados,
Não me desfça,
Presto-lhe sacrifício.
(Tradução nossa)

O samba na casa de Exu* (Mãe Beata de Yemonjá)

** Conto dedicado à minha Mãe do Carmo*

Uma mulher gostava muito de sambar. Não tinha um dia em que ela não procurasse um samba ou festa para ir. Não tomava conta da casa, dos filhos, nem do marido. Pegava uma garrafa de cachaça e se mandava, não podia ouvir o barulho

da viola “tim... tim... tim...”, e do pandeiro “bakatum... bakatum... bakatum...”. A mulher já era conhecida de todos, e o marido dela vivia dizendo:

– Mulher... Deixa essa vida. Um dia você vai se dar mal!

– O samba nasceu comigo, não é você que vai fazer eu deixar meu samba com Deus e o Diabo – respondia ela.

Assim chegou Sexta-Feira da Paixão. Antigamente, esse era um dia de grande respeito. Ela ficou de dentro para fora da casa, inquieta, e o marido só olhando. Era quase meia-noite, e ela disse:

– Hoje eu sambo nem que seja com Exu! Que troço besta acreditar em dia santificado.

Ela foi se deitar contrariada e começou a ouvir o som da viola e do pandeiro. Ela se levantou, pé ante pé, e saiu, pensando: “Está vendo, tem sempre um que não acredita nessas coisas.” Ela entrou em beco e saiu de beco, e chegou ao fim de uma rua, numa casa aberta, onde o samba estava comendo. Ela entrou.

– Agô? Licença? – pediu ela.

– Agô yá! – responderam todos.

No canto, tinha um rapazola de chapéu panamá, roupa de linho bem engomada, que a espiava muito. Ela entrou na roda e sambou, dizendo:

– Você aí, o que está esperando? Não samba? Estou esperando você dar umbigada. Embora a casa não seja sua, venha sambar comigo.

Ele respondeu:

– E quem lhe disse que a casa não é minha? Você não disse que hoje você sambava, nem que fosse com Exu?

Ele começou a sambar e deu um estouro bem no meio do samba e sumiu. A mulher caiu ali mesmo, desmaiada. De manhã o marido não achou a mulher na cama e saiu à sua procura. Ele achou a mulher caída numa encruzilhada, falando bobagens. Ela nunca mais ficou perfeita nem pôde mais sambar.

Dancing samba at Exu's house* (Mãe Beata de Yemonjá)

* This short story is dedicated to my mother Do Carmo

There was a woman who was really fond of dancing samba. There was not a day she would not look for a samba performance or a party to go to. She did not take care of her house, children, or husband. She would pick up a bottle of *cachaça*⁸ and go away when she heard the thrumming of the guitar and the clashing of the tambourines. Everyone knew this woman, and her husband used to say:

– Woman, leave this life. One day you'll be in trouble!

– Samba was born with me, you're not the one who's gonna make me leave my samba with God and Devil – replied she.

Then Holy Friday came. Formerly, it had been a highly respected day. She was wandering restlessly around the house, and her husband was just looking at her. It was almost midnight when she said:

– You know what? Today I'll dance samba even if it has to be with Exu! What a stupid thing to believe in holy days!

She went to sleep upset but she started hearing the sound of the guitar and the tambourine. She stood up slowly and left thinking: "You see, there's always someone who doesn't believe these things." She entered and exited the alleys, and she got the end of the street, at some open house, where samba was being played. She went in.

– *Agô?*⁹ Excuse me. – asked she.

– *Agô yá!*¹⁰ – replied everyone.

⁸ It is a Brazilian alcoholic drink distilled from sugarcane.

⁹ In Yoruba, *agô* is a request for permission to enter, exit, pass, etc.

¹⁰ *Agô yá* means that someone was allowed to enter, exit, pass, etc.

In the corner, there was a young man wearing panama and well-ironed linen clothes, and he peeked at her a lot. She entered the circle and danced samba saying:

– Hey, dude, what are you waiting for? Don't you dance samba? I'm waiting for your cue. Although the house isn't yours, come to dance with me.

He replied:

– And who told you the house isn't mine? Haven't you said today you'd dance samba even if it were with Exu?

He began to dance, burst in the middle of the samba and disappeared. She fell unconscious right there. In the morning, her husband was not able to find her in bed and went out in order to look for her. He found the woman lying down on the crossroads, talking nonsense. She was never perfect or able to dance samba anymore.

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Brother Mug: The Carmelite Revolutionary in Brazilian Culture

Introduction

No religious figure has marked Brazil as much as *Frei Caneca* (Brother Mug), the *Frei* having been depicted by Brazilian playwrights and painters. Small restaurants, bars, shopping malls, streets and bakeries carry his name. Yet, very little has been written about this early nineteenth century journalist and political activist.

In this article, I begin with a historical overview of Caneca's life and works. Then, I familiarize the reader with cultural production regarding Brother Mug in Brazil. The objective is to argue that the figure of Brother Mug has exercised an important influence over artistic expression, serving as an inspiration to Brazilian authors and painters. In fact, I argue that Brother Mug has been transformed into a symbol of the ideal of "freedom" in the country, a malleable concept capable of multiple interpretations.

Who was Brother Mug?

In 1822, the Portuguese-born prince-regent Dom Pedro of the House of Braganza declared Brazil an independent kingdom from Portugal. Dom Pedro's reasons for declaring Brazil a separate country are still largely unknown but he and then his son

seated. The monarch soon manifested his belief in his right to appoint the governors of each state.¹

The dissolution of the Assembly followed shortly thereafter. Brazilians were divided into a *federalista* (federalist) camp in favor of greater regional autonomy and a *unitario* (unitarian) camp which believed in a strong central authority. More specifically, *federalista* movements in demanded the right to elect state governors. The dissolution of the Constitutional Assembly and arrests of activists who argued for limits on the powers of the government in Rio worked to incite federalists to revolt.

In the state of Pernambuco in northeastern Brazil, the *unitario* landlords who controlled the state were overthrown in December of 1823 by a *federalista* faction in favor of more autonomy. The revolt began shortly after news reached Pernambuco in December of 1823 that the monarch had tempestuously dismissed the Constitutional Assembly in November of 1823 after discovering that limits would be placed on his authority - in fact, anger in Pernambuco led to the leader of the *federalistas* taking over as governor.² Brother Mug was a Carmelite friar and journalist who supported the state autonomy faction in Pernambuco.

Who was *Frei Caneca* as far as his personal life? Brother Mug was a redhead who was a mixture of Portuguese immigrants from the cities of Elvas and Porto and less documented heritages, most likely indigenous or African. He was born Joaquim do Amor Divino Rabelo and raised in the Fora de Portas neighborhood in the city of Recife in the state of Pernambuco, and graduated from the Seminary of Olinda. He became a Carmelite on the 8th of October of 1796.³ His father was a cooper and Brother Mug adopted the label *Caneca* (mug) as a tribute to his family's business. He was entrusted with teaching rhetoric and geometry in 1803 and wrote a grammar, a

¹ Mello, *A outra independência*, 147, 151.

² *Ibid.*, 157-159, 161.

³ Montenegro, *O liberalismo radical*, 25-27; Morel, *Frei Caneca*, 20, 22-23, 30.

guide to eloquent prose, and a stylistic guide.⁴ After the dismissal of the Constitutional Assembly by Dom Pedro, Frei Caneca began publishing the *Typhis Pernambucano* (Tiphys of Pernambuco), a newspaper he named after the helmsman of the Argos in Greek mythology.

In the *Typhis*, Caneca argued that Brazil required a weak political center that could unite the states in a loose confederation. He claimed this form of confederation would be the salvation of the entire nation, not just Pernambuco.⁵ Historically, other South American nations did form confederations such as the *Provincias Unidas de Súdamerica* (United Provinces of South America) in the southwestern part of the continent. As such, Caneca's support for a confederation structure fit into a general pattern of disaggregation in the region. Caneca believed that Brazil possessed a democratic spirit and required a constitution protecting civil liberties.⁶ He opposed granting Rio the following powers: levying taxes on citizens, appointing local officials, establishing a national military force, and chartering a national bank. Caneca claimed he was an advocate for those who could not read or write, insinuating that he expected

⁴ Brito, *A gloriosa sotaina*, 30, 46-47, 49-51, 52, 68-69.

⁵ Caneca, *Frei Joaquim*, 335, 360. Caneca writes that "não havendo um centro comum a que se refiram todas as vontades, e donde partam as direções das marchas seguras, ficavam as províncias isoladas, tomando cada uma seu rumo diferente, e por isso aptas a serem subjugadas, uma após outra, vindo rematar o negócio na escravidão de todas" ("not having a common center to which all desires are referred, and from which would originate defined marching orders, all provinces would remain isolated, each taking its own path, and for this reason apt to be subjugated, one after another, resulting in the slavery of them all"). He also wrote, on the 19th of February of 1824, that "dadas as mãos entre nós, e com as províncias nossas limítrofes, na firme esperança de que...seremos a salvação dos nossos brasileiros," "[s]eremos beneméritos da pátria, com um inauferível direito à sua gratidão..." ("us holding hands, and with our neighboring provinces, in the firm hope that we will be the salvation of our Brazilians", "we will be meritorious of the fatherland, with an undeniable claim on its gratitude").

⁶ Ibid., 448, 452, 456. Caneca informs us that an opposition paper "está em contínuas declamações contra o sistema democrático...nada obstante ter à vista os Estados Unidos na América do Norte, os novos governos da do sul, Cantões Suíços" ("is in continual denunciations against the democratic system...notwithstanding having in sight the United States of North America, the new governments of South America, the Swiss Cantons"). He also writes that "se conhece que a tendência do Brasil é para o governo democrático; a qual seria sopitada, se em câmbio se lhe desse o regime constitucional representativo; que esse espírito é indomável, nos mostra a história..." ("it is known that the tendency of Brazil is for democratic government; which would be silenced if in exchange was given a constitutional representative regime; that this spirit is unconquerable, history shows us"). Caneca makes his demands clearer on the 3rd of June 1824 writing that "nós queremos uma constituição que affiance e sustente a nossa independência, a união das províncias, a integridade do império, a liberdade política, a igualdade civil, e todos os direitos inalienáveis do homem em sociedade" ("we want a constitution which furthers and sustains our independence, the unity of the provinces, the integrity of the empire, political liberty, civil equality, and all inalienable rights of man in society").

his papers to be read aloud.⁷ He supported a gradual elimination of slavery, caste systems, and nobiliarchical titles, as well as freedom of speech and of worship. He ridiculed the fact that many people waste time feeling ashamed of having African roots and looked forward to a day without discrimination.⁸ The following dispute with a journalist over race shows just how far ahead of his time Caneca was:

Pois a pureza de teu sangue! Tem seu peso!!! Que entendes, Cachorro, por *sangue puro*? És o primeiro filósofo que deu com esta melgueira...Na espécie humana se reconhecem cinco variedades...Pergunta-se qual destas diferenças é a mais perfeita!... Qual delas é a mais pura?

(The purity of your blood! It has weight!!! What do you understand, Dog, pure blood to be? You're the first philosopher to come up with this foolishness...In the human species we can see five varieties...Ask yourself which of these is more perfect!...Which one is more pure?)⁹

In a slavery-based society, admittedly with many slave owners of a mixed background, he writes: "Infere-se do exposto que é estúpida a tua bazofia de branco, e que pelo lado do sangue não és mais puro que o samoeda, o chines, o kalmoulk, o housouana, o noolk; que o negro da Guiné; que o da Nova Zelândia" ("we can infer from this that your white bravado is stupid and that your blood is not more pure than the Samoyedic, Chinese, Kalmyk, Hausan, Norfolk; than the black man from Guinea-Bissau; than he from New Zealand").¹⁰

Caneca distinguishes his vision from "religiões monarcais" ("monarchical religions") which live off the public purse.¹¹ He questions the divine right of kings,

⁷ Ibid., 57. Caneca tells us: "eu não escrevo para os homens letrados; sim para o povo rude, e que não tem aplicação às letras" ("I do not write for lettered men; yes for the rude people and who do not have application for the letters").

⁸ Ibid., 255. Caneca proclaims that "é a maior infâmia e indignidade ter um cidadão no seu vigésimo avô uma sutil porção do sangue africano, como já foi dos caboclos" ("it is the greatest infamy and indignity for a citizen in his twentieth grandfather to have a mild portion of African blood, as it once was with indigenous people") and remarks that there may be a time "quando se destruir a escravidão dos africanos" ("when the slavery of the Africans shall be destroyed").

⁹ Ibid., 153-154.

¹⁰ Ibid., 155.

¹¹ Ibid., 299.

positing instead that the title of emperor comes not from God but from the public.¹² He believes that the “demônio” (“demon”) of absolutist monarchy is a difficult demon to exorcize and that “mãos sacrílegas” (“sacrilegious hands”) should never touch the “sagrada” (“sacred”) Constitution.¹³

Dom Pedro's forces attempted to forcibly reinstall the overthrown appointed *unitario* governor, leading the state council of Pernambuco to reaffirm the right to elect governors and reject offers that yet another governor be appointed. As a result, a blockade was imposed upon Pernambuco.¹⁴ Frei Caneca and the other *federalistas* refused to consider any alternative to a Constitutional Assembly comprised of elected representatives, free to deliberate, and issued a call to arms for the whole northeastern region on the 2nd of July, 1824.¹⁵ The rebels announced the formation of an independent *Confederação do Equador* (Confederation of the Equator) which would be comprised of northeastern states under the control of a government separate from the rest of Brazil. Pernambuco was embargoed and invaded, the rebels driven to a neighboring state, surrendering on the 29th of November of 1824.¹⁶ Caneca was executed and the revolt suppressed.

Cultural Production Regarding Brother Mug

After the end of the monarchy in 1889, Brother Mug became a symbol of the First Republic regime established by the Brazilian military to replace royal rule. Streets in Brazil acquired names celebrating the figures of the Confederation of the Equator. In Rio, for example, the *Rua Conde d'Eu* (Street of the Count of Eu) was renamed *Rua Frei Caneca* (Frei Caneca Street) after the municipal council met and changed the name on the 21st of February of 1890, less than four months after the First Republic had been

¹² Ibid., 503. Caneca gives us his formulation that the power of kings comes “não de Deus, sim da soberana e generosa nação brasileira” (“not from God but from the sovereign and generous Brazilian nation”).

¹³ Ibid., 516, 518.

¹⁴ Leite, *Pernambuco* 1824, 99-100.

¹⁵ Ibid., 101, 108-109.

¹⁶ Ibid., 122, 125-127.

proclaimed.¹⁷ The First Republic, which was not a democracy and did not attempt to form a national organization based on the level of state autonomy defended by Caneca, chose to deploy him as the embodiment of the regime. Caneca, who had opposed the creation of a national military, was now a figurehead of a government operated by the military.

The 1918 painting by artist Antônio Parreiras titled *Estudo para Frei Caneca* (study of Frei Caneca) is a work of art by a well-regarded artist. Parreiras was one of the most popular artists of the Republic, a professor at the *Escola Nacional de Belas Artes* (National School of Fine Arts), and earned multiple prizes during his life. The National School of Fine Arts itself was known as the *Academia Imperial de Belas Artes* (Imperial Academy of Fine Arts) until the proclamation of the Republic, when its name was changed and its professors were encouraged to paint national republican figures. Parreiras's painting of Caneca is a realistic, oil on canvas depiction of the Friar in a cowl standing near a soldier, presumably a guard, leaning on his musket, in front of a group of well-dressed men sitting in high chairs behind a table with green table cloth. One of the men is standing, pointing accusatorily at Caneca. A group of men are behind Caneca, one of them wearing a rag on his head. The painting is part of a series of historical scenes Parreiras was commissioned by the government to paint. Art historian Antônio Gasparetto Júnior describes Parreiras in the following terms: "Antônio Parreiras foi o pintor que mais participou da construção da visualidade republicana, a ponto de ser considerado o mais representativo do estilo nas três primeiras décadas da República" ("Antônio Parreiras was the painter who participated the most in creating a

¹⁷ Berger, *Dicionário histórico*, 59.

republican visual style, to the point of being considered the best representative of the style during the first three decades of the republic").¹⁸

The painter Murillo La Greca, born to Italian immigrants in Pernambuco, was commissioned to paint historical paintings during the Republic. Aside from his painting *A Execução de Frei Caneca* (the execution of Frei Caneca) produced in 1924 as part of the centenary of the 1824 revolution, La Greca painted two presidents of the Republic, Deodoro da Fonseca and Floriano Peixoto. La Greca's painting of Caneca realistically depicts a stoic man in robes tied to a pole surrounded by soldiers in uniform. The audience is entirely comprised of government officials as opposed to the popular classes which are absent from the painting. The depiction is detailed but the scene it represents could just as easily have occurred in France as Brazil.

The First Republic was followed by a coup leading to the formation of a populist dictatorship embodied by the figure of Getúlio Vargas, the governor of the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. After being installed as president, Vargas supported some social welfare measures and fashioned himself a protector of the working man. The Vargas Era produced changes in labor laws but did not lead to an effective challenge to rule by national elites. A return to democracy followed the Vargas dictatorship and left-wing movement began to pick up steam, pushing for land redistribution. The presidency of the elected leader Juscelino Kubitschek was marked by investment in infrastructure, including the construction of a new capital in Brasília, this period associated with prosperity. Eventually, moderate leftists were able to elect João Goulart, who promised redistributive measures as far as income and land ownership, to the presidency. Goulart was overthrown and replaced by an anti-communist, right-wing dictatorship supported by the wealthiest interests which

¹⁸ Gasparetto, "A Jornada de Parreiras."

governed from 1964 to 1985. During this military regime which ruled over Brazil during much of the late twentieth century, Frei Caneca became a symbol of democracy in plays written by anti-dictatorship authors. Cláudio Aguiar's 1977 play *Suplicio de Frei Caneca: Oratório Dramático* (the suffering of Brother Mug: dramatic oratory), João Cabral de Melo Neto's 1984 play *Auto do Frade* (auto of the friar), Carlos Queiroz Telles's 1972 play *Frei Caneca*, José Pimentel's 1982 play *O calvário de Frei Caneca* (the Cavalry of Frei Caneca) - all of these plays depict Caneca as a figure advocating democratic freedoms in the face of an authoritarian regime.

João Cabral de Melo Neto is one of the most important writers in Brazilian history, known in particular for his surrealist poetry. In 1992, he was awarded the Neustadt Prize for Literature, a distinction he shares with such celebrated figures as Octavio Paz and Gabriel García Márquez. He was also awarded a chair in the Brazilian Academy of Letters. João Cabral de Melo Neto, in his 1984 *Auto do Frade*, depicts Frei Caneca walking to his execution asking himself: "quem sabe um dia virá uma civil geometria?" ("who knows if some day a civil geometry will arrive").¹⁹ The word "civil" implies the growth of civil society, a sense of civil society restraining government action. Melo Neto suggests a parallel between the tortured friar of Pernambuco and figures such as Frei Tito, psychologically and physically tortured in the seventies to the point where he committed suicide after being released, and Frei Betto, jailed for years, figures who suffered as a result of their stand against the dictatorship. Melo Neto goes out of his way to describe the torture Caneca suffered as a result of his political participation:

-... de fome e sede ele sofrera.
(... of hunger and thirst he suffered)

¹⁹ Neto, *Auto do Frade*, 492.

-Viveu piolhento, esmolambado, guardado quase como fera.
(He lived covered in lice, ragged, stored away almost like a wild animal)²⁰

Aguiar's play also discusses the treatment of political prisoners as Caneca speaks with his jailer:

Frei Caneca – Major, aqui vê o Senhor um grupo de presos caídos nos cantos, uns por sobre os outros, em andrajos, rasgados e cheios de doenças. O Senhor aqui caiu do céu. Somos tratados como animais. Nem animais, Senhor, creio eu...

(Major, you can see a group of prisoners here collapsed into the corners, one on top of the other, in rags, torn and full of diseases. You fell from Heaven. We are treated like Animals. Not even animals, Sir, I believe...)²¹

Aside from implicitly criticizing the military dictatorship of the late twentieth century for violations of human rights via an emphasis on how Brother Mug had been treated by his jailers, despite the lack of information as to how Caneca really had been treated, these plays also discussed other issues.

Anti-dictatorship activists in Brazil were often associated with left-wing groups. As such, Caneca became a vehicle for their views on racism, income inequality, poverty, and other concerns. Carlos Queiroz Telles is a Brazilian playwright who was awarded a number of national literary prizes. He was one of the founders of the *Teatro Oficina* (workshop theater) in the Bixiga neighborhood of the city of São Paulo, a theater known for taking risks in its defense of freedom of expression. The *Oficina* did not shy away from plays criticizing the dictatorship in a coded manner. Carlos Queiroz Telles imagines Frei Caneca and his collaborators pondering their mistakes and plotting a more working-class-based revolution to follow in his 1972 play *Frei Caneca*:

Frei Caneca – Erro foi confiar demais em todos que conspiravam conosco.

²⁰ Ibid., 495.

²¹ Aguilar, *Suplício de Frei Caneca*, 36.

PALARA

(It was a mistake to trust excessively in those who conspired with us)

Padre Miguelinho – Principalmente nos abastados. Esses, pouco ou nada tinham a perder com qualquer governo. Eles nunca chegariam a arriscar a pele apenas por um pouco mais de imposto sobre suas mercadorias.

(Principally the rich. These individuals had little to lose with any government. They would never risk their skin because of having to pay a little more tax on their goods)

Frei Caneca – Eles estavam do nosso lado apenas por cobiça. Liberdade para eles era sinonimo de lucro e economia. Mais Nada.

(They were on our side for kicks. Liberty for them is synonymous with profit and the economy)

....

Padre Miguelinho – Desde o começo, nós devíamos ter nos apoiado mais nos alfaiates do que nos mercadores; nos barbeiros do que nos donos de engenhos; nos soldados do que nos oficiais; nos noviços do que nos superiores gerais; nos miseráveis do que nos pobres; nos pobres do que nos remediados; nos remediados do que nos abastados; nos escravos do que nos dignos cidadãos livres desta capitania. Os Palmares resistiram cinquenta anos. Nós não aguentamos três meses. (From the beginning, we should have relied more on tailors than merchants, barbers than mill owners, soldiers than officers, initiates than superiors, the miserable than the poor, the poor more than the well off, the well off more than the rich, the slaves more than the dignified free citizens of this province. The Palmares resisted fifty years. We couldn't resist three months)²²

The Palmares was possibly the largest maroon community in the Americas, comprised of tens of thousands of refugees who organized an independent society lasting from 1605 to 1694 in the state of Alagoas and holds a special meaning to many Brazilians. The Palmares was structured as a confederation of groups following Central African practices and this confederation resisted a number of expeditions by Portuguese forces before being conquered. The mention of the Palmares community in the play is meant to imply solidarity with slaves and free people of color, but also to reinforce the image of a popular revolt led by the “masses,” and may also have been a coded reference to Africanist and Afro-Latin movements in Brazil in the sixties and seventies. To many Brazilians, the Palmares is a symbol of resistance against foreign and domestic enslavers.

²² Telles, *Frei Caneca*, 39-40.

Brother Mug is depicted as siding with the "masses," the Palmares community, preaching a liberating ideal. Frei Caneca is a religious figure who sides with the people but the religious establishment is against him, as the clergy observing his execution in Melo Neto's *Auto do Frade* make clear in the play, dubbing Caneca a "frade levantadiço" ("impertinent friar").²³ Caneca's embrace of traditionalist, religious language removes him from the realm of esoteric intellectualism as he represents an impetus for popular revolt, officials watching the spectacle commenting that "Andar como padre é dar vez à gente baixa que protesta" ("him walking like a priest will provide an opportunity for the lower people to protest") and complaining that "Padre existe é para rezar pela alma, mas não contra a fome" ("priests exist to pray for the soul and not against hunger").²⁴ During the dictatorship, lower ranking clergymen frequently opposed the military regime but the Church in Brazil, as an institution, supported a government they viewed as anti-communist. Some of the priests who opposed the dictatorship adhered to Liberation Theology, a religious ideology which suggests that Christianity is a religion mandating action and solidarity with the plight of the poor. A number of Liberation Theology adherents, such as the Columbian revolutionary priest Camilo Torres Restrepo, attempted to reconcile Catholicism and Communism. A class-based discourse is certainly present in the play:

-Por que não deixou para um lado
esse apelido de Caneca?
Ser do Amor Divino era pouco
para dignificar quem ele era?
(Why didn't he forget this nickname "Mug"? Being do Amor Divino was too little to dignify who he was?)

-Não quis esconder que seu pai
um simples operário era,
nem mentir parecendo vir

²³ Neto, *Auto do Frade*, 471.

²⁴ Ibid., 472, 473.

das grandes famílias da terra.
(He didn't want to hide his father, a simple worker he was, nor lie as if he came from the great families of the land).²⁵

The choice of the term *operário* (worker) reveals an obvious worry with regards to class-related issues. Class, liberation theology and revolution are tied together as Frei Caneca becomes a tribute to the courage of the adherents of Liberation Theology who were tried and executed by the regime.

Caneca's impact was not limited to theatrical productions available primarily to the well-educated. The playwright José Pimentel brought his play *O Calvário de frei Caneca* (the cavalry of Frei Caneca) to the public on the streets of Recife from the 14th to the 17th of January in 1982 and the 11th to the 15th of January of 1984 and then from the 5th to the 13th of January in 1985, 1986 and 1987. The play became a New Years ritual in Recife as if, at the beginning of each year, members of the public should remember the democratic lessons Caneca had to teach.²⁶ The published version of the play thanks Frei Tito, an anti-dictatorship clergyman dedicated to liberation theology who was captured, tortured by the dictatorship, and then subsequently released, taking his own life.²⁷ We have praise for a Christianity dedicated to tackling economic issues as two coryphaeus introduce the play:

CORIFEU I: Assim, Frei Caneca foi um mártir-profeta, antecedendo de muito as teses do Concílio Vaticano II.

(In this manner, Frei Caneca was a martyr-prophet, much anteceding the theses of the Vatican II Council)

CORIFEU II: O que a teologia contemporânea ensina pela voz dos seus mais categorizados representantes, passava, na época de Frei Caneca, como comportamento que se desviava da ortodoxia católica.

(What contemporary theology teaches us through the voices of its best representatives passed during Caneca's time as behavior detracting from Catholic Orthodoxy)²⁸

²⁵ Ibid., 502.

²⁶ Pimentel, *O calvário de Frei Caneca*, Preface.

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

²⁸ Ibid., 12.

Given that the play is dedicated to Frei Tito, we can surmise that Tito is one of the best representatives the coryphaeus are discussing. Throughout the play, a group of military men debate censoring Caneca and when to arrest him, allusions to the military censorship of the period.²⁹ One of the coryphaeus, just in case the audience missed it, states that Caneca stood for “libertação do homem de todos os condicionamentos ideológicos, políticos e sócio-econômicos que inibem nos seus anseios de progresso e crescimento” (liberation of man from all ideological, political, and socioeconomic constraints limiting their own desires for progress and growth) the very definition of autonomy.³⁰

The play serves as an argument for a progressive theology against traditional structures:

CORIFEU I: Como acontece ainda hoje, a forte tradição conservadora, tão favorecida e reforçada pela concentração do poder econômico nas mãos da elite proprietária, impedia a eliminação da opressão social, base da política dominante.
(As happens today, the strong conservative tradition so favored and strengthened by the concentration of economic power in the hands of the property-owning elite, impeded the elimination of social oppression, the basis of the dominant politics)

CORIFEU II: Os movimentos libertários sempre esbarravam diante de tais obstáculos.
(Liberation movements always clashed with such obstacles)³¹

The work is therefore tied to *movimentos libertários*. Liberation movements were generally understood in Brazil as socialist movements occurring in developing countries, the Cuban Revolution in particular. In the sixties, seventies, and even the eighties, the Castro regime loomed large as an alternative route for the country to follow.

²⁹ Ibid., 16.

³⁰ Ibid., 18.

³¹ Ibid., 20.

The fact that some artists who depicted the Confederation of the Equator during this period of dictatorship lasting from 1964 to 1985 were socialists should not be taken to imply that every artists handling this subject matter advocated for a left-wing ideology. Cícero Dias, for example, did not limit himself to participation in socialist circles. He was a painter who associated with *both* an inward-looking group of nationalist painters tied to fascism and a group dubbing themselves the anthropophagics open to absorbing outside influences, citing the Bolshevik revolution as well as Rousseau as inspirations in their manifesto. Cícero Dias therefore participated in both left-leaning and right-leaning schools. Dias was born in Pernambuco in 1907 and frequently painted scenes of "typical" people from the state, including rural workers, in a semi-abstract manner.

He painted two large paintings of Caneca in his colorful, geometric style in 1981. One, *Frei Caneca – Revolução de 1824* (Frei Caneca – Revolution of 1824) depicts a brown-haired and brown-skinned Caneca in tatters, his feet tied to a pole, a cross around his neck, his arms raised with images of a figure being beaten for refusing to execute the friar and a man on a horse with the words "Oh Pernambuco a par da tua gloria voarei à eternidade" ("Oh Pernambuco, in keeping with your glory I shall fly to eternity"). Another, painted the same year, *Frei Caneca – Revolução de 1817* has the Brazilian flag and the words "Typhis Pernambucano" with a figure on a boat and showcases chained prisoners. On the one hand, these paintings indicate a class conflict as the combatants are depicted wearing peasant garbs while the government troops wear uniforms. We see a Brazilian flag located above the regional republican flags, indicating nationalism and regionalism. As opposed to being depicted as a redhead, he is brown-haired and brown skinned. Simultaneously, the reference to Caneca's newspaper suggests freedom of the press. The theme of freedom of the press was a

major one for artists opposed to censorship during the dictatorship. Dias opposed the dictatorship but did not identify as a socialist or conservative.

The military government ended and Brazil transitioned into a return to democracy in 1985, amidst growing unrest due to inflation and stagnation. Inflation was brought under control in the nineties. In the early twenty-first century, Lula, the first working-class president in the country's history, was elected. Democracy and freedom of the press became ideals to be celebrated in the country. Commercial books, comic artists, and independent filmmakers have all addressed the Confederation in recent years. In 2008, an illustrated young adults book titled *Frei Liberdade: sonhos e lutas da independência* (Friar Liberty: dreams and struggles of independence) by Luiz Antônio Aguiar was released, ending with the following, describing the Confederation of the Equator: "Era, enfim, a população se levantando para afirmar sua condição de cidadania responsável e participante do destino do país, como sonhou Frei Caneca. Seu sacrifício e o de tantos como ele foi o quanto nos custou a realização desse sonho, por mais que ainda temos de lutar pela liberdade" ("It was, after all, the people rising up to affirm their status as responsible citizens participating in the destiny of the country, as Frei Caneca had dreamed. His sacrifice and of so many like him was what what realizing this dream cost, as much as we must still fight for liberty").³² In 2013, a comic book was published by the artistic group *Filhos de Marte* (Sons of Mars) titled *A morte e a morte de Frei Caneca* (death and the death of Frei Caneca), directed at young adults, and João Cabral de Melo Neto's daughter, Inez Cabral, informed the newspaper *Diário de Pernambuco* (Daily of Pernambuco) that she is planning on making a film about Frei Caneca and that the film will be distributed free of charge to democratize learning for

³² Aguiar, *Frei Liberdade*, 72.

students.³³ The independent filmmaker Osman Godoy released a fictional short about Caneca titled *O mensageiro* (the messenger) in 2003 and has also filmed a short documentary titled *Caneca e a Confederação* (Caneca and the Confederation). The documentary features interviews with a number of academic and religious figures providing different perspectives about Caneca's ideas. In the documentary, literature professor Lourival Holanda states that Caneca represents the first step towards "consciência crítica nacional" ("national critical consciousness"). In 2015, the Museum of the City of Recife held a show called *Um novo olhar sobre Frei Caneca* (a new look at Frei Caneca), with photographs by local artists. The photos do not show Caneca's face but only his feet walking over grass in a monk's robe and sandals, or his hand holding a rosary, or a cross. The black and white images evoke religiosity but also class, the settings for the pictures being local streets. His anonymity, his face a blur or not a part of the picture, indicates that he is a symbol as opposed to a specific person. Frei Caneca, in this exhibit, could have represented the freedom of local democracy, the freedom of formal legal rights, or the freedom of effective rights. In fact, Caneca may have symbolized a different kind of freedom for each separate photographer.

Conclusion

As discussed herein, the Confederation of the Equator has been deployed by notable artists over the course of Brazilian history. Certainly, the painter Antônio Parreiras was one of the most influential visual artists tied to the First Republic government, his depictions of important national figures included in a number of museums. Cícero Dias designed a city Plaza in Recife, Pernambuco, and is a fine representative of Brazilian muralism. João Cabral de Melo Neto received the Camões Prize for literature, one of the most important prizes for literature written in the

³³ Torres, "Filha de João Cabral."

Portuguese language, and is considered a national treasure. Carlos Queiroz Telles is one of the most admired playwrights in Brazilian history. These artists felt the need to address the Confederation because they concluded that Brother Mug represents something more than a northeastern rebellion for state autonomy.

What does Caneca mean to Brazilians? Why did writers and painters feel the need to depict this figure? How do representations of Brother Mug reflect or modify his original ideology? A discussion about the importance of Caneca as a symbol throughout Brazilian history has to take place among Brazilianists in interaction with the Brazilian people. In particular, a comparison between the mantle of meanings placed upon Brother Mug's shoulders and the way other historical figures in the country are depicted and understood has to take place. Over the course of this article, I have merely attempted to suggest that Caneca has become something more than a participant in a nineteenth century revolt. He has become a heroic archetype and part of what he stands for today reflects the meanings cultural producers injected into their representations of him. Yet, at the same time, these cultural producers may have been inspired by elements of Caneca's ideology such as his defense of freedom of the press.

Brother Mug deployed the term "liberty" to reflect his support for democratic institutions, limits on executive authority via a constitution, and freedom of expression, but his ideal of "liberty" now includes freedom from all forms of oppression. The suppression of the Confederation by Dom Pedro is now synonymous with the repression of a Brazilian nation under the boot of elite families. The Confederation represents a moment of aborted national birth, the silencing of a national dialogue about how the nation should be organized, the first dialogue between Brazilians as Brazilians occurring immediately after independence. Artists and authors tied to movements have to engage with the ideals of the 1824 movement to argue that their vision of freedom reflects the vision of the confederates and not the monarchy. Regardless of the reason

for the reverence surrounding this figure, Frei Caneca is an important character in Brazilian culture, personifying a yearning for freedom and justice. This article should be read as a call to arms for political scientists, historians, philosophers, literature professors, and academics involved in other subject areas to study Brother Mug, his ideas and his impact.

Various references to Frei Caneca pepper the streets of Brazilian cities: Frei Caneca bakeries, bars, pharmacies, supermarkets, malls, theaters, and schools. Unlike other national figures who are depicted in formal dress, Caneca is frequently represented as a character with whom people have a more personal relationship. Outside the Frei Caneca Bar in the City of Campinas, in the State of São Paulo, for example, a placard on a wall portrays the friar holding a mug of beer, smiling. During gay pride parades on Frei Caneca Street in São Paulo, some young men and women dress like Brother Mug. He is a rare historical actor who commands both respect and adoration over a century later, a trusted elder who resides in local neighborhoods and provides guidance for future generations.

Frei Caneca has influenced artistic production by reknown painters and authors in Brazil but we must expand our analysis with regards to his influence over the people of this South American nation. A new field of *Frei Caneca Studies* must be developed by Brazilianists to fully understand the phenomenon that is Brother Mug including better studies regarding his political thought, the influence of his ideas on subsequent revolts during the nineteenth century, his relationship to federalist authors in other nations, and his impact on the arts (including popular forms of expression which have not been widely divulged such as rural music, street art, oral storytelling traditions, and representations of Brother Mug on commercial businesses). In this article, I have attempted to prove that Caneca influenced some of the most important cultural

producers in Brazil. The extent of Caneca's impact on the nation remains for us as scholars to explore.

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Blackness In Argentina: A Quest for Legitimacy

When songstress Josephine Baker visited Argentina in the 1950s she asked the biracial minister of public health Ramon Carilio, 'Where are the Negroes?' to which Carilio responded, laughing, 'There are only two – you and I.' (Aidi, "Blacks in Argentina")

The presence of people of African descent in Argentina in the twentieth and twenty first centuries has been ignored and even denied publicly by high authorities. During a diplomatic trip to the United States in 1996, former Argentinian president Carlos Menem remarked: "Black people do not exist in Argentina; Brazil has that problem" (Knight 29).¹ This statement is not only disingenuous for the lack of historical references, but also profoundly racist since it equates and essentializes blackness with negative behavior. The trip to Argentina on May 27, 2013 led me to question the homogeneity of Argentina as a white nation as well as the concept of blackness in Argentina as a monolithic (id)entity.

This study not only delves into the dialectic surrounding the disappearance of Afro-Argentines, but also focuses on the impact and challenges of the African Diaspora (Afro-American) immigration on the revitalization and (re)configuration of blackness as well as the (re)africanization of the nation. The so-called disappearance of blacks in Argentina, as former president Carlos Menem vehemently suggested, is due to a combination of multiple factors such as war, disease, miscegenation, low birth rates, white immigration, black emigration and taxonomy led by the official policies of cultural and physical whitening of the nation and a good dose of pervasive racism. Despite the war on blackness, the black population survived under the radar through cultural activities and community organizations. I argue that the survival of the black population was made possible through the growing population of black immigrants. If European immigration of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reshaped the identity of

Argentina as a white nation, black immigration of the twentieth and twenty first centuries challenges the invisibility of blacks, redefines and re-centers the concept of blackness into the national socio-political and cultural discourses. Moreover, blackness in Argentina should not be viewed or studied only as a historical phenomenon rooted in slavery as most studies have done so far, but as a combination of the colonial past and post-colonial diasporic immigrations. This paper challenges any notion of cultural homogeneity that may be implied or suggested by such a diasporic population. Some black immigrant groups may identify only with those who share the same country of origin or those with whom they have linguistic or religious commonalities and not necessarily with afro-descendants of slaves and vice versa. The balkanization of blackness, as necessary as it is for black immigrants to find a sense of integration, normalcy and a home away from home can also constitute an impediment to the collective fight against marginalization, racism and discrimination.

As an interdisciplinary endeavor, this paper is based on eclectic sources combining archival research, personal experience, history, documentaries, newspapers, and critical analysis. The study of the black diaspora immigrants takes into consideration (some of) the framework proposed by Kim Butler, which includes the reasons for and conditions of the dispersal, the relationships with homeland, the relationships with host lands, the interrelationships within communities of the diaspora and comparative studies of different diasporas (195). For the purpose of this study, we limit the black diaspora communities to Afro-Uruguayans and Afro-Brazilians for their politico-cultural impact on Argentinian society.²

“There are no Blacks in Argentina”: The Myth of an Oblivion

It is hard to tell if the comments of former president Carlos Menem were made in good faith as a result of centuries of erasing blackness from Argentinian consciousness, or if they were just another political maneuver to avoid international

insight into the life condition of blacks in Argentina as is the case in neighboring countries such as Brazil and Uruguay. Nevertheless, in November 2002, six years after Carlos Menem's (in)famous statement, the newspaper *Clarín* published a report in which María Pocha Lamadrid, a black Argentinian activist and founder of *Fundación Africa Vive*, recalls the day in 2001 when Argentinian customs officers prevented her from boarding a plane to a conference in Panama honoring Martin Luther King Jr. She was detained for hours and interrogated because they did not believe she was Argentinian, and thought she was travelling with a fake passport (Kinigsberg 2002). Lamadrid later added in an interview that there exists a false concept created by non-blacks in Argentina, that there is no people of African descent in Argentina, and the few ones who acknowledge their existence limit it to the remote past and make clear that this population was exterminated in wars. But actually they made us invisible ("Africa Vive").³

Pocha Lamadrid's experience and remarks reveal four important phenomena embedded in Argentinian consciousness: the historical existence of blacks in Argentina, their limitation to past history, the present denial of blackness and its invisibilization. The presence of blacks in Argentina dates back to the colonial era. It has not only been documented by historians, ethnographers and sociologists but also mentioned (negatively and/or positively) in the literary work of Esteban Echeverría (1836), José Mármol (1851), José Hernández (1872/1879), Horacio Mendizabal (1865/1869), Casildo Thompson (1877), Mateo Elejalde (1881/1882), Higinio Cazón (1866-1914), Gabino Ezeiza (1897) and Jorge Miguel Ford (1899). According to Andrews Reid (1980) and Molina and Lopez (2001), since the beginning of colonization the city of Cordoba served as a slave trade distribution center, and by 1840 people of African descent made up 62% of the population. Data collected by Rodriguez Molas (1970) show that in the 1778 census ("Census Vértiz") people of African descent constituted

42% of the population in Tucumán, 54% in Santiago de Estero, 52% in Catamarca, 46% in Salta, 24% in Mendoza, 20 % in La Rioja, 16% in San Juan, 13% in Jujuy and 9% in San Luis. The revolution of 1810 in Argentina marked the beginning of the prolonged and gradual abolition of slavery (Andrews 1980). The first legal step toward abolition was the 1813 *Ley de libertad de vientre* (Free womb law) which established the freedom of children born to enslaved mothers (Goldberg 1995, Frigerio and Lamborghini 2011). The process of abolition culminated in 1853 when slavery was officially abolished through the implementation of a new national constitution, though it was not adopted in Buenos Aires until 1862 (Frigerio and Lamborghini 9). During the era following the abolition of slavery in 1853, Argentina (like many other countries in Latin America) set out on a new ideological course through which Black people and African-derived cultures were systematically erased from the nation's building. Black and indigenous people were considered antithetical to the desired identity of the new Argentine nation (Andrews 1980-2004, Solomianski 2015). These were the years of scientific racism and social Darwinism in Europe and North America, Jim Crow segregation in the USA, and the beginnings of apartheid in South Africa. By the end of the twentieth century the black population had sharply decreased. In 1905, the black Argentinian Juan José Soiza Reilly wrote an article in the newspaper *Caras y Caretas* complaining about black ethnicity fading away: "Little by little, this race is becoming extinct. With slow extermination, the black race of the sun's children walks toward death. It is sad. It is pitiful...It pitiful and sad to contemplate the darkness of this race made of iron and stoicism" ("Gente de color"). The literary critic Marvin Lewis reported that in periodicals published in 1967 (*Panorama*), 1971 (*Clarín*) and 1973 (*Ebony*), contributors such as Máximo Simpson, Era Thompson and others gave testimony to the decline of the black population: " "The colored people of Buenos Aires

constitute a disperse group, in extinction, which does not constitute a community,'... asserts Máximo Simpson." (10)

The gradual decrease of the black population is rooted in many factors. The war of independence and multiple civil wars (1810-1880) positioned blacks fighting at the forefront in very precarious conditions. 60% of José de San Martín soldiers were black *libertos*, and between 1816 and 1823 Afro-Argentines fought in Chile, Peru and Ecuador. From 1825 to 1828 they fought against Brazil and the remaining survivors fought in the civil wars between *unitarios* and *federales* (Reid 1980). The largest number of black Argentinian casualties occurred during the War of Triple Alliance against Paraguay from 1865 to 1870. Most adult black males were enlisted in the war and only 10% made it home alive. This event affected greatly the reproduction rate among Blacks and facilitated interracial relationships that gradually absorbed the mulatto offspring into the white social category, whitening blackness in the process. Disease (cholera epidemics of 1861 and 1864 and the yellow fever plague of 1871) devastated black neighborhoods of Buenos Aires and greatly contributed to the decreased black population (Molas 1970, Liboreiro 1999, Solomianski 2003). Another factor less discussed by critics is ceasing the importation of African slaves. Contrary to Brazil, whose black population was consistently renewed with the arrival of African slaves, Argentina abolished slavery in 1853. This phenomenon contributed in certain to the stagnation of the black demography and to the progressive decline of a population already dealing with a low birth rate and ravaged by natural death and disease.

To explain the disappearance of blacks in Argentina, it is important to mention the negative effects of the drastic implementation of the policies of *blanqueamiento* (whitening) through European immigration, miscegenation and the war on the black culture. Among the "crusaders" of anti-blackness and pro-whiteness were presidents Bartolomé Mitre (1862-1868), Domingo Sarmiento (1868-1874) the "father of

education” and Julio Argentino Roca (1898-1904), alongside members of the “generation of 1880s”, a group of intellectuals and wealthy bourgeois who believed in modernity and development through whitening. They committed what historians such as Emilio Corbiere and Emilio Ruchnsky (2003) referred to as black genocide, not only against the black population but the indigenous alike. The same policies will later be implemented by Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. Even though the country modernized its economy and education through European immigration, this modernization was done at the expense of the black population. The *Ley Avellaneda* of October 6, 1876 facilitated the huge increase of European immigrants but also progressively made the black ethnic group insignificant. Marvin Lewis writes: “In 1852 there were approximately 1,000,000 Argentines; in 1869 there were 1,830,214; and in 1895 there were 3,954, 911. In essence the population, through immigration, has quadrupled in forty years. The strategy, ‘to govern is to populate’ (with Europeans) had worked as Argentina aimed for a massive blood transfusion” (19).

As a result of immigration, miscegenation also contributed to the decline of people of color. Mariano Bosch wrote in 1916: “Another important factor contributed to the disappearance of the black race: the Italian. The latter had perhaps an atavistic preference for black women...” (qtd. in Marvin Lewis 13). The fear of miscegenation was also reported in 1905 by Juan José Soiza Reilly in the magazine *Caras y Caretas*: “Entre tanto, la raza va perdiendo en la mezcla su color primitivo. Se hace gris. Se disuelve. Se aclara. El árbol africano está dando blancas flores caucásicas...” (“Gente de color”). [“Meanwhile, the race is losing in the mixture its primitive color. It becomes gray. It dissolves. It lightens. The African tree is producing white Caucasian flowers”]. In 1908 the sociologist José Ingenieros emphatically wrote: “The indigenous races, externally alien to our political and social national identity, are now reduced to near

extinction... Blacks have also become extinct...In Buenos Aires a black Argentinean is an object of curiosity" (qtd. in Knight 53).

The policies of whitening the nation were also applied to taxonomy. People of African descent who used to be categorized in the census as "negra, parda o morena" became by the end of the nineteenth century "trigueño" (wheat color), a category that does not necessarily apply to

afro-descendants. This factor can explain the decline of the black population in Buenos Aires from 29.5% in 1810, to 26.1% in 1838 and 1.8% in the official census of 1887 (Andrew 1980, 66). Alejandro Frigerio (2000) and Reid Andrews (1980) argue that after the 1887 census there was only one option for categorizing blackness. Those previously categorized as white or mixed race (blanco o moreno/prado) were replaced by the option white or of color (blanco o de color). This new option removed "black" as an official racial category and made it impossible to claim an African heritage, thus advancing the image of Argentina as a homogenous white nation, an erasure of its blackness. Despite the arguments made by Frigerio and Andrews about the use of racial categorizations "blanco" or "de color" after 1887, the racial categorization "trigueño" (wheat) continues even in the twenty-first century. Ruthie Ackerman reported in *Chronicle Foreign Service* on the case of Lucia Molina, the director of the Indo-Afro-American House of Culture in the city of Santa Fe: "When I was issued my (government) identification card ... they had written wheat as the color of my skin...They just tell you that you can't be black" ("Blacks in Argentina").

Furthermore, the succession of military juntas in the 1970s and 80s were prejudicial to black culture as they were to other popular cultural manifestations (Frigerio and Lamborghini 26) Black social clubs and cultural activities were prohibited and thus restricted the cultural expression of blackness. Additionally, the difficult life condition of the black community further encouraged the emigration of some black

Argentiniens to neighboring Uruguay and Brazil, where blackness is more visible due to the higher percentage of their black population

The dominant rhetoric on the disappearance of blackness in Argentina can also be attributed to (modern) internal and external racism as a byproduct of the whitening policies. External racism in this context refers to the tactics used by the dominant discourse to exclude or prevent black Argentiniens from being part of the imaginary of the nation. This external racism can manifest itself in diverse ways: in the education system and news media by erasing or limiting blackness from the curriculum, books or programs; in public and private spaces by the denial and disdain for afro-descendants; in social behavior that perpetuates Eurocentrism and in the concept of Argentina as a homogeneous white nation. Internal racism applies mostly to Afro-Argentiniens who deny or hide their blackness through the internalization of the inferiority complex. In order to conform to the normativity of the Eurocentric society and escape racism and poverty, many Afro-Argentiniens have opted to purge themselves from their black heritage. Some examples provided by Alejandro Frigerio (2006) attest to the inferiority complex among the black population. The Argentinian sociologist presents the case of the writer Pedro Orgambide, whose black relative was only mentioned "in the confidentiality of the patio". During an interview of a member of the "Farándula" on the famous television series "Televisión Registrada", it was reported that the individual hired someone to pretend to be his mother in an attempt to hide the ethnicity of his black mother (82-83). The activist Pocha Lamadrid, in an interview with writer Viviana Marcela Iriart, also gives an account of a personal experience with a city councilman of Matanza: "un día fui a ver a un concejal para pedirle una oficina. El concejal me recibe, cierra la puerta detrás de mí y me dice: "esto no se lo podés decir a nadie, mi abuela era como vos pero la teníamos escondida en una pieza" (qtd. in Iriart 2002). [One day I went to ask for an office to a city councilman. He receives me, shut the door and says:

"You can't tell anybody about this. My grandmother looked like you (black) but we have her locked in a room].

These stories and many more illustrate the desire of some Afro-Argentines to run away from their blackness since the black body and culture are antithetical to civilization and/or modernity and marred with negative stereotypes. As psychiatrist Frantz Fanon argues: "In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his body schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty" (110-111). The body as a powerful image of identity became for some afro-descendants a "burden of a corporeal malediction" (111). Be it consciously or unconsciously, the suppression of their own African heritage by afro-descendants contributes to reinforce their invisibility.

Despite all the factors that have contributed to the decline and invisibility of Afro-Argentines, they have not disappeared as the dominant discourse explicitly implied for decades. They have been silenced in the national consciousness, psyche or imagination. Thanks to the recovery work of historians, ethnographers, literary critics, documentary film makers and black associations among others, the silenced presence of blackness in Argentina is becoming more audible. Research has shown that even during the negation of the presence of people of African descent in Argentina at the beginning of the twentieth century, blacks continue to survive and thrive as a community (Goldberg 1995, Andrews 1980, Frigeiro 2006). They were not merely passive subjects of historic circumstances. Cultural activities such as music and dance remained vibrant in the black community. The *candombe* with its multiple forms and expressions was growing (Ricardo Rodríguez Molas 1957-1988, Néstor Ortiz Oderigo 1969, Frigerio 2008). The Tango and Milonga were burgeoning. The first tango song, "El entrerriano", was written in 1896 by Afro-Argentine Rosendo Mendizábal. Other

tango composers were Carlos Posadas, Enrique Maciel, Cayetano Silva and Zenón Rolón. The latter wrote the famous song *Gran marcha fúnebre* which was used during the repatriation of San Martí's body in 1880 (Castillo 13). In *Afro-Argentine Discourse* (1996), literary critic Marvin Lewis asserts that two black periodicals were circulating at that time, *La verdad* edited by the activist Benedicto Ferreira and *La protectora* by Lucas Fernández, both founded in 1858. Lewis reveals and examines the literary productions of black Argentinian writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as Horacio Mendíbal, Mateo Elejalde, Casildo Thompson, Jorge Miguel Ford, Higinio Cazón, Luís García Morel and Gabino Ezeiza. Black Argentinian writers have not only raised awareness on the dire condition of blacks and the official attempts to erase blackness from the society but have also produced literary works of aesthetic quality. In addition to the literary legacy of black Argentinian writers, Spanish Argentinian vocabulary is infused with Africanism: "Mina", "tango", "tamangos", "Mucama", "mondongo", "marote", "catinga", "mandinga", "milonga", "zambo", "candombe", "bochinche", "maní", "batuque", "bambula", and perhaps "chingar", "chimango" and "tongo" (Rojas 1924, Schávelzon 2003, Oderigo 2007).

Besides literature and language, Afro-Argentines also maintained their presence artistically through the work of musicians, pianists and composers such as Alejandro Vilela, Remigio Navarro, Federico Espinosa, Remigio Rivarola, Roque Rivero and Tiburcio Silvarrios. Remigio Navarro came to be the director of the Orquesta del Teatro Argentino in the mid nineteenth century (Castillo 25). There were also exclusively black social club activities through "La Agrupación Patriótica 25 de Mayo" and the "Shimmy Club" (Estrada 1979, Andrews 1980). These organizations played an important role in socially connecting the black population and helping black Argentines survive in a society where they were positioned as foreigners in their own homeland. The historical survival of blackness is also notable symbolically in public

spaces through monuments. Among the two hundred public monuments in the city of Buenos Aires, three are Afro-Argentines, namely "El esclavo" in Palermo, the statue of the semi-mythic soldier Falucho in downtown Buenos Aires and the statue of Gabino Ezeiza in Matadero. These monuments, as few as they are, constitute a tangible legacy of blackness to Argentina's historiography and destiny.

Even though many white Argentines I encountered on my journey in the Southern Cone continue to question the modern existence of Afro-Argentines, they live on. Blackness has become a reality that permeates little by little the political discourse in the twenty first century. The resurgence of blackness in the politico-cultural arena was spearheaded by black immigrants in the 1990s and boosted in the 2000s as a collateral effect of the Argentine great depression from 1998 to 2002. The collapse of the economy not only plunged the country into financial depression, but also facilitated soul searching that resulted in a deep distrust of the dominant discourse and its rhetoric. As Alejandro Solomianski states, "The economic crisis in Argentina left many people ... seeing holes in what they were told by the government and in history books...They started realizing that if the government was false then maybe their whole identity was false" (qtd. in Ackerman 2005). The failure of the political and economic structures on which the nation was built as modern and Eurocentric not only opened a period of socio-political, economic struggle and reform but also fostered a cultural awakening that resurrected the Argentine history of indigenous and African based heritage. I suspect that the slow but steady rehabilitation and inclusion of racial/ethnic minorities by the government is geared towards the construction of new national identities that include blacks. This process will take time to flourish and be accepted in national consciousness, but a hallmark has already officially been made as of 2010. The national census conducted October 27, 2010 included an option for blacks or as having African ancestry, which came 232 years after the first official census "Censo de

Vértiz” in 1778 (INDEC 295). This effort was led by the effective political endeavor of black associations, activists championing the cause of Africa and its diaspora, the afro-descendant and African Commission of the Chancellery and primary the National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI). According to the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INDEC), the 2010 census reported 149,493 self-recognized as people of African descent, 76,064 were males and 73,429 females. There were 62,642 households with at least one person of African descent, 137,533 (92%) were born in Argentina and 11,960 (8%) were born elsewhere (296-299). However, the foundation *Africa Vive* calculated that there are about two million people from African descent in Argentina (Heguy, “Un censo”). Census on ethnicity is always an arduous task, hard to establish and very controversial. The majority of these censuses are based on self-recognition, and there are some Argentinians of African descent who pass for white or just do not want to be categorized as black. On the other hand, it is sufficient to argue that those with dark skin who are considered black “negro mota” (Frigerio 2008: 120) might not actually have African ancestry. Dark skin color is not necessarily a measurement of blackness.

Transnational Blackness: Afro-American Immigrations

If to govern is to populate, as proponents of European immigration to Argentina claimed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the socio-cultural and political power and survival of blackness is effective through populating as well. The increase of the black population comes from immigrations of Afro-Americans from Uruguay and Brazil.

In the second half of the 1980s, thirty to fifty blacks from Uruguay, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador and Perú came to Argentina to teach dance and percussion (Frigerio and Lamborghini 27). This small number would rise considerably in the 1990s with the creation of Mercosur, known as the Common Market of the South, that promotes the

free movement of goods, services and people among member states. Alejandro Frigerio estimates that there are around 1,200 Brazilians, Uruguayans and Cubans living in Argentina who claim African ancestry (Aidi, "Blacks in Argentina"). There is no statistic figure to know exactly who among these immigrants are born in Argentina or nationalized citizens. After the collapse of Argentinian economy, the migration of afro-Uruguayans and Brazilians declined sharply. Despite their low numbers, the presence of black Uruguayan, Brazilian and Cuban immigrants revitalized the cultural practices of blackness in Argentina. Moreover, Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Uruguayan immigrants were at the forefront of the fight not only against racism and discrimination of blacks but also for the recognition of the African heritage and contribution to Argentine history and culture (Frigerio 2008, Andrews 2010).

Suffice to say that the fight for the visibility of blackness in today's Argentina did not come from the core of the Afro-Argentinian community but from the Afro-American immigrant. I agree with Frigerio and Lamborghini (2011) who argue that before the appearance of the black Argentinian militancy in the late 1990s, practically the only groups that were claiming publicly the existence and the importance of the black culture in Argentine history were cultural workers, principally Afro-Uruguayans and Afro-Brazilians as well as the Argentinian followers of Afro-Brazilian religions. Afro-Argentinian social organizations were conditioned by the socio-cultural activism of those previous groups. The activism of Afro-Brazilians and Uruguayans in Argentina is a result of past experience in their country of origin. After struggling against racism and fighting for the affirmation of blackness in Brazil and Uruguay, Afro-Brazilians and Uruguayans in Argentina could not keep quiet in face of what they perceived as the reproduction of the historical pattern of discrimination and marginalization their community once faced in their respective homeland.⁴ Contrary to Afro-Argentines, Afro-Brazilians and Uruguayans had the experience of challenging dominant discourse

overtly for decades to assert their cultural practices. Their activism back home contributed not only to their positionality at the forefront of the fight against black discrimination in Argentina, but also to their vigorous defense and promotion of black cultural context. As Frigerio and Lamborghini stated, the cultural activities/ activism of Afro-Brazilians and Uruguayans are justified through their defense of the important role played by blacks in the history and local culture (27). Immigrants' activism is not only the result of a diasporic condition, but it is also rooted in past experience in their countries of origin.

From my conversation with Afro-Brazilians and Uruguayans in Buenos Aires, I learned that they still maintain relationship with their countries of origin that have provided the foundation from which they are building their new diasporic identity. They might not send money to help relatives back home the way it used to be primarily because of the great depression in Argentina, but they travel frequently due to the relative short distance between the countries. Homeland is not a mere myth, but still a reality that permeates daily life.

Heterogeneity of Blackness, Contributions and Challenges

The heterogeneity of blackness derived from the plurality of black experience that includes colonial heritage and the legacy of immigrations. Ethnic associations and cultural practices are gateways into the plurality of black identities. These organizations constitute physical and symbolic spaces of affirmation and resistance. As bell hooks articulates it, they constitute "homespaces" or spaces for identities and communities of resistance in white supremacist societies (42). Beyond resistance against racism and affirmation of ethnic identities/ affiliations for its members, ethnic associations also provide mutual aid and the first step of integration into the web of the migration's process. They also constitute a tool for the (re)Africanization of society through cultural practices that have also been adopted by white Argentinians.

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In the case of Afro-Argentinian organizations, they are concerned about political recognition of their historical memory. They also strive to rekindle interest in and promote the African heritage of Argentina, mutual aid to its members, the fight against racism and the betterment of the living condition of the black community who were descendants of slaves. Among the important Afro-Argentine organizations that cater to the needs and visibility of the Afro-Argentinian community are the Fundación Africa Vive, Asociación Misibamba and Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana among others. The Fundación Africa Vive was founded in 1997 by María Magdalena Lamadrid, a black Argentinian descendant of slaves. It has succeeded making allies with local political circles and institutions such as the Buenos Aires's Oficinas de la Defensoría del Pueblo and the periodical *Clarín* to foster their agenda. Two years later, in 2007, another organization founded by Afro-Argentines was born in Merlo: Asociación Misibamba. The members of this organization identify themselves as black Argentines of the colonial period, and view themselves as legitimate black Argentines with unique historical experiences since they are descendants of slaves. La Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana in Santa Fe was founded by Lucía Molina in Santa Fe in 1988. It is the oldest black institution in activity. Contrary to the Asociación Misibamba, La Casa de la Cultura not only caters to Afro-Argentine cultural and sociopolitical wellbeing, but also promotes the development of aborigine communities as well. With their unique position as descendants of slaves (and despite their invisibility for centuries), Afro-Argentines had a deep impact on the socio-economic, political and cultural fabric of Argentina. The works of slaves in plantations and cattle ranching, the fight for independence, the cultural legacy in arts, literature, language, dance and music (as described in the first part of the paper) have all influenced the society. The tango, for example, as one of Argentina's greatest (cultural) icons has

African influence and the Argentine candombe is progressively becoming popular in the society under the leadership of the association Misibamba.⁵

In the case of Afro-American immigrants, each community brings from their country of origin its cultural specificities which historically are the result of years of miscegenation and transculturation between indigenous, African and European cultures. The black cultural traditions from Brazil and Uruguay, among others, contribute to the re-Africanization of Argentina and challenge the cultural uniformity of the society. The adoption by Argentinians of the Afro-American diaspora cultural and spiritual contexts has contributed to their legitimacy as an integral part of Argentinian cultural diversity as well as part of the heterogeneity of blackness. For example, the Afro-Brazilian religious practices of *Candomblé*, *Batuque*, *Omolokó*, *Umbanda* and *Quimbanda* are widespread in Argentina across ethnicity and social classes, not only among Brazilians but also among Argentinians (Frigerio 2002). Rita Segato called this phenomenon “a voluntary colonization, colonization without colonizers” (258). Afro-Brazilian religions were introduced in Argentina in the 1960s. In 2002 Alejandro Frigerio suggested that there were legally around four hundred Afro-Brazilian temples in Buenos Aires alone (130). Afro-Brazilian culture is also thriving in Argentina through the formation of associations. On May 14, 1995 Marcos Gyutauna founded the Asociación Argentina de Capoeira devoted to the education of capoeira and the diffusion of Afro-Brazilian culture in the City of Buenos Aires.⁶ In 2002 Antonio Lima created the cultural association “Me Leva Que Eu Vou” not only rescues the cultural memory of the Afro-Argentine but also realizes activities that generate social and cultural integration among Brazilians in Buenos Aires as well as promotes events and seminars related to the Brazilian community.⁷ In 2003 Claudio de Oliveira founded the Escuela de Danzas Brasileiras Balaio. This dance school is an educational enterprise, a network of cultural exchange and collaboration. They teach different type of Brazilian classic and

contemporary dances such as el forró, la samba, el afro, el xote, el frevo, la samba reggae y la lambada-souk.⁸ Nowadays, Afro-Brazilian spiritual practices, music and dance are part of the black cultural enrichment of Argentina as well as the black Uruguayan cultural context of candombe that has found fertile ground in the society for the past three decades.

Introduced in Argentina by black Uruguayans in the 1980s, the candombe has been appropriated by the Argentinian from all walks of life. For its characteristic as a popular black cultural practice, the candombe constitutes a formidable challenge to the hegemonic images of Buenos Aires as white, modern and European (Frigerio and Lamborghini 26). In April 1987 the Afro-Uruguayan trabajadores culturales/cultural workers founded the Grupo Cultural Afro in Buenos Aires which would morph in 2001 into *Movimiento AfroCultural* (MAC).⁹ MAC was instrumental in teaching and promoting candombe in the Argentinian society. The impact of the Uruguayan candombe among white Argentinians can be seen in the creation of the dance troupes *Lonjas de San Telmo* in the late 1990s and *Dos Orillas* in 2000. Both groups performed regularly at Buenos Aires carnivals, but their members were mostly white Argentinians who adopted black cultural practices. Even though the cultural legitimacy of these white African dance groups has been questioned by traditional candombe groups (López 2006), it shows a historical shift in the mentality of the (white) society who is still struggling to accept blackness. In general, the followers of black Brazilian religions and black Uruguayan culture often refer to the connections between their practices and the historical past of blacks in Argentina, thus forging transnational and trans-historical cultural identities.

The influence of Afro-American cultures in the society is also visible through the performance of the white Argentinian music and dance group Oduduwá. According to one of the founders, María Balmaceda, the group was created in 1998 by white

Argentiniens inspired by traditional Afro-Brazilians and Afro-Cubans popular religion (319). Their artistic works explore the unity between the body, word and music by combining dance, song and percussion as well as research into the characters and legends of the orixás mythology. As a syncretic and experimental endeavor, Oduduwa recreates black dance based on the candomblé and the dance of the orixás. The group performed in public spaces and in ethnic parades, bringing awareness to African cultural practices as well as fighting against racism. Oduduwa revealed how blackness could be appropriated by other ethnicities not only to showcase the importance of African cultural practices but also to (re)discover and/or foment personal identity. María Balmaceda confessed that, to dance "afro" and to dance the orixás connected her with deep aspects of her life and essence. It allowed her to connect with the mystery of life, nature and the essence of the universal. The dance of orixás also allowed her to travel through different human experiences, to be a woman, to be a male, to be a naughty child or a warrior, to be an elderly and sensual and beautiful woman among others (324).

From a cultural and economic standpoint the segregated black ethnic associations are important to the integration and socio-cultural wellbeing of their respective community members, but operating in isolation can also be detrimental to blackness in general in terms of negotiating social and political power and great visibility within the white Argentinian society. During my stay in Buenos Aires, I discovered that many Argentiniens don't make clear distinction between the multiplicities of blackness.¹⁰ They consider all blacks a single racial/ethnic entity, and might marginalize or treat them poorly. Afro-Argentiniens and Afro-American immigrants and their descendants are indistinguishable by phenotype. By sharing a common racial classification they are all exposed to the same forms of racial discrimination. As Charles Mills put it in the context of the United States of America,

they all wear the racial stigma of subordination in their physical appearance (1998:84). Faced with a united social perception against blackness, it is imperative for the black communities to unite and/or build coalitions among themselves to forge common goals and create social movements. As McCarthy and Mayer assert, social movements depend, as a necessary precursor, on the existence of a collective identity (1977).

The last two decades have witnessed the formation of integrated associations that started in 1986 with the creation of the Instituto de Investigación y Difusión de las Culturas Negras “Ilé Asé Osún Doyo” founded by Gladys Mabel Mallorca.¹¹ Thanks to their actions, the first black Argentinian museum was established in 1987. The “Casa de Africa en Argentina” was founded in 1995 by Irene Ortiz to promote cultural exchange between Africa and Latin-America.¹² The Asociación Civil África y su Diáspora created in 1999 with the review *Revista Benkadi*. Other important mixed associations are Afro Xangó and the Consejo Nacional de Organizaciones Afro de la Argentina (CONAFRO) created in November 2010 as a fusion between the Movimiento de la Diáspora Africana de la Argentina (DIAFAR) and the Asociación África y su Diáspora. These movements participated in Africa week in 2007, which transformed since 2008 into African Diaspora Week organized by the Movimiento de la Diáspora Africana. The cultural and political activities of these associations are having some impact on the visibility and recognition of black subjects in the socio-political arena. Their activism has caught the attention of the INADI (National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism) since 2006. In July 2007, INADI organized Black Argentinian Cultural Month during which they celebrated the first Argentinian Congress about people of African descent. One month later, the institute organized a seminar on Africa and its diaspora. In 2008 and 2009 they promoted awareness sessions entitled “Argentine is also Afro”, where Africa and African Diaspora cultural practices were presented (INADI). These sessions constituted a platform to debate the incipient

racism that plagued Argentinian society. In 2009 the INADI organized the “Primer Encuentro Artístico de Candombe Afroargentino” (first artistic gathering of Afro-Argentinian Candombe) in order to value and promote Argentinian candombe and the culture of the Afro-Argentinian community (INADI). After the declaration of 2011 as the International Year for People of African Descent by the United Nations and subsequently by the Organization of American States, the INADI presented the program “Black Descendants against Discrimination and Racism” (INADI). The Institute is still actively involved in the promotion of blackness in the Argentinian society. The Asociación Civil África y su Diáspora organized the “Primer Encuentro de Derechos Humanos y Cultura Afro en la Argentina” in 2009. This association has worked since 2010 with the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censo (INDEC) to incorporate the afro-descendant population in the census, and is also working with the Health Ministry to improve healthcare in the black communities.

In July 2010, the autonomous city of Buenos Aires created the EPIIA (Space of Promotion, Integration and Exchange with Africa) (Maffia 80). This group is comprised of the black communities (Afro-Argentiniens, African and Afro-American immigrants), organizations from the civil society, civil servants, intellectuals and artists working for a better understanding of Africa and its Diaspora and connecting Argentina to Africa through seminars, public talks, conversations and interviews. On March 15, 2011, the ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security organized discussion sessions entitled “Trabajo y Cultura Afro en la Argentina” (Afro Labor and Culture in Argentina) with the participation of the CONAFRO and members of the black communities, government and civil society.¹³ It was an opportunity for the black communities and the government to talk about the integration of blacks in the labor market and the discrimination they encounter in the society in general. The visibility of blackness was manifest at the higher level when the Argentina Chancellery hosted the

First National Congress of afro-descendants and Africans from the Republic of Argentina on March 21, 2011. The Congress was presided over by the Chancellor himself who advocated for the inclusion of the black community as a topic in the state and government agenda. The Congress and Senate of the Province of Buenos Aires promulgated the law 14276 that established October 11th as the “Día de la Cultura Africano-Argentina” (Day of African-Argentinian Culture).¹⁴ In May 20, 2013 The Argentinian Senate and Congress passed the Law 26.852 that declared November 8th as the “Día Nacional de los/as afroargentinos/as y de la cultura afro” (National Day of Afroargentinos and Afro Culture), in commemoration of María Remedios del Valle, a female soldier of the Ejército del Norte (InfoLeg).¹⁵

Thanks to the activities of black associations and mostly to the activism of black integrated/mixed organizations, blackness has become more and more visible by local and national Argentinian institutions. The growing involvement of state agencies in the promotion of black cultural practices and the fight against discrimination of the black community respond to the government’s desire to expand its cultural diversity initiative and human rights campaign which in the past only involved Indian communities. Cultural incorporation of minorities and/or new groups is an important first step, but it has to be followed by political incorporation which is the credo of any democratic country (Reuel Rogers 3). One important political victory for black communities was the incorporation of the term “afro-descendant” on the 2010 national census. The official political recognition of the black community does not necessarily mean acceptance in or by the society but it is an achievement nevertheless. The acceptance of the black community in the society is a constant and tedious process that has to go beyond engaging local and national authorities in promoting cultural blackness; it also involves focusing on political inclusion. The black communities need to harness political capital in order to force political implementation of concrete

mechanism/laws to recognize the contributions of blacks to the history, sociopolitical, economic and cultural landscape of the country. It is even more important for black communities to remain united in order to achieve more visibility and consideration. In a society plagued with racism and anti-blackness rhetoric, common identity and goals should trump differences within the black communities. There have been too much strife and rivalry among black organizations competing for leadership and authority to speak for the black community as a whole (López 2005, Frigerio and Lamborghini 2011).¹⁶ Due to the low number of black demographics, the fight for political incorporation needs to be based on trans-ethnic partnerships. The black communities have to forge alliances with other ethnicities and minority groups such as the marginalized/discriminated Amerindians, Asians, Peruvians and Bolivians among others including the white progressive Argentinians. Political activism and the voting power of minorities (who have the right to vote) are powerful weapons for political incorporation and policy changes.

Blackness in Argentina is not only a historical fact but a present reality that encompasses the life and contributions of blacks descendent of slaves, black immigrants and their progeny. The immigration factor re-centers the socio-political marginality of blackness and reveals its heterogeneity and complexity. The formation of ethnic associations has provided a fertile ground for the survival of black identities and the (re)Africanization of the Argentinian society. Nevertheless, to achieve a greater visibility, blacks have to continue forging common goals and solidarity against racism which still permeates society despite government effort of promoting multiculturalism.

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- ¹ This statement is also noted in the documentary "Afroargentinos" (Diego Ceballos et al., directors, 2005).
- ² My research trip in Buenos Aires in 2013 has been fundamental in my desire to work on blackness in Argentina. Some of my information and analysis derives from personal contact with people, and visiting monuments, museums and archives.
- ³ "Africa Vive", [s.e.], [s.l.], August 18, 2006. Taken from *In Pueblos Negros de América Latina*. México Nación Multicultural <http://www.nacionmulticultural.unam.mx/>
- ⁴ George Reid Andrews (2010) also noted that Afro-Uruguayans moved to Buenos Aires since mid-19 century to escape political and economic hardships: "During the second half of the 1800s, Afro-Uruguayans moved to Buenos Aires in significant numbers seeking both economic opportunity and to escape from Uruguayan military conscription" (91). Afro-Uruguayans and Brazilians immigrants, who arrived in the mid-1980s, were instrumental in forging a vibrant *afro* culture. This effort is also a result of past experience in their country of origin where blackness has been historically denigrated for so long (Andrews 2004,)
- ⁵ There are candombe and candomblé. In Argentina and Uruguay it is called candombe but in Brazil it is candomblé.
- ⁶ Information about the history and activities of the association are found at <http://capoeira.com.ar/la-asociacion/>
- ⁷ The history and activities of the association are found on thier website at <http://www.melevaqueeevou.com.ar/pt>
- ⁸ The school has a website <http://www.balaio.com.ar/inicio/>
- ⁹ The Movimiento Afrocultrual is the result of a fusion between Grupo Cultural Afro (1987) and Comparsa Kalakan-gue (1998-2000). More information about the association can be found on their website at <http://movimientoafro.com.ar/>
- ¹⁰ During my interaction with Argentinians in Buenos Aires, I was considered black right from the onset by those who didn't know my nationality/ethnicity. I also felt some sort of alienation in predominantly white neighborhoods. I was mistaken for Brazilian many times.
- ¹¹ The history and activities of the institute are available on their website at <http://www.doyo.com.ar/frame.htm>
- ¹² Data and goals of the organization are found on the website of INADI (National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism). <http://inadi.gob.ar/osc/ficha/casa-de-africa-en-argentina-para-intercambio-cultural/>
- ¹³ This event was organized and sponsored by the Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social. It took place at the University of Buenos Aires in the College of Philosophy and Arts (Facultad de Filosofía y Letras). The participants were: Consejo Nacional de Organizaciones Afro, Asociación Misimba, Carrera de Relaciones del Trabajo (Facultad de Ciencias Sociales de la UBA), Cátedra (Sociología y los estudios poscoloniales; carrera de sociología de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales de la UBA), Cátedra (Derecho sindical y de las relaciones colectivas del trabajo; Carrera de Relaciones del Trabajo de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales de la UBA).
- ¹⁴ This law 14276 is found on the website of the *Cámara de Diputados de la Provincia de Buenos Aires*.
- ¹⁵ InfoLeg (Información Legislativa) from the Center of Documentation and Information (CDI). María Remedios del Valle took part in the battles of El Desaguadero, Salta, Vilcapugio and Ayohuma. She was designated "Capitana del Ejército" by General Manuel Belgrano (Galasso 2005, Ottaviano 2011).
- ¹⁶ One example is the failure to obtain a "Casa del Negro" (Black House) in 2000 because of rivalry between black Argentinians descendant from slaves who wanted the house to be only for them (for historical reason) while black Uruguayans and Africans proposed a more inclusive approach.

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Africans into Creoles: Slavery, Ethnicity, and Identity in Colonial Costa Rica
by Russell Lohse (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press,
2014): 351 pp. \$34.95 (paperback)

Reviewed by Beau D.J. Gaitors

Russell Lohse's book *Africans into Creoles* is a social history of Africans and their enslaved descendants in early-colonial Costa Rica that fits firmly into a wide body of literature on the transatlantic slave trade, comparative slavery, and the colonial period in Latin America. In this text, Lohse argues that diverse ethnic origins, the small nature of the slave trade to Costa Rica, geographic dispersal of slaves across Costa Rica, and constant contact between Africans and people of other racial and ethnic origins led to rapid and profound creolization from 1600-1750. Through his analysis of baptismal records, marriage records, notarial records, and court cases, he shows how a seemingly insignificant number of enslaved individuals provided tangible contributions to the economic, political, and social development of colonial Costa Rica. In fact, as he makes clear, the nature of slave labor and social interactions made available in Costa Rica produced the circumstances for the creolization of the African descended population within Costa Rica.

In 1709 a Danish crew onboard the ships *Christianus Quintus* and *Fredericus Quartus* completed loading their cargo of goods and enslaved individuals on the Gold Coast of Africa only to ultimately abandon the ships and the surviving 671 enslaved Africans on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica in 1710. In Chapter one, "A 'Guinea Voyage' Gone Wrong: From Africa to Costa Rica, 1708-1710," Lohse employs the circumstances revolving around the aforementioned ships as a launching point for his analysis of the creolization process of African descendants in Costa Rica. Upon reaching the shores of the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, slaves fled into the interior only to be returned and interrogated in a court case on the ships' trajectory and

circumstances leading to their abandonment. As a result, Spanish colonial court officials interviewed the newly arrived slaves using African descendant translators to learn about their voyage and the ship crew's role in smuggling: a high offense in Spanish law although it was a practice well embedded in the commercial system, as shown in the historiography. These court records give voice to the enslaved and, as Lohse employs them in the following chapters, an opportunity to follow specific men, women, children, and their descendants showing continuity in the process of creolization.

In Chapter two, "Stolen from Their Countries: The Origins of Africans in Costa Rica," Lohse makes the case that no single African ethnic group dominated the proportion of African descendants in Costa Rica. In fact, both sides of the Atlantic served as complex contact zones where creolization processes took place. Conflicts between European nations, on the one hand, and the military struggles between African nation-states, on the other, placed enslaved Africans and European ship crews in the middle of fluctuating power relationships. Despite initiating the transatlantic voyage from the same fortresses and ports, many slaves came from the interior of the African continent as prisoners of war, meeting and interacting with different ethnic and cultural groups under harsh circumstances along the way to the coast. This chapter, especially, fits into the trajectory of African revisionists showing that no social death happened among the enslaved; instead cultural transmission of ethnicity took place at slave forts well before their voyage. The Atlantic crossing was another space for creolization to take place as enslaved individuals survived the transatlantic slave trade across cultural and linguistic barriers. Unlike colonial Louisiana, Brazil, and Cuba, Costa Rica did not have a constant revitalization of specific African ethnicities due to the small-scale slave trade. Given the high number of mulattos and free blacks already in Costa Rica, Africans adapted to the majority culture regardless of their ethnic origin.

Chapter three, "Middle Passages: The Slave Trade to Costa Rica," examines the slave trade and the ways that African descendants entered Costa Rica, ultimately demonstrating the strong regional connections that Costa Rica had to other spaces in the Caribbean. Lohse argues that the majority of African descendants who finally arrived in Costa Rica had disembarked in Caribbean ports in Jamaica and the Isthmus of Panama before coming to Costa Rica. In fact, as he states "no ship ever intentionally sailed from the African coast to Costa Rica" (76). As the numerous slaves going to the region had gone to Panama first and were later smuggled into Costa Rica, the legal and illegal trafficking of slaves adds Costa Rica to a rich body of literature on maritime contraband trade. By the time slaves arrived to Costa Rica's ports they had already begun a process of creolization, at the very least linguistically and in terms of the social hierarchy imposed upon them due to their experiences in other Caribbean spaces.

Even when slaves arrived to Costa Rica they had to learn how slavery functioned in this particular colony. Chapter four, "Becoming Slaves in Costa Rica," engages the multilevel learned process that slaves encountered in Costa Rica. The renaming of slaves was a way to separate them from their former identity and situate them in their new social context. Most slaves accepted the forced use of Spanish language for communication purposes, yet Lohse discusses exceptions that did not learn Spanish. Because Costa Rica lacked the institutions that allowed slaves to have their own unique ethnic culture, such as the *cabildos de nación* in Cuba, slaves developed an especially creolized American culture.

Regardless of their process of creolization, slaves owners forced enslaved Africans to perform domestic and agricultural labor for which they had been brought to Costa Rica. Chapter five, "Working and the Shaping of Slave Life," demonstrates how labor provided enslaved Africans with opportunities to converse in new languages, to witness the functioning of new hierarchical structures, and placed slaves directly within

those structures. There were differences within slave regimes throughout Latin America, especially in the colonial period. In fitting with the bodies of work on comparative slavery, the lack of a plantation society in Costa Rica had direct consequences for the livelihood of the enslaved. The majority of enslaved women worked in the domestic spheres, always in close proximity with the masters. Yet, enslaved men lived unsupervised lives after the introduction of the cacao plant to Costa Rica. Lohse articulates that owners of cacao haciendas employed a combination of workers, "including free wage laborers, sharecroppers, and African slaves" (134). The physical mobility afforded to males on cacao plantations came as a result of the relatively light labor requirements after workers planted the trees. These labor conditions provided space for social mobility in ways that were restricted in plantation society. Lohse shows that there was not only social mobility but also a fluidity in which enslaved peoples interacted with free individuals. Many enslaved men engaged in contracts just as free men did, despite laws to the contrary. And because cacao served as legal tender in the colony, its production had been used by some slaves to negotiate with their master and even as a tool to gain freedom.

When negotiations with masters did not work, slaves sought ways to resist. Unlike in Jamaica and Cuba, where flight to new communities through cimmaronaje and marronage existed, in Costa Rica, more often than not, slaves did not attempt to flee the system. Slaves who ran away to cities would almost immediately be noticed as foreigners and/or newcomers, which would cast suspicion. As Lohse states, "A fugitive's best chance for permanent freedom lay in leaving Costa Rica and starting a new life as a stranger in another province" (155). In Chapter six, "Slave Resistance," Lohse argues that on a large scale, resistance against slave masters was not to dismantle the system but to find more comfortable spaces within it. In many cases, slaves attempted to find new masters who would treat them better. Honor, a key theme

throughout Latin America, played an important role in the context of slavery in Costa Rica as well. Lohse adds to the body of literature on honor in colonial Latin America as he provides examples of how slaves resisted through rhetoric showing the very nature of the creolization of African slaves as they used concepts, ideas, and arguments that elites employed as a way to degrade and attack their masters' honor.

While resistance hinged on slaves' perceptions of their status, they continued to attempt to improve the status of themselves and their families. Chapter seven, "More than Slaves: Family and Freedom," focuses on slave families and their association with freedom. The gender separation of labor partially restricted the potential to create cohesive slave families and a slave culture that would be distinct from that of the master, because many women worked in close proximity to the masters. As a result, slavery in Costa Rica gave way to makeshift families as older men and women often adopted younger slaves. Adding to the literature on comparative slavery Lohse asserts that, unlike in other places, enslaved men highly successfully chose free women of other racial origins as wives, attempting to ensure freedom for their children and sometimes for themselves in Costa Rica. Often the children of these enslaved individuals found acceptance in free communities of color, found jobs in skilled trades, or worked in the militias: showing the presence of African descendants in the Spanish colonial military.

As part of the *Diálogos* book series published through the University of New Mexico Press, this text is accessible to a wide readership for classroom adoption by university and college teachers. Costa Rica's link to the Atlantic world through commercial connections, especially with the expansion of the cacao industry, had direct consequences for the enslaved and their creolization process in one of Spain's smaller colonies. Beyond its contributions to the historiography of the transatlantic slave trade, comparative slavery, and colonial Latin America history, this book would be useful for

students in courses on the African diaspora, colonial economies, and identity formation in the Americas.

***The Devil's Nose* by Luz Argentina Chiriboga. Trans. Ingrid Watson Miller and Margaret L. Morris. (New York: Page Publishing, 2015.):108 pp.**

Reviewed by Mario A. Chandler, Oglethorpe University

With Ingrid Miller and Margaret Morris' English translation of Afro-Ecuadorian writer, Luz Argentina Chiriboga's *La nariz del diablo*, published originally in Spanish, English-speaking audiences have access to an unusually short, but intriguing historical novel whose aim, among numerous objectives, is to resurrect the little-known contribution of Jamaican laborers in the construction of the line of Ecuador's national railway system that bridged the two-hundred fifty mile, but geographically-challenged, distance between Ecuador's capital, Quito, and its main coastal city, Guayaquil. Chiriboga's novel is set during the first decade of the twentieth century, a time of significant social and economic transformation in Ecuadorian society. The latter half of the nineteenth century found Ecuador struggling to modernize on the heels of its independence from Spain, a feat that came to fruition in 1822 through the actions of the Venezuelan *Mariscal*, Antonio José de Sucre, and his rebel troops' defeat of the Spanish colonial army at the famous Battle of Pichincha—a fierce and bloody two-year skirmish fought on the slopes of Quito's foreboding and iconic volcano called Pichincha.

While Quito's Pichincha volcano specifically is in no way crucial to *The Devil's Nose*, the notion of difficult geographical terrain as a metaphor for human struggle and perseverance is undoubtedly and quite clearly one of the novel's essential and strongest leitmotifs. The story's initial setting in Kingston, Jamaica, and its focus on Jamaican laborers' recruitment for work with the Guayaquil/Quito Railway Company is an intensely strategic and creative choice on Chiriboga's part. It is certainly possible to begin the story where the majority of the action will unfold, in

Ecuador. Nonetheless, by beginning the story in Jamaica, the place of origin of the characters with whom she attempts to convince her readers she is most preoccupied, Chiriboga establishes as a necessary tone of humanization toward her characters, an important choice since Chiriboga's story of Jamaican railway labor in Ecuador is as much a story of forgotten and unsung contribution as it is a response to other Ecuadorian stories and histories that have relegated these key Caribbean players in Ecuador's railway saga to invisibility—the epitome of dehumanization.

While the novel contains a variety of intriguing and alluring characters, the narrative is centered on Jamaican brothers, Gregory and Syne Marret, who have relatively different motives that propel them in the journey from Jamaica toward the Ecuadorian unknown, which prior to their arrival in Ecuador, they can only conceive in simplistic Andean clichés centered on condors and climate. For Gregory, the younger of the two brothers, the desire to earn money and return to Jamaica to construct a better life for his wife, Pamela, and two children, David and Edna, is his constant; it is what helps him overcome his trepidation to depart in the first place, as well as what sharpens his survival instinct when appointed the deadly task of “dynamite man,” which obliges him to use TNT (and sufficient agility to avoid death) to blast a path along Devil's Nose, the treacherous mountain and most difficult impediment in the railroad's trajectory, as well as the inspiration for the novel's title. Gregory, fueled by the prospect of finding gold in Ecuador and returning home a rich man is an *el dorado* motif present in various forms in many migration narratives. His brother Syne, on the other hand, departs from Jamaica unmarried and with no offspring. Unladen by strong familial ties, what Syne brings to and cultivates in Ecuador, is his “special energy, an extraordinary capacity of a leader with an unbreakable faith united to action” (Chiriboga 24). Syne represents, therefore, the voice of black leadership in the Ecuador railway project. Syne's leadership is necessary, not only to inspire and to motivate his

younger brother, who has a weaker, more delicate personality, but of equal importance, to inspire their fellow Jamaican migrants whose sufferings through unsanitary working conditions, altitude sickness, poisonous snakebites, and the potential of being blown to bits by dynamite, require a voice of advocacy from within their own ranks.

Interestingly, the original Spanish version of *The Devil's Nose* was released by Chiriboga in 2010, a little over a century since the completion of the railway line, which was celebrated with great fanfare in Quito in 1908, an event that Chiriboga paints in the final chapter of her novel with conflicting and disturbing bitter sweetness. While a good number of books (mostly nonfiction) commemorating the construction of the Guayaquil/Quito Railway are released within a few years before and after the publishing of *La nariz del diablo*, Chiriboga's novel is unique in its attempt to recuperate through fiction, a contribution that often appears as a mere footnote in texts, taking a backseat to more "prominent" (i.e., non-black) contributors to the railroad enterprise.

Chiriboga's recuperative objective is clear throughout the novel, but reinforced strongly towards the novel's end where the narrator articulates a series of pointed interrogatives questioned precisely at the national celebratory moment when the seemingly impossible project had been achieved due in large part to the sacrifices of life and limb of the Jamaicans:

What happens to the laborers is inconsequential, but no one seems to remember them. Those present only have eyes for don Eloy and for the railway. *Why do not they remember those who sacrificed themselves in the construction of the railway? They are profoundly grateful to the technical staff, to Mr. Harman, and to others but why not to the laborers?* (Italics author's) (Chiriboga 107)

The author's mention in the previous citation of José Eloy Alfaro Delgado, the revered president of Ecuador during much of the railway's construction, is interesting. Undoubtedly, don Eloy's modernizing vision and steadfast constancy contributed

greatly to the completed railway's success. But on the one hand while Chiriboga is critiquing in this citation, the front and centered positioning of politicians and the material byproduct of the railway itself over the black human toil and sacrifice to build it, on the other hand, the author seems to reinforce throughout much of the novel the supremacy of the Ecuadorian president's vision and leadership over the sacrificial manual labor of all of other characters in the text, most importantly that of the Jamaicans. In a way, this seems to undercut and take away from the author's primary objective.

With ubiquitous and laudatory sentiment, the figure of don Eloy's character is tightly woven throughout the length and breadth of Chiriboga's storyline, either mentioned or appearing physically in all of the novel's four chapters. To be sure, it is impossible to tell the story of the construction of the Guayaquil/Quito Railway without talking about President Eloy Alfaro. However, Chiriboga's overly reverential painting of don Eloy at times overshadows her Jamaican characters, engulfing them by the president's vast shadow, and thereby relegating them, uncomfortably and frequently so, to the status of paternalized if not infantilized characters. Some examples that illustrate this paternalism occur, interestingly enough, with two of the most intriguing and high-potential characters in the entire novel: Lamberto Balket, a fearless, optimistic orphan and the youngest of the migrants, and Leona Cuebute, the only female migrant on the boat with the Marret brothers and others bound for Ecuador. In Ecuador, both Lamberto and Leona experience circumstances that result in their need of "rescue" by don Alfaro. In Lamberto's case, during his recovery from a tropical illness that nearly claimed his life, don Alfaro visits the camp, and with little motivation that is made clear in the text besides the fact that Lamberto is significantly younger than the other workers, the president whisks the young Lamberto away from the camp and we are

told unceremoniously that “[Lamberto’s] new family has become don Eloy, and he will have the considerations and the goodness that characterize the Alfaro” (Chiriboga 55).

In the case of Leona, fearful that her gender would prevent her journey to Ecuador and her shot at a chance to build a better life, she pretended to be a man (León) for a good portion of the narrative. The wasted time contributed to a potentially fruitful relationship that was never realized between her and Syne Marret. Instead, Leona leaves the railway and decides to go to Quito to take work as a domestic, where we learn some years later she is abused and raped by an Ecuadorian, Ventura Villavicencio, who has left the country taking their son, Rigoberto, with him. At the close of the novel, Leona seeks and gains audience with President Eloy Alvaro and makes a strong appeal for his comfort and justice. Remarkably, not only does don Alfaro remember Leona from the railway line years earlier, but he promises “justice for all” applicable to Leona as well as other to mothers in similar circumstances (Chiriboga 103). The key flaw of the novel is that it ends abruptly with no clear resolutions and with no tidy wrapping of up the fate of the key Jamaican characters in the text. Some return to Jamaica, while others stay in Ecuador. We know that much. But what happens to the ones who return home? How well do those who stay adjust and adapt to the rest of their lives lived out in Ecuador? The reader is left with far more questions than answers. For a novel that strives to recuperate the Jamaican story from the annals of Ecuadorian history, the reader is left hungry for an ending that provides better creative “justice” for the characters that we have come to know and in whose lives we have taken keen interest. Instead, Chiriboga settles on a patriotic and pan-Latino climax grounded in the triumph of the railroad with the final lines of the novel, “Long live the railroad!” “Long live Alfaro!” “Long live Alfaro, dammit!” that seem to erase the powerful Jamaican presence and objective that novelist began crafting at the start of her story.

Valero, Silvia & Campos García, Alejandro. Editors. *Identidades Políticas em Tempos de Afrodescendencia: auto-identificación, ancestralidad, visibilidad y derechos*. (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2015): 635 pp.

Reviewed by Ana Beatriz Gonçalves, Federal University Juiz de Fora, Brazil

The conception of identity is emphasized in the various chapters that compose *Identidades Políticas em Tempos de Afrodescendencia*. Written by a number of scholars from different parts of Latin America, Canada, and France, and edited by Silvia Valero and Alejandro Campos García, the book discusses identity from different perspectives and backgrounds.

The long introduction by Campos García sets the tone for the intellectual purpose of the book. As a point of departure, he discusses the importance of the “Conferencia Regional de las Américas”, which took place in Santiago, Chile in December 2000, and analyzes the discourse of political identities in general and its many interpretations when related to the African descent population in Latin America.

In the presentation that follows, Valero and Campos García divided the book in four different sections, according to the type of discussion of identity. Therefore, the three articles that compose the first section deal with the African descent category with its variations and different purposes.

The first article, “Los términos afrocubano y afrodescendiente y la importancia de ARAAC para Cuba”, by Tomás Fernández Robaina, deals with the conception of African descendant as a category that shares cultural objectives and experiences. Moreover, he questions whether or not the term Afro-Cuban really describes a population that, although linked by the idea of a nation, has its peculiarities. For the author, the fact that Cuba joined the ARAAC (Articulación Regional Afrodescendiente para América Latina y el Caribe) is extremely important in the struggle against prejudice.

Alfonso Cassiani, in “La diáspora Africana y Afrodescendiente en Latinoamérica: las redes de organizaciones como puntos de encuentro” discusses the importance of international networks in the Afro Latin American movement, and its articulations, and describes the rise of different organizations and networks from 1992 to 2001. Identity for Cassiani should be understood as a concept linked to *Madre Africa*, despite the differences amongst the various groups that share the same ancestry. Diaspora should, then, be discussed transnationally, not as a local phenomenon.

In the last article of this section, “El movimiento estudiantil afrocolombiano en ciernes: entre reivindicaciones antiguas y nuevos desafíos para el multiculturalismo en Colombia”, Óscar Quintero analyzes the importance of the rise of university student movements in the articulation of new demands and claims of the Afro Colombian population.

The two following articles, “Raza, racismo e identidad. Los postulados del racismo doctrinario en el debate actual”, by Costa Rican writer Quince Duncan, and “Negros? Afros? Más allá de una respuesta maniquea y excluyente. Reflexiones en torno al caso venezolano”, by Meyby Soraya Ugueto Ponce, compose the second section of the book. Both articles explore the complexities, the challenges, and the contradictions of the identity discourse, and emphasize the existence of an African descent community with a common cultural background: “Estamos, así, frente a posiciones híbridas que además de asumir la existencia de una comunidad afrodescendiente con un sustrato cultural común, no pierden de vista la condición de esa última como una entidad política que intenta producir una plataforma discursiva sobre su homogeneidad” (70).

The following section, the longest in the book, is composed by six articles which analyze the identity discourse as a both facilitator and an obstacle to social / political causes. Eduard Arriaga’s “La red de representaciones artísticas de lo afrodescendiente: tejiendo imaginarios en la era digital. Colombia, Canadá y Guinea

Ecuatorial” situates the birth of identity discourse in the XV Century, and argues that identity and representation, in the case of African descent, should be negotiated in three levels: being, resembling, and identifying (or being identified). The author is interested in the different spaces where those identities are discussed in the digital era.

“Contruyendo uma identificação desde la historia local: la categoria afroargentino del tronco colonial como experiência etnogênica”, by Norberto Pablo Cirio presents the Argentine association called Misibamba, created by a group of Afroargentinians as an initiative not only to question local politics, but to enable the category African descent in Argentina.

“Las políticas culturales em Belice: entre la herencia colonial y el reconocimiento de la diferencia”, by Elizabeth Cunin. In this article Cunin analyzes the relation between how identity is conceived and social practices. Using Belice as an example, she concludes that recognition of multiculturalism does not imply real actions to these identities; instead, it could be a threat.

“Agenciando la raza, reinventando la nación: el movimiento de las reparaciones en Brasil”, by Petrônio Domingues also relates identities to political actions. Using the (MRP) as a point of departure to his analysis, Domingues concludes that the movement actually tries to dissipate the marginal condition of the AfroBrazilian population. “Acciones afirmativas para negros en el Brasil y la construcción de un nuevo discurso sobre la desigualdade en el país del mito de la democracia racial”, by Lília G. M. Tavoraro y Rebecca Lemos Igreja traces the most relevant aspects of affirmative action in Brazil, as an answer to the demands of the AfroBrazilian population, “La construcción de las identidades contenidas en las acciones políticas no debe verse como un a priori que genera y evidencia el camino a tomar”, but as a consequence of these actions.

“Las encrucijadas del reconocimiento multicultural. Los afrodescendientes em América Latina y el Caribe”, by Carlos Agudelo “reflexiona sobre la forma en

que le discurso sobre la discriminación racial se articula con el de la existencia de derechos culturales, territoriales y políticos.” Mapea las condiciones de implementación de las políticas del multiculturalismo y el reconocimiento cultural”. Identities are viewed as a product of the political, conditioned by it.

The last section, composed of two articles, written by the editors, discusses the various processes and strategies that made the Afrodescent discourse not only possible, but necessary.

“Afroepistemología y sensibilización en las narrativas históricas afrodescendientes del siglo XXI”, by Silvia Valero looks at a documentary *Voces para un silencio*, by the Cuban film writer Gloria Rolando, and a number of literary texts, *Fiebre Negra*, by Maurizio Rosenvit, 2008, *Susurros negros*, by Mirta Fachini, 2010, both from Argentina, and *El pueblo afro descendiente*, by Costarrican writer Quince Duncan (2012) to analyze the way the past is represented in contemporary literary and audiovisual Afrohispanic productions. In her analysis, Valero uses the concepts proposed by the Venezuelan Jesús “chucho” García, afroepistemología, and sensibilización, to reinforce the idea of a common experience that connects the Afrohispanic world.

The last text of the book, “Normalización y formación del modelo de justicia social de los derechos humanos: el tema afrodescendente y la contribución del sistema interamericano (2005-2011)”, by Alejandro Campos-García examines the different processes Afrohispanic civil rights and states that, since the creation of the OAE, civil rights and identity politics in Latin American are unconceivable if Afro descendent is not taken into account.

The various perspectives presented in this volume show the reader different views of cultural, historical, and political projects in Latin American societies that want to engage in transnational, multicultural, and yet conflicted, projects. By describing and analyzing contexts of exclusion and marginalization very well known by Afro Latin Americans, it also demonstrates the importance of

rearticulating these projects by highlighting the necessity of discussing identity in a global world. This book is, in my opinion, an essential resource for scholars of Afro-Latin-American issues.

**The *Publication of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association*
(PALARA) invites submissions for the Fall 2016 number**



PALARA, a multi-lingual journal devoted to African diaspora studies published annually by African and African American Studies at Dartmouth College, is now accepting submissions for the Fall 2015, Number 19 edition. *PALARA* is multi-disciplinary and publishes research and creativity relevant to diaspora studies in the Americas and Equatorial Guinea in West Africa. Manuscripts should conform to the latest style manual of the individual discipline and may not exceed twenty-five pages in length. Submissions are to be sent electronically to the editor of the journal at: palara@alarascholars.org. It is our policy to have all manuscripts anonymously refereed; therefore, please omit any identification of authorship from the typescript. The submission should be accompanied by a contact file, which lists all pertinent information for the author and submitted manuscript (name, university affiliation, rank, contact information, and title of submission). We are especially interested in receiving submissions from colleagues in the social sciences.

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