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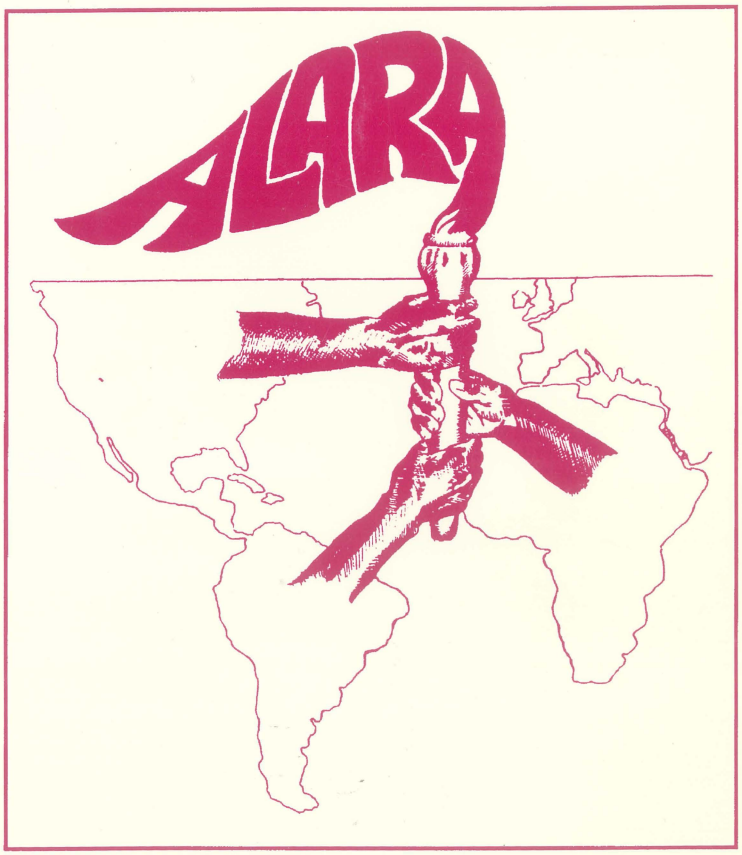

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Table of Contents

Essays

Dolores Joseph Montout's "Limon on the Raw": A Study of Language, Intrahistory and Afro-Costa Rican Cultural Identity
by Dorothy Mosby 3

The Demon of Solitude
by Katherine M. Thomas 17

Desmemorias y genocidios discursivos: cultura letrada afroargentina de fines del siglo XIX.
por Alejandro Solomianski 26

Maroons and the Palimpsest Landscape
by Margaret M. Olsen 43

History, Violence and Self-Glorification in Afro-Mexican *corridos* from *Costa Chica de Guerrero*.
by Paulette A. Ramsay 62

Reviews

Haitian Revolutionary Studies, by David Patrick Geggus
reviewed by Flore Zéphir 79

Blasfemia del escriba, por Alberto Guerra Naranjo
reviewed by Mauricio J. Almonte 85

Coplas Esmeraldeñas, por Luz Argentina Chiriboga
reviewed by Paulette Ramsay 89

Dolores Joseph Montout's "Limon on the Raw": A Study of Language, Intrahistory and Afro-Costa Rican Cultural Identity

by Dorothy Mosby

Introduction

In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," the Black British cultural critic, Stuart Hall, asserts that there are at least two possible ways of examining cultural identity. The first "defines 'cultural identity' in terms of the idea of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self,' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves,' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (51). This consideration of cultural identity "reflect(s) the common historical experience and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people,' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath shifting vicissitudes of our actual history" (51). The other position offers a "strategic essentialism" which recognizes that actual identity is not an unvarying, monolithic fact. Hall states, "Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being.' It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo transformation" (52).

"Limon on the Raw" by Dolores Joseph Montout (1904-1991) is a fictionalized articulation of the second definition of cultural identity offered by Hall, through its portrayal of the process of "becoming" Costa Rican over generations for the Black population of Afro-West Indian descent in the provincial port town of Puerto Limón. Joseph presents a study of the shaping of cultural identity and community transformation by identifying language change and intrahistory.[1] The short story appears in *Tres relatos del caribe costarricense* (1984), a collection of three stories written in English on the Afro-West Indian culture of Limón. The linguistic dissonance between the Spanish title and the English text can be attributed to the publication of the collection by an official organ of the Costa Rican government, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, as part of an Afro-Limonese short story contest won by Joseph in 1982.

Joseph's work, "Although marred by spelling and typographical errors," echoing Donald Gordon's observations, occupies an important position as a literary representation of earlier generations of Afro-Costa Ricans of West Indian descent (21). "Limon on the Raw" explores the changing ethnolinguistic community formed by Blacks of West Indian descent on the Atlantic coast of Costa Rica. The text examines the history, culture, and legacy of the exploitation of Black workers in the Limón by foreign companies, as well as the difficult integration of earlier generations of Afro-West Indians into the dominant Hispanic culture. The town of Limón is configured as a space still grappling with the effects of (neo)colonialism and cultural domination. The past is haunted by the former regional control by the British-owned Northern Railway Company and the North American-based United Fruit Company during the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Both operations depended on contractual labor from the West Indies. The transformation of Afro-West Indian cultural identity into a Costa Rican national identity in Limón is also impacted by efforts initiated in the mid-twentieth century by political reformers from the predominantly white/*mestizo* Central Valley to politically enfranchise and culturally

"Hispanize" the largely English-speaking Black population, in effect to ensure their "Costa Ricanness" and minimize their "foreignness."

"Limon on the Raw" follows Amanda Jackson, a second-generation Afro-West Indian in Costa Rica, and her neighbors from the bus stop to the central market and back home again. The bus, with its Black and *mestizo* passengers, represents a microcosm of Limón as a site of cultural contact and conflict. The thoughts and conversations of the characters and narrative interruptions in the text demonstrate change in the region during the late 1970s to the early 1980s. The issues raised in the text highlight tensions during a time that reflects distance from the Revolution of 1948, a conflict that brought sweeping changes in favor of the political inclusion of Blacks of West Indian descent into the nation. The short story also presents the emergence of succeeding generations, particularly the fourth generation, with no lived memory of the years before the enfranchisement of Blacks in the region. This transition is not only a dramatic political change in the community, but also marks the linguistic and cultural transition of the largely English-speaking first, second, and third generations to the almost exclusive use of Spanish among the fourth generation.

Language and Language Change in "Limon on the Raw"

Language is one of the most notable examinations in "Limon on the Raw." The text presents the different manifestations of Standard English, inherited from the British colonial educational system, English-based Creoles, French patois, and Spanish.[2] The introductory paragraph presents the cacophony of voices, languages, and accents to be heard in "Limon on the Raw." Joseph begins:

> This is a study of the mode of speaking, the everyday expressions of the man and woman of everyday life, ... Attempting to bring forward the different moods of the average people, the different expressions, the moods, the various accents, some typically Jamaican, some Barbadians, others descendents from the smaller island groups, Trinidad, St. Lucia, Antigua, St. Kitts, Nevis, Guadalupe [sic], Martinique and even the people from Curazao [sic], not to leave out people hailing from Bluefields, Nicaragua, and British Honduras.
>
> Group [sic] of the people from Grand and Lesser Cayman, St. Andres and Providence and a straggling of the people from Bocas del Toro make this story, LIMON ON THE RAW. (15)

Establishing a continuum among different language groups in the insular and coastal Caribbean, Joseph also attempts to unify these Caribbean identities through the common experience of European colonization and their current location in Limón. Joseph continues:

> Very rarely one would hear an attempt of correct speaking, and even those who have tried, very often would fall into the mode of speech of their ancestors, whether jamaicanisms or French patois. Those who have traveled to the United States would very often fall into a mistaken grammar. (15)

This preface appears not as an apology for this linguistic difference from the colonial and neo-colonial metropolitan codes, but rather an affirmation of the strength of the

variants that emerged as a result of the history imperialism, particularly of the British and the French in the Caribbean and along the Central American coast. Joseph's introduction embraces the naturalness of the "nation language," or the vernacular of the everyday people, particularly the "english variants" in the region and in the same instance announces the tension between the nation language and the standard, favoring the regional variety of "english."[3] The Barbadian scholar and writer, E. Kamau Brathwaite, in "History of the Voice" affirms that in the Anglophone Caribbean, "[nation language] is the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers, the servants who were brought here by the conquistadors" (260). Brathwaite also notes in his discussion a preference to describe the english variants as nation language and not a *dialect*,

> The word dialect has been bandied about for a long time, and it carries very pejorative overtones. Dialect is thought of as 'bad' English. Dialect is 'inferior' English... Nation language, on the other hand, is the submerged area of experience in the Caribbean. (266)

Likewise, in "Limon on the Raw," Joseph acknowledges that the spoken language of the people in Limón is not an "inferior" code, but rather an expression of the West Indian cultural experience of the "old home" on new land.

After this introduction to the Caribbean linguistic continuum present in the town, the opening scene of "Limon on the Raw" represents the admixture of voices and peoples. The short story unfolds on a typical morning in a Puerto Limón neighborhood where people await the bus to go to the central market to purchase provisions for the afternoon meal. Among the congregation of folk at the bus stop is Amanda Jackson, the story's principal figure. The bus stop features a cross-section of Limón province—Blacks, *mestizos*, and white Americans. These groups are each chatting in their own language "and minding their own business" (16). The narrative is interlaced with West Indian-accented dialogue in Creole between the characters, sometimes with Spanish and French patois added into the conversation. The separate groups perceive themselves as mutually unintelligible linguistically,

> Negro women, white skinned native women and even a small group of white Americans. They were anxiously waiting, gathered in front of the Corales primary school, the regular bus stop ....The crowd had increased as time was passing, each little grouping was chatting one to the other, each group minding its own business. The small group of americans [sic] were conversing between themselves... Though they were not hostile, they were not friendly. Even though one would like to know what they were gabbing about, those standing near by could not understand one word, nor could they themselves understand what these negro [sic] women were gripeing [sic] about. It was a veritable bedlam of voices. (16)

This grouping of languages and ethnicities highlights the separation among the different cultural spheres and reveals an ethnolinguistic divide. The mutual cultural and linguistic incomprehension between American and Creole English speakers prompts Amanda Jackson to proclaim to

her Black neighbors about the Americans, "Dem white brutes cant lib in dem country, coming out here and playing proso. Watch dem...talking up dem nose...cant anderstan one word dem ha say" (16). After saying this Amanda "cut her eye," a non-verbal expression of contempt. Amanda Jackson's ironic statement mirrors the anti-immigrant attitude of the "native" white and *mestizo* Costa Rican nationals towards the first generation of Afro-West Indian laborers. But, Jackson, as a second-generation descendant, feels her place is in the land of her birth, which needs to be protected from outsiders, foreign and domestic. Her statement is an assertion of place for Jackson and those of her generation, that home is Limón and the island homeland of her forebears is a distant memory. Miss Amanda is one of the West Indian immigrants who according to the narrator, "forgot that last moment's promise to return home as soon as possible" (17).

The detailed, Afro-Caribbean linguistic continuum of "the various accents" that Joseph establishes in the preface to the story has already been transformed. The creolized language spoken by the majority of characters in "Limon on the Raw" is Limonese Creole, a local West Indian English-based Creole. According to a linguistic study of Central American English by Anita Herzfeld, Limonese Creole emerged during United Fruit's dominance in Limón Province and "Limón Blacks became a single speech community. From among the various kinds of West Indian Creole English spoken in Limón, the most widely spoken variety of Jamaican Creole emerged as the dominant language and became identified with that locality, developing its separate course as Limonese Creole" (Herzfeld 133). Since a significant portion of Limonese Creole is attributed to Jamaican Creole, several Jamaican sayings appear in the text, which Joseph uses colorfully in dialogues. A character at the bus stop proclaims that she would rather wait for the slower, less expensive bus by stating, "me no have no dead fi go bury" (16). When asked where she is going on the bus, Amanda makes references to the "John Crow," scavenger birds, referring to the lack of provisions, "Guine market fi see of the jan crow dem leave anything" (21).

Also dotting the narration are "borrowings" from Spanish and code-mixing of the languages as a result of increased contact between Limonese Creole speakers and Spanish speakers. Herzfeld acknowledges these borrowings as a characteristic of Limonese Creole, "

> Limon Creole exhibits a great deal of variation. As might be expected there has been heavy borrowing of words and idioms from local Spanish, which in turn has been influenced by LC" (134).

An example of the use of this borrowing and code-mixing occurs in "Limon on the Raw" when one of the characters complains of the shortage of provisions in the small neighborhood stores, "You go fi buy rice, No hay, Sugar, No hay, Sweet ail. No hay, Nat eben camman salt. As fi cigaret ... Don't bather ask" (19). Another character voices complaints at the negative attitudes of employees of the municipality, "Es que dis and es que dat, and dem doant wan fi ansar in english" (20). Miss Sue, a Jehovah's witness with a penchant for playing the lottery observes, "even Panama ticket being sold in Harlem...que va, they cant stop that" (30). Even the frequently employed expression of surprise

or disgust among the white natives and *mestizos* is borrowed by the West Indian English-speakers, "'Puta' she shouted, 'eben here dem raise the price,'" (25) exclaims one character shocked at the rising costs to mail letters to relatives living in the United States and Panama.

Language in the text is a point of multicultural contact, going beyond a dialogue or interfacing of two ethnolinguistic groups. The mixture of the two languages is a manifestation of cultural hybridity in Limón, a result of the encounter of distinct ethnolinguistic groups along the coast and emblematic of a changing socio-cultural environment. However, this linguistic fusion is not limited to the English-based Creole-speaking West Indians and the Spanish-speaking population. Migrants from the Francophone areas of the Caribbean also brought with them their patois. These French Creole-speaking immigrants living in Limón had to learn Limonese Creole, the dominant tongue of the region just as non-West Indian company managers and workers (Europeans, North Americans, Costa Ricans) living in the region had to use English, the official language of the region at the peak of the United Fruit Company's influence. The character Madame Met represents one of these immigrants from Martinique who speaks "always with a mixture of English and patois french [sic]" (20). After mounting the bus and getting help to her seat she groans, "Tanks, Du Du meh. Mi not feeling too gud today...Cant move as I want. Go see docteaur" (20-21). *Du-du* or *dou dou*, is a common expression of affection in patois meaning "dear."

Adina Gourbourne is another patois-speaking character in the text. She is a second generation Limonese of Trinidadian and Haitian parentage, who, "Though she spoke patois learned from her parents, that habit is fast wearing out, and jamaicanism predominated. And Adina's accent was less jamaican [sic] and more Trinidadian" (26). This less frequent use of patois and the increase in her speech of Jamaicanisms is also part of the phenomenon of cultural and linguistic hybridity where the dominant parlance in the region is fused with other linguistic modes. Though her speech pattern is Trinidadian, Adina's lexicon is based on the governing presence of Jamaican Creole in the regional English.

The situation of Adina Gourbourne illustrates that while Jamaicanisms predominate in Limonese Creole, other Caribbean englishes are also present and influence the speech of the people. The acknowledgement of Caribbean Creole languages and cultures in the preface creates a gesture that situates this polyglossic community squarely within the Creole continuum. This continuum is a linguistic link between the variant englishes of the Caribbean and the Limonese language community. The theory of the Creole continuum posits,

> the Creole complex of the region is not simply an aggregation of discrete dialect forms but an overlapping of ways of speaking between which individual speakers may move with considerable ease. These overlapping "lects," or specific modes of language use, not only contain forms from the major languages 'between' which they come into being, but forms which are also functionally peculiar to themselves. (Ashcroft, et al., 45)

Though dialects, accents, and lexicon may differ, they are mutually intelligible as is

the situation of Adina in the text, as a French patois and Trinidadian english speaker who also communicates in Jamaicanisms. The polyglossic speech community in Limón expands to include the French patois speakers who use Limonese Creole as a lingua franca and also form part of the continuum.

However, this polyglossic community in Limón also exists within an officially monolingual country where Spanish is the language of political power and prestige. The text also reveals the presence of tensions between Spanish and Limonese Creole, which are indicators of cultural contact and cultural change for the generations of Afro-West Indian descendents in the country. As the younger generation integrates into the dominant culture to make a "rise," they prefer to use the official tongue to project their achievement.

In the difficult integration of the second and third generations of Afro-West Indians into the Hispanic nation, Spanish was not always learned by those Blacks who did not migrate to the capital, San José, nor was it always used with great facility by the older generations who remained in Limón. Miss Amanda is able to communicate in Spanish, although not as fluently as later generations. In her interaction with the lottery vendor, Doña Olga, she awkwardly communicates, though outside of Standard Spanish:

> "Quiere tres pedacitos ciegos, Miss Olga," she stated.
>
> "Como pedacitos ciegos?" Olga asked.
>
> "Para mi no puede saber," she returned.
>
> "Ah, pedacitos tapados," and she tore off three pieces, three different pieces, folded the pieces one by one and handed them to Amanda. (31)

Miss Amanda superimposes the syntax of Creole upon Spanish to negotiate meaning with a native Spanish speaker, but results in a type of interlanguage. In Creole, Miss Amanda's part of the dialogue are approximately, "Me want three lickle blind pieces (Quiere tres pedacitos ciegos)" and "So me doan know (Para mi no puede saber)." What appears as her inability to speak fluent Spanish and a difficult negotiation of meaning is contrasted by an earlier scene when three young Black women board the bus.

These young women, representing the fourth generation of Blacks of West Indian descent in Limón, enter the bus and "were talking among themselves, not too loudly, but nevertheless their conversation could be heard by those standing nearby" (21). The narrator relates their conversation about their parents and siblings. One proclaims, "Papie, him is all right, nutting we does troubles him....Him always sey, we is getting big now, and we must know rang fram right" (21). Only at the end of what appears as a conversation in Limonese Creole, it is revealed that, "they converse in a flowing spanish [sic] so that the listeners [on the bus] were unable to follow what they were saying" (22). The privileged narrator translates their conversation from Spanish into Limonese Creole to convey the "everyday language of the everyday people" and perhaps to maintain continuity for his English-competent audience. Additionally, this late disclosure of the exclusive use of Spanish of the young women is also an indicator of the linguistic and cultural transition from Afro-Antillean to Afro-Costa Rican. The Spanish-speaking fourth generation interrupts the Creole continuum established at the beginning of the story. However, unlike their Limonese

Creole-speaking grandparents and great-grandparents, they do not consider the weighty issue of the return to the West Indies. Their national identity is not in question, although they may not be embraced as full citizens by the majority population. Significant in the narrator's delayed revelation is that he does not chastise this generation, but acknowledges them as a part of the continuity of the community along with the other passengers on the bus.

The linguistic transformation that Joseph presents in "Limon on the Raw" demonstrates a correlation between language and national identity. For the first generation, identity was aligned with their island homes as British subjects or French colonials. However, when it became apparent that the return home would be impossible to realize, the individual national identities, most united by British imperialism, formed a single community and a single speech community around Limonese Creole. After the enfranchisement of West Indians, this older community of speakers, like Amanda Jackson, are incorporated into the political body of Costa Rica as citizens, but maintain distance from Hispanic culture. Language change again occurs in the appearance of the three young Black women on the bus. The three speak Spanish fluently, symbolic of the efforts to educate younger generations and facilitate their cultural integration into dominant society and adds to the perceived cultural and linguistic unity of the country. Unlike previous generations, for the younger Afro-Costa Ricans there is no question of national identity although their skin color remains a signifier of their "foreign" origins.

The cultural transitions of the various generations of Afro-Costa Ricans are also explored from a historical standpoint in this work. For all of the West Indian groups mentioned, migration, labor, and struggle are the predominant issues addressed in "Limón on the Raw." By presenting themes of language, cultural contact and struggle, cultural transitions, and displacement, Joseph forms an intrahistory from the perspective of the residents of Limón, whereby he gives voice to a group marginalized by official discourse.

Intrahistory and "Limon on the Raw"

Intrahistory in the postcolonial narrative exposes the viewpoint of a subjugated people, not the grand events told from the perspective of the dominant group, but rather addresses the history of the common people. The official history of Costa Rica often omits the contribution of West Indian immigrants and Afro-Costa Ricans to the formation of its modern state. Examples of this are significant omissions of the West Indian presence in history texts such as *Historia de Costa Rica* or *Geografía social y humana de Costa Rica* by Carlos Monge Alfaro and *The History of Costa Rica* by Iván Molina and Steven Palmer. The latter, more recent text glosses over the West Indian presence as if none of the laborers remained in the country at the conclusion of the construction of the one-hundred and three miles of rail and the foundation of United Fruit.

In presenting the intrahistorical perspective, Joseph creates a work of ethnographic fiction through the portrayal of the daily experience of the Black characters. As author/narrator, Joseph

performs as "translator" and "transcriber" of experience in "Limon on the Raw." He must explain to an English-competent audience not familiar with the speech and culture of the Blacks in Limón, while authentically and accurately relaying the same experience to those of the culture about which he writes. Joseph portrays this authenticity through the character types and presents the postcolonial experience of the contemporary Black presence in Costa Rica.

After her initial appearance at the bus stop at the beginning of "Limón on the Raw," the narrator relates a partial personal history of Amanda Jackson,

> Amanda Jackson represented the second generation antillian (sic) immigrants, whose forbears anxious to better their economic conditions, harkened to the call to travel overseas, and to toil in the banana plantations of the powerful american (sic) companies. [...] Amanda Jackson's forbears and thousands of other native borns' forbears, with a firm intention of making 'a raise' to return home to the West Indies. (17)

Joseph uses Miss Amanda to represent the struggles of the second generation of Afro-West Indians in Costa Rica. Her history is actually a collective one, representing the experience of all children of West Indians in her generation. Like so many others of the first generation, her parents "upon leaving the shores of their beloved homeland, and bidding a reluctant farewell, and a promise not to stay too long in foreign land, many receive frustrations, many succumb before the onslaught of the cruel malarial climate or the castigating lash of venemous serpents or the cruel rivalries of irate natives, many to forget the last farewell" (17). The first generation migrated to Costa Rica with the intention of making money and returning home. However as the years and the dreams wore on and dissipated, many worked the plantations following the Company where it went and worked the land when they could. For Miss Amanda and her parents, the Company controlled the lives of Limón's residents and determined their destiny, "the first Jackson generation, struggling in some of the Company's plantations...trying here and trying there, Bananito, Zent, Siquirres, Guacimo, Guapiles, wherever and whenever the Company chose to move to new areas, Talamanca, Sixaola, Margarita, Olivia" (18).

Some immigrants, like the rebellious workers from St. Kitts were able to defy the control of the United Fruit Company and were repatriated. Mr. Mac, the reminiscing grandfather on the bus, relates to his grandson how the workers from St. Kitts resisted the conditions imposed upon them by the Company. He explains that these men, mostly fishermen on their home island, provided United Fruit with cheap labor. But the workers "did not stand for the robish [sic] that the company did to them" and they all walked off the job until some were repatriated by the British government (34). The passing on of this memory from the old man to his grandson recalls the role of the oral tradition in recording the history of a people overlooked by Costa Rica's official history.

Nevertheless, for those whose families remained in Costa Rica, particularly the second generation, the "wounded generation,"[4] the most crucial issues are identity and language. The Costa Rican civil war, also called the Revolution of 1948, changed the West Indian enclave in

Costa Rica and the status of the "native-born" Black children of West Indian parents. Before the civil strife in Costa Rica, this second generation was stateless. In *El negro en Costa Rica*, Costa Rican author Quince Duncan describes the situation as the following,

> No son costarricenses. No son jamaicanos. La Gran Bretaña no los reconoce como ciudadanos, porque han nacido en un país extranjero. Costa Rica no los reconoce como ciudadanos, porque son negros, hijos de jamaicanos. Los negros de la segunda generación son, durante mucho tiempo, gente sin patria, sin identidad reconocida. Vegetan en un país que de pronto, se vuelve hostil, restringiéndolos. (134)

The second generation of Miss Amanda witnesses the decay of the British colonial outpost forged along the Limón coast and the incursion of the Costa Rican national culture in the region. The second generation continued as their parents with the United Fruit Company's philosophy of, "Give the workers enough to see, give the foreigners their own pastors, their own teachers, and give them a philosophy wherein they will consider themselves far above the average native" (19).

With the departure of United Fruit from Limón during the late 1930s, the Black residents were essentially abandoned by the company, the civil protection of the British government, and ignored by Costa Rica. The narrator informs us, the identity of the second generation was left in a state of uncertainty after the watershed events of the 1948 civil war. With the victory of the reform-minded Liberationist forces, civil war ended in Costa Rica in 1948. The majority of Black residents in Limón did not participate in the conflict, citing that it was not their war to fight. After the war, citizenship was extended to Costa Rican-born persons of Afro-West Indian descent, which obligated them to educate their children in Spanish to facilitate their integration into Hispanic society. The West Indian "English schools" were closed and students were required to enroll in public "Spanish school," since Blacks were now integrated into the country. According to the narrator, the West Indian "English schools" bear some of the blame for the difficult integration,

> the closing of these west indian [sic] schools, schools that taught allegiance to the King of England, where black children were discouraged from attending native schools where integration would be possible, where native black kids were discouraged to love the country of their birth, where the respect due to the national emblem was discouraged. (19)

For the earlier generations, the "English schools" in Limón had already formed their education, which followed the British system in anticipation of the return to the West Indies that for many never materialized. This education did not place importance on the development of an attachment or understanding of the national culture of Costa Rica since the majority of Afro-West Indians residing in Limón were not vested in the country.

With the sweeping political and social changes, Amanda Jackson and the other "old types" of this "wounded," second generation had learned to love the country of their birth, but "not to love the people of her country" (19). The "paniah" or *paña* (Spanish-speaking white and *mestizo* Costa Ricans) were regarded as culturally inferior, according to their received

colonial education.

Also in "Limón on the Raw," there is an explicit criticism of the role of United Fruit in the education of the enclave's children and the perpetuation of colonial models of dependence and exploitation. The narrator asserts, "the first and second generation, deprived of adequate educational facilities, grounded in philosophy stressed by a cruel foreign company [United Fruit], a company that created a spirit of separationism, a philosophy of dividing the working people so as to rule the working people" (18). The Company's strategy of "divide and rule" is evident in the continued strained relations between the white and *mestizo* Costa Ricans and the Afro-Costa Rican population in Limón.

One of the Black women on the bus says to Amanda that she is fortunate to have a good white neighbor because, "rite now me hab two becinas libing, and me in the middle, libing hell me tell youh. Nat eben the fouwl can go in dem yard. Moreno dis and moreno dat, real showaff paniah...Praying to God dem will move" (23).

Amanda Jackson represents part of the linguistic transition of the second generation of West Indian Blacks from one language to another, as well as the transition from one national identity to another, "Like hundreds of second generation creoles, Amanda could not 'Pallais Pallais' the spanish (sic), though she understood most of what her country folks would say to her" (19). As evidenced by her earlier conversation with Doña Olga, the lottery vendor, Amanda Jackson is uncomfortable with using the Spanish language. Miss Amanda received a Standard English education and moves comfortably across the creole continuum, "Amanda could read her English fluently, though her everyday mode of expressions, she would revert to her vernacularism, the everyday English of the everyday people" (19).

The significance of the intrahistorical project that Joseph presents in "Limon on the Raw" is the attention to historical ellipses. When the Black presence in Costa Rican history is discussed, migration from Jamaica and other parts of the Anglophone West Indies overshadows the experience of Francophone immigrants such as Madame Met and the early "coaster natives." This latter group were a migratory population with origins in Providence and San Andrés. These Afro-Caribbean settlers were turtle fishermen who eventually became small farmers and arrived to a very sparsely populated Limón Province at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Miss Sue, a vendor in the market, represents this group of Blacks who came during the early days before the large waves of migrants from the West Indies. They arrived at a time when there were very few inhabitants on the coast, "dedicating themselves to the planting of ground food" (29).

In addition to recounting the overlooked history of the residents of the Caribbean coast, intrahistory is also a chronicle of the cultural values of a people as well. This culture is being transformed with the continuous wave of internal and external migration of the descendants of the West Indians and the influx of migrants from the interior of Costa Rica and other countries. Some characters lament change, but nevertheless they look towards a hopeful future. Time, migration, and economics has changed the Limón of the past where "The United Fruit Company

was lord and master of Limón, and rightful owner of all the black people who resided in this Atlantic region" (38) and the municipal leadership that practiced a crude form of apartheid with exclusionary racist practices. Mrs. Mac, a rider on the bus, recounts "the cruelty of the Municipal fathers where the negro people of Limón were concerned, how after erecting an auspicious bathing pool and dance hall, a most insulting and heartles [sic] inscription was placed at the gate 'PROHIBIDO LA RAZA NEGRA'" (37). There seems to have been an instance of divine intervention for "the ire of Neptune sent the whole contraptions, barricade and dancehall to HADES" when the complex was washed into the sea during a storm (37).

It is the older Black women in this brief narrative who attempt to conserve some of their inherited community values. Clarabelle, one of the women waiting at the bus stop, does not hesitate to reprimand a rock-toting child who is chasing a classmate. She threatens to tell the boys mother and instructs, "Get rite in back in class! Sonny, goan in and doant fite. Fite is nat gud...Unu must learn fi love one anader" (17). The two boys upon hearing Clarabelle's orders, head back into class.

This scene is a contrast to the appearance on the bus of the three young Spanish-speaking Black women, representing the fourth generation. One of the young women talks about her brother as the narrator "translates" from Spanish for us, "'Mamie and Papie, dem is al-rite. But mi bredda is a pain in de neck. Want fi do as him like, stay out late nights, even now and den would come in drunk" (21). In the conversation, the rebelliousness of the brother, smoking marijuana and dropping out of school, also presents a change in attitude between the generations.

Generational differences notwithstanding, it is this last generation which holds hope for the future. Throughout "Limón on the Raw," there is concern for the progress of the fourth generation. This concern is particularly expressed through Miss Amanda at the beginning of the narrative and Mr. Mac's reflections from the bus window on the way back home from the market at the end of the story. The ambulation of the women through town to purchase the daily meal is constancy surrounded by change. Reflecting on the strength and struggles of the first and second generations, Miss Amanda herself, "became the creative for the third and fourth generation, a better time and a better outlook"(18). Looking at the three attractive, young Black women, Miss Amanda observes the positive changes, "Girls as these were fit subjects for some white woman's kitchen or to be scrubbing at the wash basins behind the zone houses. [...] To obtain a little work in a store, girls looking such as these were given the cold shoulder" (22). The same sentiment echoes in Mrs. Mac's silent thoughts as she peers at contemporary Limón and envisions the Limón of the past. Watching a group of children leaving school, the narrator articulates Mrs. Mac thoughts,

> These kids, and especially the black ones, no more hewer of stones and carriers of water, no more useful subjects of a white woman's scrubroom, or nursemaids to tend to little rude white brats. This emporium of learning, directed by non other than the children of these former immigrants black men and women teachers, proud and respectable, for now, yesterday was

> yesterday, only either a sad reminder or a pleasant reminder. (39)

This last image ties the past with the present, a continuous history of the West Indians who settled in this region and their descendents. There is a sense of pride and hope in this last reflection, which is not a nostalgic desire but an acknowledgement of the effect of time on a community. The past is not mourned as a loss, but rather understood as part of the process of to bring forth the future. In this densely packed recollection of remembrances and hope, "Limón on the Raw," provides an intrahistorical narrative which documents the residents' preoccupations and transformations.

Conclusion

Postcolonial critics, Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin in *Decolonizing Fictions* assert that literatures created in regions and territories impacted by the legacy of unequal colonial relations, "constitute a field where meaning is produced through history and language, and interactions of social text and literary text" (32). The interconnectedness of these issues is evident in the exploration of Afro-Costa Rican cultural identity through language and intrahistory in "Limon on the Raw." From the outset of the story, Joseph presents his narrative as ethnographic fiction by asserting in the introductory paragraphs that "This is a study of the mode of speaking, the everyday expressions of the man and woman of everyday life" (15). He creates around notions language change and intrahistory personages that establish Limón as a part of the Creole continuum in the Caribbean region. Joseph situates the people of different islands and West Indian "cultural outposts" in Central America in the space of Limón. He also draws on the linguistic diversity of the West Indies in order to establish what appears as a common identity formed by the different West Indian migrant groups and their sometimes harmonious, sometimes contentious coexistence with Spanish. These different identities maintain some difference in a linguistic sense with Jamaicanisms or patois, but on the surface they form a single group shaped by ethnolinguistic difference and colonialism, and unified by the sharing of a common space and a common experience.

"Limon on the Raw" displays the phenomena of becoming what Stuart Hall states, as "one people" but also readily exposes the superficiality of this supposition, for beneath the façade of a unified Afro-Antillean culture, there are multiple peoples, multiple histories, and multiple cultures meeting in the space of Limón. Through the written text, which is intimately connected to the cultural context, Afro-Costa Rican cultural identity is "constructed not outside but within representation...not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover who we are" (Hall 80). The text illustrates the notion of Hall's affirmation that cultural identity is a matter of "'becoming' as well as 'being'" and is not located outside of history but is shaped by it and expresses "the names we give the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (70). In this way, "Limon on the Raw" examines not only the emergence of Afro-Costa Rican identity in

Limon, but also how that identity is influenced by and influences the vicissitudes of time, place, and culture.

Joseph's brief exposition addresses the issue of language change in the Creole-speaking community and the cultural pressures to transcend this and other West Indian "peculiarities" to gain acceptance —at least superficially into the national culture. The text also presents a fictional portrait that encourages the valorization of cultural hybridity in the region and recognizes the effect of cultural forces from the outside—the dominant Hispanic culture of the Central Valley and the neocolonial relationships created by global commercial ventures. These forces have left an indelible mark on the (trans)formation of Afro-West Indian culture in Limón, which are critically examined in "Limon on the Raw." Joseph problematizes the neocolonial relationships of Afro-West Indians and their descendants with British, North American, and Costa Rican enterprises and authorities. Within the diversity that forms Afro-Costa Rican identity is the recognition that their cultural identity is formed by primary and secondary diasporas, that according to Hall, "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 80). The diasporic community in "Limon on the Raw" presents a study of cultural transformation in the ethnolinguistic community of Puerto Limón and is an effort to illuminate West Indian difference through an emphasis on language change and intrahistory to present a community and a cultural identity that is continually in a process of "becoming."

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Notes

[1]The Spanish intellectual, Miguel de Unamuno, in his essay "En torno al casticismo," develops his concept of intrahistory in which he asserts, "Todo lo que cuentan a diario los periódicos, la historia toda del 'presente momento histórico,' no es sino la superficie del mar, una superficie que se hiela y cristaliza en los libros y registros..." (793). It is the silenced history of the common people, intrahistory, which hold the key to the identity of a nation. He continues to state, "Esa vida intra-histórica, silenciosa y continua como el fondo mismo del mar, es la sustancia del progreso, es la verdadera tradición [...] no la tradición mentida que se suele ir a buscar al pasado enterrado en libros y papeles y monumentos y piedras" (793).

[2]Although Jamaican Creole is often referred to as *patois*, I will maintain the distinction made by the author in which he refers to French-based Creole languages as *patois* and regional variations of English as Creole. This also seems to be in accord with Ronald Wardhaugh in *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (3rd ed) who notes that *patois* is used traditionally to describe a language variant without a strong written tradition. The French make this distinction between *un dialecte* and *un patois* (24, 40). The Jamaican variety of English seems not to conform to this definition (Wardhaugh 40).

[3]I favor here the proposal by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*, to consider the distinction between "English" as the cultural and linguistic values of empire and "english" as the language of cultures impacted by the oppressive discourse of British imperialism. The critics assert, "We need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile

imperial center), and the linguistic code, English, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world. For this reason, the distinction between *English* and *english* will be used [...] as an indication of the various ways in which the language has been employed by different linguistic communities in the post-colonial world" (8). This distinction also addresses the erroneous positioning of the "'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' as impurities" (7).

[4]The term "wounded generation" is taken from Quince Duncan in *El negro en Costa Rica*. He states, "La segunda generación es en muchos sentidos una generación herida" (134). On pages 134-147, the author describes the situation of the second generation of West Indians in Costa Rica, their difficult integration after the Revolution of 1948, and generational transitions.

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The Demon of Solitude
by Katherine M. Thomas

The 1994 novel *Del amor y otros demonios*, (*Of Love and Other Demons* 1995) is one of the most Caribbean of Gabriel García Márquez' novels. Set in the 18th century in a coastal town that may be Cartagena, the novel, according to García Márquez' introduction, grew out of an experience the author had when assigned to cover the story of the tearing down of an old convent turned hospital to make way for a five-star hotel, a typical Caribbean experience. Those buried in the church were dug up and reburied. Among those to be reinterred were the Marquisa Olalla de Mendoza whose husband's crypt was mysteriously empty, a bishop, several abbesses, and the surnameless young girl Sierva María de todos los Ángeles whose skull still bore "a stream of living hair the intense color of copper" (4) which measured 22 meters 11 centimeters in length (almost 72 feet!). This may be an exaggeration or an example of *realismo mágico*. As Palencia-Roth says, "for García Márquez what is conventionally real can become the magical. Everything interpenetrates and interrelates" (54). Thus García Márquez can couple the actual moving of remains with his grandmother's tales of a long haired and saintly young marquise dead of rabies at age twelve. This blend of history, myth, and magical realism weaves the rich texture of this novel where "fantasy and fact constitute one reality" (Palencia-Roth 54).

In the opening paragraph of the book, all the key elements of the novel are revealed as an ash-gray demon dog with his face marked with *un lucero,* the star of Venus, goddess of love, bursts into the market, biting four people, three black slaves and an American-born marquise who is there with a mulatta servant to buy a birthday present for herself. She seems out of place in the market frequented by slaves and very near the slavers' port where factors are selling a cargo of slaves at reduced prices because of an illness aboard ship. In the midst of all the uproar of the market, the solitude of the little marquise stands out as she seeks to forge her Caribbean identity through others, an identity which another solitary exile, the Sephardic Jewish doctor Abrenuncio says, "No one knows in these kingdoms....And it will be centuries before they find out" (*Of love* 114).

Each of the solitary characters of the novel reveals the impossibility of working out a Caribbean identity within a colonial mentality "through ways of seeing that have been inherited from the European Renaissance" (Spiller 376). As García Márquez says in his Nobel address, "The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary" ("Solitude" 89), as the marquise becomes throughout the novel.

The little marquise facing the ash-gray dog, symbol of love, death, and demonic possession, is Sierva María de todos los Ángeles, only daughter of the Marquis de Casualdero. Her name reflects the dichotomy of her nature which is in accord with the setting in northern Colombia where centuries of Spanish imperial slave trade have given "the ethnic composition of its people...a distinctly African character" (Bell-Villada 17). Named for Mary Queen of all the Angels, she also bears the first name that means servant or slave. From infancy she was given over to the household slaves to be raised. Both of her parents, infected with the inherent degeneracy of colonialism and existential isolation, were wrapped in their own solitude, incapable of love for each other or their daughter. Sierva María's grandfather, who made the family fortune through the slave trade and astute smuggling, passed none of his

questionable business acumen on to Ygnacio, the second marquis and Sierva María's father, showing how quickly the colonial mentality corrupts and enervates. Ygnacio was solitary because of his slight mental prowess and his fear of every living creature—cows, dogs, even chickens. He first fell in love with the madwoman next door, but was forced to marry a Spanish noblewoman whom he respected so much he refused to sleep with her until shortly before she was struck by lightning and killed. Then Bernarda, the mestiza daughter of an Indian and a Castilian woman, tricked him into marriage. She soon became so tied up with herself and her addictions that she was unaware of most of what went on around her, bound in the solitude of drugs and ill health. She took one look at their newborn daughter and hated her on sight, giving her over to be raised by Dominga de Adviento, the housekeeper and slavemistress. The Marquis made no objection, for he later admitted that although he told himself he loved his daughter, "this was a lie for the sake of convenience" (*Of love* 16).

Ignored and neglected by her parents, Sierva María left her solitude to become one of the slaves with whom she shared the now dilapidated quarters. Her parents' only concerns for Sierva María were very similar to their concerns about the slaves. Since they understood neither, they demonized them. The Marquis "did not sleep well in the darkness because of the congenital fear of American-born nobles that their slaves would murder them in their beds" (*Of love* 38). Similarly, Bernarda feared the way Sierva María seemed to creep around, recoiling in horror from her stealthy presence. Using a string of Yoruban curses she had learned in the quarters, Sierva María increased her mother's fear.

Sierva María found among the slaves the love denied her by her birth family. Dominga de Adviento saw to Sierva's baptism but also consecrated her to Olokum, a Yoruban deity. So began the journey that made Sierva María white skin in a black mask. "She learned to dance before she could speak, learned three African languages at the same time, learned to drink rooster's blood before breakfast and to glide past Christians unseen and unheard, like an incorporeal being" (*Of love* 42). Like the house slaves she learned to be present but unobtrusive, like a piece of household furniture. She dressed in the burlap chemise and tignon of the slaves, slept in a hammock with the other young slaves, developed a taste for pickled iguana and armadillo stew, and wore the necklaces of many African deities over her baptismal scapular. She lived there in happiness, letting her foster family paint her face black with soot so she would fit in better and even adopting a slave name, calling herself María Mandinga.[1] At length Bernarda would exclaim, "The only thing white about that child is her color" (*Of love* 45).

After she was bitten by the rabid dog, Ygnatio installed her in the big house. Sierva María quite naturally resisted being taken from all she knew and loved, slipping off to the quarters when left alone. Only when the Marquis followed the doctor Abrenuncio's prescription to provide happiness for the child did change occur for both of them. They spent time together and made the first moves from isolation. Sierva María learned something of white people's ways, and the Marquis also changed. For a short time he became a man of action grounded in commitment.

Sierva María began to respond to the nascent love of her father. She asked him whether love truly could conquer all as she had heard. "It is true," replied her father, "but you would do well not to believe it" (*Of love* 49). His words almost immediately proved prophetic as the Marquis out of his love for her began to submit her to every possible cure for her presumed illness from the dog bite. These "cures" resulted in convulsions and spasms, leading to the diagnosis of madness or possession. In desperation the Marquis turned her over to the tender mercy of strangers who, with no understanding of what caused her differences, further demonized them.

It was the duty of another solitary character, the Bishop Don Toribio de Cáceres y Virtudes, to exorcise demons afflicting his flock. Isolated by a malignant asthma brought on by the heat and humidity of the New World, he lived in "an aloofness that over time was turning him into an unreal being" (*Of love* 52). His brilliance was to have been rewarded with a bishopric in the Yucatan where cathedrals rose over pagan pyramids; only the serendipity of shipwreck brought him and his librarian assistant Cayetano Delaura to the decaying episcopal palace in Colombia that mirrored his own decaying health and the decadent colonial church ravaged by distance and neglect. García Márquez describes him as "a man whose kingdom was of this world" (*Of love* 75) weaving an intertextual reference to Carpentier's passage "bowed down by suffering and duties, beautiful in the midst of his misery, capable of loving in the face of afflictions and trials, man finds his greatness, his fullest measure, only in the Kingdom of this World" (185). The Bishop saw rabies in humans as akin to possession, so he set his librarian to the task of preparing to exorcise Sierva María's demon.

Sierva María was to prepare for exorcism at the Clarissan convent. There all the ways she had learned to live from her slave family were again misunderstood and demonized by the superstitious women kept in ignorance by the dictates of their time. Upon her arrival, she sat so quietly on a garden bench that people didn't notice her, so she was thought to have made herself invisible. Her only activities for the afternoon were learned behaviors more suitable for life in the bush than for a marquise dressed like a queen in a convent courtyard. She got a drink from the cistern "pushing away the skim of rotting leaves with a deft movement of the hand and [drinking] her fill from her cupped palm, not bothering to remove the water worms. Then she urinated behind the tree squatting and holding a stick at the ready to defend herself against abusive animals and predatory men, just as Dominga de Adviento had taught her to do" (*Of love* 64).

Only two black slave women who spoke to Sierva María in Yoruba earned a response. They took her to the kitchens where once again she found herself at home. Throwing off her isolation, she played games and helped with dinner preparations, slitting the throat of a goat and claiming its eyes and testicles, her favorite parts, for her own meal. However, when she was finally discovered by the abbess and taken from the only warmth and familiarity she had found in this new and frightening place, her torment began as locked in a solitary cell she became "ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary" (García Márquez, "Solitude" 89).

The nuns, not understanding her African ways, began to keep a list of "acta" blaming Sierva María for everything from their own ignorance and superstition to the migratory patterns of birds. Her facility with African tongues was considered the work of the devil, and her African songs demonic. Only two priests sent to exorcise her demons could see the truth, for they alone really tried to know her. Cayetano Delaura, upon reading the acta declared, "I believe, however,...that what seems demonic to us are the customs of the blacks, learned by the girl as a consequence of the neglected condition in which her parents kept her" (*Of love* 91).

Cayetano Delaura, the librarian chosen by the bishop to be Sierva María's exorcist, was a scholar planning to pursue a career as a Vatican librarian. He spent most of his time isolated in the windowless library where books were arranged in careful order, and in a locked cabinet in the back of the room were the forbidden books banned by the Inquisition because of their dangerous worldly content. Here the arcana if European civilization were kept for Delaura's eyes only, for he was authorized to peruse them. Here was the storehouse of legal, scientific, and anthropological data, as well as the story and myth of Europe and the New World, the repository of the totality of knowledge as perceived by the Western world. González Echevarría holds that the Latin American novel passed through stages of relating to the legal and scientific holdings of the Archive, and finally in the twentieth century to anthropologic texts as modern interest turned in that direction (28). García Márquez added myth and its magical realism to the mix to capture the Caribbean reality as it emerged from "a Renaissance genre which used myth to create what then became history while it also transformed existing history into a form of myth" (Spiller 377).

As librarian, Cayetano Delaura concentrated in his study on a time of the literature of the courtly love tradition of *Amadis de Gaul* and his supposed ancestor, the sixteenth century Renaissance poet Garcilaso de la Vega. These works, which arrived in the New World with the conquistadors, are among those Spiller says "imposed...the marvels of fictive romance onto the New World" (379). Garcilaso, whose sonnets resonate in the novel's closing chapters, can serve as a model for taking disparate elements and building something strong and new. He united the traditions of Spanish poetry with the troubadour poets of Provence, Petrarch and the Italian sonnet, and the ancient world as newly emphasized in the Renaissance. "The existing material which Garcilaso borrowed from the masters becomes transformed in his art thus producing a new aesthetic original" (Cammarata 20). Garcilaso also wrote at the start of the great Spanish Archive begun by Charles V. In this Archive Europeans created and catalogued their New World by their writings about it.

The sixteenth century, which furnishes literary and historical models in the novel, serves as a metaphor for the purer time of Spain's "discovery" of the New World, but also shows how the story of that New World "can be told only through the forms which it has inherited" (Spiller 376). At the time of the Renaissance, Spain was at the height of its literary and world power. All appeared possible. The New World seemed a redemptive opportunity for the corrupt old world. European humanists "saw in America the utopian promise of a

New Golden Age" (Fuentes 4). Within the Church arose men of action who would be declared saints for the major impact they would have on the New World: Ignatius, founder of the Jesuits who played a major role in the evangelization of North America; Torribius, a bishop of Lima known as the defender of the Indians and reformer the Church in Peru; and Cayetano, a priest who renounced the world to serve the wretched and dying in menial capacities. That the major characters in the story bear these names but accomplish their similar tasks so pitifully is a parody of the sixteenth century when conquistadors and saints spread Spain's power, fought at home and abroad, physically and legally, and finally were conquered by blending with the Indians, Africans, and Asiatics they imported to serve them, establishing the mestizo character of Latin America which still evolves today. These great literary and historic figures are parodied in their namesakes and descendants in the novel. In a relatively short time, the great aspirations of the sixteenth century devolved into the decadent age of the eighteenth century with the Bishop Torribius wheezing his life away in his crumbling palace and the Marquis Ygnacio lying "rotting in his hammock at a distance of one thousand three hundred nautical leagues from a king who has never heard his name" (*Of love* 47). So quickly did colonialism and slavery debase the shining hopes of the sixteenth century and give way to the gloomy despair of the eighteenth. The solitude of Latin America had already begun. As Barrett says, "The limitless horizons into which man looked at the time of the Renaissance...at last contracted" (38). European and Native identity had been destroyed, and the first gropings toward a new identity were met with failure, leaving man alienated, a stranger to the world and to himself. "The oldest tragic wisdom of the race suggests that at the very height of his power, man is bound to experience, as Oedipus did, his absolute impotence" (Barrett 272).

In the midst of this gloom and decay, Cayetano Delaura, the son of a Spanish noble and an Inca princess, searched for his Caribbean identity. He stated, "At my age, and with so much merging of bloodlines, I am no longer certain where I come from...or who I am" (*Of love* 114). As González Echevarría has noted, "Anthropology is a way through which Western culture indirectly affirms its own cultural identity....Anthropology translates into the language of the West the cultures of the others and in the process establishes its own form of self-knowledge through annihilation of the self" (13). Delaura's self-searching and openness to other cultures opened him to Sierva María's Afro-Caribbean culture. González Echevaría says that even today "The resilience of neo-African culture is one of the most remarkable factors of Caribbean life and history. Languages, religions, and all sorts of cultural practices survived the horrors of slavery and later the scorn of racial and class discrimination" (170). Delaura recognized that many of what were considered Sierva María's demons were simply the effects of acculturating herself to the resistance efforts of the slaves —speaking several African languages, accepting theological pluralism and living clandestinely, that is lying to those in authority, telling the masters what they thought the masters wanted to hear rather than the truth. Even the Marquis realized the slaves did not lie to each other but merely to the masters. So if the nuns

asked her about her demons, Sierva María told them exciting stories, for that was what they wanted to hear, story telling also being one of the few ways for the slaves to pass their free time.

The sonnets Delaura quoted so frequently to Sierva María in the closing chapters of the novel were another connection to the sixteenth century and a parody of it. (The poet's name also reflects Cayetano's search for identity for it calls to mind Garcilaso the Inca, son of a Spanish noble and an Inca princess, who sought his identity in Spain, trying fruitlessly to reclaim his father's heritage.) All the poet's sonnets had as their theme "the suffering caused by frustrated love" (Rivers 26). Garcilaso de la Vega affected courtly love for a woman denied to him by marriage and later death. Delaura's growing love for Sierva María was forbidden by his priestly vows. Garcilaso's love was for a gracious and unavailable woman. Delaura recited the verses for a twelve-year-old girl who vacillated from playing house for him like a married woman to biting, scratching, and attacking him. Nor was she unavailable, for Delaura found secret access to the convent that allowed them to spend nights together in her cell. However, although they engaged in an ecstasy of love making, he left her a virgin. He recited all forty of Garcilaso's sonnets so often that Sierva María too learned them as he seduced her by their passion.

When the bishop discovered that the demon of love had spread from Sierva María to Cayetano, he removed Cayetano from her case. The priest Tomás de Aquino de Narvaez became her new exorcist. Named after a Dominican, one of the wisest philosophers of the Catholic faith, he lived the life of both white and black and contained within himself an understanding of both. The priest was from the Canary Islands, a man of mixed race who had lived for years as a white and rose to the role of prosecutor of the Holy Office, then he renounced his office and went to the New World where he "lived among the slaves like a slave" (*Of love* 132), like Sierva María.He immediately recognized Sierva María's demons for what they were—misunderstandings—and was able to convince even the Abbess that there was no possession. It seemed that Sierva María's prolonged problems were about to be over, for the Bishop trusted Aquino, Sierva María could communicate with him, and he could demolish the arguments in the acta to Josepha Miranda's satisfaction. While returning to his humble home in the slave district, he passed the carcass of a large, sinister, mad dog hung on the bridge. It seemed a sign that the mad demon was defeated, and all would be right in the world. Ironically he drowned in the cistern that very evening, throwing everyone into confusion for his death seemed to confirm the demon's animosity.

Sierva María's only hope was to flee to the maroons as an escape from the confinement and exorcism of the patriarchal society. As a woman and one who wore the mask of the slave, Sierva María was doubly marginalized and voiceless. The voice in which she was comfortable, her African dialect, was unheard by the discourse of the masters. Her life as a marroon could be a lived counterdiscourse to the hegemonic discourse. It would be like that "of the *picaro* and other delinquents who live on the margins of the law" (González Echevarría 171). Cayetano, however, preferred to seek solutions working with

the metadiscourse of which he was a part. He decided to pursue legal avenues, but his investigations revealed how truly marginalized Sierva María was. She was unknown even to her own family. On questioning the Marquis about his daughter, Cayetano received the answer, "I do not know. I feel as if the more I know her the less I know her" (*Of love* 110). She became ever more solitary as her friends deserted her—Caytano to pursue legal recourse, her only friend Martina to escape her prison, and Aquino to die. She became ever less free, enclosed in her prison, strapped to her bed, losing even the freedom of movement within her cell and at the end confined to a straitjacket for the exorcism. Finally, in the solitude of her cell, Sierva María gave way to her demons and died alone. Then her glorious hair grew back in gushing resistance to the silencing and imprisonment visited upon her. Modern existential philosophy suggests that when Sierva María confronted the Bishop with "satanic ferocity, speaking in tongues or with the shrieks of infernal birds" (*Of love* 146), she was merely coming to terms with the dark side of human life and claiming a voice. Aeschylus suggested this to be a necessity when he assigned the Furies a special place in the resolution of the *Eumenides*. Barrett argues that:

> in giving the Furies their place, we may come to recognize that they are not such alien presenses as we think in our moments of evading them. In fact, far from being alien, they are part of ourselves, like all gods and demons. The conspiracy to forget them or to deny they exist, thus turns out to be only one more contrivance in the vast and organized effort of modern society to flee from the self (280).

It is an effort of hegemonic discourse to silence anything perceived as other to its imposed hierarchies.

The other characters in the novel also ended in isolation and with their own demons. Cayetano, like the sixteenth century saint for whom he was named, finished his life caring for the dying at a leper hospital, not as a choice but as a punishment, alone, unable even to identify with his patients by getting their disease. The Bishop was alone, "shattered by the downfall of Cayetano, by the indecipherable death of Father Aquino, by the public resonance of a misfortune that went beyond his wisdom and power" (*Of love* 146). The Marquis died alone on his solitary way home from visiting his estranged wife who was alone on their abandoned sugar plantation—alone, alone, with only death to look forward to. Like the solitary individuals at the end of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, they are all "secluded by solitude and love and by the solitude of love" (409), and face death, as each person must, alone.

Being deprived of interpersonal relationship forced each "to encounter existential isolation with all its dread and powerlessness" (Yalom 361). But it is just such aloneness that allows man to take responsibility to create his "self" out of his aloneness and to grow. We must first acknowledge our aloneness before we can confront it (Yalom 363).

The solitude of each of the characters is an existential isolation which is a metaphor for the solitude of Latin America and the Caribbean. Yalom says that the task of growth is to "separate oneself from the other" (362) which results in isolation. "The solitude of the self is an irreducible dimension of human life no matter how

completely that self had seemed to be contained in its social milieu. In the end...each man is solitary and unsheltered before his own death" (Barrett 34). In order to continue to grow and develop the individual must "develop the inner strength, the sense of personal worth and firm identity that enables us to face existential isolation...and to take anxiety into ourselves" (Yalom 373). García Márquez "demands that we recognize how, in Latin America objectivity, the separation of the observing (European) 'self' from the observed (native) 'other' that anthropology aspires to is perhaps even more unattainable than is ordinarily the case" (Spiller 395). Sierva María incarnates this duality which is still reflected in Caribbean realities.

In its search for relationship within the community of nations, the Caribbean has completed the task of separation, a task which took centuries to achieve; now it is involved in the struggle to create a firm identity which will confirm its sense of worth and enable it to emerge from solitude and isolation into reciprocal relationship with the others of the world. At the end of his *Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz foresees a meeting with other solitaries in the world that will enable it to recognize that "For the first time in our history, we are contemporaries of all mankind" (194). Emergence from this solitude and reunion will provide harmony and plenitude (Paz 196). Until this task is achieved, however, it will continue to resist relationships which seek to use it as a tool. It must confront the demons that are unique to its experience and incorporate them into its identity, resisting misunderstanding and exploitation with a resistance that must bubble forth like Sierva María's seventy-two feet of hair.

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Note

[1]The concept of a white child raised as a black is not new in Spanish literature. Martín Morúa Delgado used it in his novel *Sofía* as early as 1891, a revisioning of the earlier *Cecelia Valdés* by Cirilio Villaverde (1839). The same year that *De amor y otros demonios* appeared in Spanish, Elio Ruiz published a short story, "*La nina blanca*" [*Afro-Hispanic Review* 13.1 (Spring 1994): 46-51]. In this short story the white child raised by slaves is ridden by an orisha who blows away the bishop trying to exorcize her. The child then joins the *palenqueros* and leads a slave revolt.

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Desmemorias y genocidios discursivos: cultura letrada afroargentina de fines del siglo XIX.
por Alejandro Solomianski

1) DESMEMORIAS Y GENOCIDIOS

Este estudio se centra en la actividad intelectual letrada y discursiva en la Buenos Aires de fines del siglo XIX y comienzos del XX, tiempo y espacio en que la presencia afroargentina era todavía (aunque disminuyendo gradualmente) un importante e innegable componente poblacional de la nacionalidad argentina y sus aportes culturales específicos constituían una parte esencial de la cultura nacional más allá del sitemático borramiento y distorsión que estas contribuciones han sufrido. Podría señalarse que esta negación sistemática de la afroargentinidad es uno de los procedimientos más elementales del principio constructivo de la elaboración hegemónica del imaginario de la identidad nacional "euroargentina": la "nación", pretendidamente, "más europea de América Latina".

Explicaré y ejemplificaré brevemente los procedimientos que denomino "desmemoria" y "genocidio discursivo" para no extenderme en una problemática que podría llevarse incontables páginas en un trabajo cuyo fin específico es dar un panorama mínimo de la tan compleja y extensa como desconocida producción letrada afro-argentina.

Llamo "desmemoria" a la alteración o sustitución (voluntaria e interesada) de un hecho (o sistema de relaciones) hasta que, en función de la reiteración de este "reemplazo", esta nueva "verdad" sustituyente pasa a ocupar el espacio que debía ocupar lo sustituido en la memoria nacional lo cual permanece de esta manera borrado. Un ejemplo clarísimo es el de "el negro Falucho", soldado raso, "héroe de las Guerras de la Independencia" totalmente inventado por Bartolomé Mitre con la finalidad de otorgarle "superioridad moral" a la Buenos Aires Secesionista y, a la vez, distorsionar el verdadero rol protagónico que los regimientos de pardos y morenos tuvieron en esas luchas. De este modo el único "moreno" que posee un monumento conmemorativo y una plazoleta en su "honra" jamás ha existido, en tanto que los numerosos soldados afroargentinos, entre ellos oficiales de alta graduación (coronel ha sido el grado máximo otorgado a afroargentinos), que forman parte absolutamente esencial de la historia militar argentina (en el corto tiempo que ésta puede considerarse gloriosa) permanecen "desaparecidos" de la memoria nacional. Dejemos de lado las connotaciones peyorativas del apodo del supuesto "héroe" "Falucho", ya sea las que refieren a un "falo" de mala calidad o a algo "fallido" que finaliza con el morfema "ucho/a", despectivo en español.[1]

Llamo genocidio discursivo al borramiento tanto intencionado como ignorante de las tradiciones y aportes afroargentinos del campo de los registros discursivos. Esta maniobra no aporta una "verdad" sustituta, simbólicamente compensatoria, sino que directamente y sin "excusas" apunta directamente hacia el borramiento de la africanidad. Este procedimiento puede verificarse básicamente a tres niveles. El más obvio es la de la registración de los aportes culturales de la negritud argentina en los campos de la cultura popular nacional (insostenible y con numerosa bibliografía que lo ataca)[2] y en el de la "alta cultura", opinión que forma parte del "sentido común argentino" y que vemos claramente ejercitada por Ricardo Rojas en su *Historia de la literatura argentina*, texto fundacional de la disciplina, donde menciona unicamente al afroargentino Horacio

Mendizábal en un artículo francamente vergonzoso, manifestación de descuidos e ignorancias más que de conocimientos en el que ni siquiera menciona los rasgos destacables de que se tratara de un "joven" poeta "negro". Vale remarcarse que en el ensayo de Rojas *Eurindia* (una investigación acerca de la identidad argentina) ya desde el título puede visualizarse un total rechazo y negación de las raíces africanas.[3] No resulta sorprendente que gran parte de la investigación más profunda, actualizada y rigurosa sobre los aportes culturales afroargentinos haya sido llevada a cabo afuera de la Argentina, por investigadores no argentinos y a veces ni siquiera en español. A los libros ya citados de Marvin Lewis y George Reid Andrews cabe agregarse algunos artículos muy relevantes publicados en la *Afro-Hispanic Review*. En primer lugar el estudio de Donald Castro acerca de la tradición payadoril y Gabino Ezeiza (no hay ningún estudio de profundidad semejante sobre esta temática realizado desde una perspectiva contemporánea en la Argentina) y luego las agudas reflexiones acerca de la construcción de la "imagen negra" en la literatura argentina realizados por el mismo Donald Castro, Elena Castedo-Ellerman y Rosalía Cornejo-Parriego; también resulta interesante la aproximación a la poesía afro-federal de la época rosista de Sylvia G. Carullo (trabajo de indudable valor, aunque disiento con sus premisas hístórico- políticas, tema que excede el contexto del presente artículo); véanse al respecto las referencias bibliográficas.

El mismo procedimiento de "genocidio discursivo" puede constatarse en los registros poblacionales de los censos oficiales argentinos donde el origen "racial" africano de los habitantes se disminuye en los números finales mediante la aplicación del ambiguo calificativo "trigueño".[4] George Reid Andrews estudia exhaustivamente este procedimiento en su libro ya mencionado y llega a afirmar directamente que "the demographic decline of the black population in Buenos Aires was artificially accelerated by the deceptive use of official statistics" (1980, 93).

También puede observarse este mismo genocidio discursivo en la producción ensayística de la época, contradictoria en varios sentidos. Entre las numerosas líneas que podrían citarse encuentro la siguiente proposición de Sarmiento en su *Facundo* de 1845 como el ejemplo clave, inolvidable diría, que más nítida y estridentemente realiza la maniobra que estoy explicitando.

> La adhesión de los negros dio al poder de Rosas una base indestructible. Felizmente las continuas gerras han exterminado ya la parte masculina de esta población que encontraba su patria y su manera de gobernar en el amo a quien servía. (Sarmiento, 1971, 294)

Dejando de lado el profundo y repugnante racismo de la cita, enunciar tal estimación respecto al número de pobladores afroargentinos en 1845 es un disparate absolutamente inaceptable y basta confrontarlo con un relato "realista" como *El Matadero* de Esteban Echeverría (1838) o la novela propagandística *Amalia* de Mármol (1851) para ver la insólita dimensión de su inadecuación con el referente poblacional. Es apropiado señalar que estos clásicos mencionados, tan fuertemente racistas como el mismo *Facundo* de Sarmiento, configuran una reacción paranoica y atormentada frente a

la pesadilla de la invasión "afronegra" que para estos autores representaba el rosismo). Propongo que el hecho de ser la de Sarmiento una afirmación formulada por una de las mayores glorias y autoridades del canon literario latino-americano, y en su libro más estudiado, no sólo aumenta su eficacia en tanto dispositivo del genocidio discursivo sino que también incrementa su calidad de mentira asombrosa y malintecionada como elemento integrante de un proyecto político. En 1845 ni siquiera había nacido todavía Gabino Ezeiza, el mayor payador de la historia argentina y uno de sus mejores poetas populares.

2) LETRADOS AFRO-ARGENTINOS DE FINES DEL SIGLO XIX

Paso entonces a un breve reporte de la actividad letrada afroargentina de finales del siglo XIX cuando el estallido inmigratorio sureuropeo, especialmente italiano y el desarrollo de Buenos Aires como ciudad en sí misma, han dado lugar a un gran nivel de complejidad y diversidad dentro del grupo afroargentino por una parte, y por la otra lo han puesto en la necesidad de remarcar sus presencias y definir sus identidades.

A grandes rasgos podrían proponerse tres grandes líneas de producción intelectual:

1) La poesía popular en su forma característicamente argentina "La payada" si pensamos que el primer payador del que se tiene registro histórico es el afro-rioplatense Joaquín Lenzina (realiza su producción entre 1800-1830) y que tres de los 4 payadores más reconocidos y relevantes son los afroargentinos Higinio Cazón, Luis García Morel y el gran maestro Gabino Ezeiza, fallecido en 1916, uno diría que se trata directamente de cultura popular argentina.[5] Creo relevante señalar que en esta línea de producción intelectual la escritura, cuando no se trata de improvisaciones orales se subordina a la oralidad, a lo escrito en el aire, a lo "no letrado". En la producción no "racializada" de Gabino Ezeiza el tema principal y casi permanente es la escenificación de la "patria" en tanto "identidad popular". Gabino es un intelectual politizado y su voz entona claramente un discurso de resistencia anticapitalista, como intentaré demostrar en el único poema de su autoría que citaré. Supongo que para entender más plenamente la producción y la postura "integracionista" de este poeta, el menos olvidado pero en la práctica tan poco leido como los demás, cabe mencionarse que era un poeta popular exitoso, admirado y que tenía numerosos discípulos "blancos" o mejor dicho de origen italiano como Cayetano Daglio o Francisco Bianco. Entiendo que la diferencia entre este nuevo grupo de inmigrantes pobres y la oligarquía tradicional—realmente construida como "blanquedad"—resulta evidente. La payada afroargentina o argentina, reafirma y reconfirma la unidad del sector afro con los otros sectores populares. Es un espacio de coincidencia, no de diferencia en el que los afroargentinos tienen por derecho propio un más que centenario lugar de privilegio absoluto y originalidad.[6]

2) La poesía culta. Esta línea escenifica el entramado de relaciones conflictivas de los grupos afroargentinos con los dueños de la tierra y de los capitales simbólicos prestigiados. ¿Cómo se adquiere el derecho a la palabra paradigmática? ¿Cómo se accede a los privilegios de la "Ciudad Letrada",[7] pero también cómo se alteran los discursos que la recorren? O, dicho de

otro modo, ¿cómo se tuercen las perspectivas del poder hegemónico y se integra una parte fundamental de la colectividad argentina en un nosotros "aristocrático", racista y excluyente? Sólo el efecto del racismo ha borrado los nombres de las y los poetas que han trabajado en este espacio discursivo, publicando la mayor parte de su producción en la prensa afroargentina de la época.

Horacio Mendizábal, Miguel Noguera y Casildo Thompson son los escritores más representativos de esta modalidad literaria. Sólo los dos primeros publicaron sus poemas en el prestigiado formato "libro". *El canto al Africa* de Thompson que, sin lugar a dudas, debería figurar en el canon literario latinoamericano, tanto por su específica alta calidad literaria como por sus particularidades ideológicas, se conserva en su versión completa gracias a la reedición del biografista Jorge Miguel Ford en 1899. A pesar de la enorme relevancia significativa del poema de Casildo Thompson no me detendré en él ya que Marvin Lewis lo ha estudiado con detalle en su libro.

3) Por último el discurso periodístico y biográfico, con publicaciones periódicas como *El proletario*, *Los negros*, *La broma*, *La juventud*, *La igualdad* y el formidable libro *Beneméritos de mi estirpe* de Jorge Miguel Ford es un tipo de discurso que exhibe y discute la conciencia identitaria que la colectividad afroargentina tiene de sí misma y del espacio ideológico-cultural decisivo que le toca jugar hasta que el arrivo desmesurado de las nuevas clases populares surpeuropeas y el mestizaje disolvieran la "africanidad" de sus presencias.[8]

Podría afirmarse que todos estos textos organizables en las tres líneas propuestas (poesía popular argentina, poesía de "alta cultura" y discurso periodístico y biográfico) poseen tres rasgos comunes:

a) Son textos borrados de la historia cultural argentina. Con esto no quiero simplemente significar que se desconocen en las escuelas secundarias. Puede afirmarse rotundamente que hasta el año 2000 (en que hice mi intensiva investigación en Buenos Aires) no existían ni siquiera como un hipotético horizonte de estudio dentro del ámbito académico de la literatura argentina del siglo XIX.

Por implicancia directa en su inmensa mayoría estos textos se conservan como fuentes primarias en mayor o menor grado de deterioro. El libro de Miguel Noguera *Recuerdos y Esperanzas* (1869) y el periódico *Los Negros* no los encontré mencionados en ningún estudio anterior al mío. Por este motivo, consciente y deliberadamente, citaré muchos fragmentos y de manera extensa: creo que ceder espacio a esas voces silenciadas es el primer paso necesario para enfrentar las "desmemorias y el genocidio discursivo" mediante los cuales aún hoy permanecen borradas. En función de los textos de George Reid Andrews y Marvin Lewis, podría afirmarse que para los argentinos la producción logocéntrica afroargentina ha sido de imposible visualización. Puede pensarse en las excepciones de Gabino Ezeiza (escritor de todos modos "popular" y recordado sólo hasta el primer peronismo) y en el curioso y detestable libro de Marcos de Estrada *Argentinos de origen africano* publicado por la Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires en plena dictadura genocida (1979) como un ejercicio de compensación simbólica y "generosidad" pretendidamente antirracista del aparato cultural de los criminales en el

poder (de todos modos Estrada le dedica decenas de páginas a "Falucho" y apenas menciona a HoracioMendizábal, hecho que evidencia no sólo la falsedad del libro sino su tendencia acentuadamente militarista).

b) Son textos escritos por afroargentinos en un momento en el cual supuestamente ya eran una "raza extinguida" en la Argentina (las palabras entrecomilladas poseen más de un sentido irónico).

c) Son textos escritos en el borde de lo posible (o "escribible") no sólo por su expulsión hacia los márgenes o espacios periféricos del entramado textual de su época hasta el extremo de su literal desaparición (ya irreversible en muchos de sus casos). El punto que quiero destacar es su decidida posicionalidad de riesgo, el riesgo que pueden asumir quienes quizás (citando a Marx y Engels del *Manifiesto del Partido Comunista* –1848-) "no tienen nada que perder" o ya lo tienen todo perdido de antemano. En este sentido resultan ser los textos más valientes, comprometidos y progresistas de su tiempo.

Pretender una unidad inquebrantable en el campo intelectual afroargentino sería tan absurdo como el pretenderla en el euroargentino. Por otra parte los entrecruzamientos estéticos entre un campo y el otro son inevitables: se trata de seres humanos habitando un mismo país. En este sentido la escritura de Mateo Elejalde se acerca mucho más a la de la fanática "blanquedad eurocéntrica" de José Mármol que a los versos populares de García Morel. Por su parte la escritura de Gabino Ezeiza se aproxima mucho más a la gauchesca de José Hernández que a la poesía aristocratizante de Horacio Mendizábal. Vale la pena mencionar que Gabino Ezeiza participó en el estreno de la teatralización del *Martín Fierro* en Buenos Aires en 1892.

El primer texto y poeta que voy a comentar es Miguel Noguera y su "Himno de la Sociedad Dramática Musical 'Los negros'" que es la misma que publicaba el periódico *Los negros*. Noguera se halla en tan buenas relaciones con el subgrupo de la colectividad afroargentina al que pertenece que éste mismo paga la edición de su libro y lo incorpora como "Regalo del periódico 'Los Negros' a sus Suscritores en el décimo abono" como puede leerse en la portada del libro. De este hecho puede inferirse una fuerte aceptación de su poesía, al menos por parte de los/las integrantes de su grupo y, en este sentido debemos atribuirle un considerable nivel de representatividad.

No sabemos mucho de Miguel Noguera, y así como ha sido absolutamente apoyado por sus amigos ha sido ignorado por los otros subgrupos de la colectividad afro-argentina; hecho que ha colaborado con un borramiento aún mayor de su producción y de los datos más elementales sobre su vida. A partir de la lectura de su libro puede afirmarse que Noguera no intentaba ejercer explícitamente influencia sobre los poderosos y que, probablemente, su grupo contaba con una red de relaciones que lo acercaba más a la esfera "blanca" o "aristocrática". Podría pensarse que un grupo que se asocia bajo el combativo nombre "Los Negros" ejercitaría un discurso de franca oposición a la política dominante. Sin embargo esto no se confirma ni en las páginas del periódico ni en la poesía de Noguera. Se trata de una postura muy peculiar y equilibrada en la que ellos se asumen como los representantes de la "negritud" y como los interlocutores válidos afroargentinos (y aquí los dos morfemas combinados poseen el mismo valor o énfasis) frente al resto de

la argentinidad "culta". En rigor no se trata de un grupo "proletarizante" como veremos en el resto de la producción afro-argentina sino más bien de todo lo contrario. Intentan dar origen a un conservatorio nacional argentino, en las páginas de su publicación pueden verse caricaturas de delincuentes con aspecto de inmigrantes italianos e ilustraciones de la moda parisina con modelos "blancas", representaciones inmersas en una atmósfera de refinado espiritualismo y remarcado "antimaterialismo". Configuran simultáneamente un movimiento hacia un universalismo aristocratizante y hacia el orgullo étnico y, aparentemente, esta doble posicionalidad no se realiza desde conciencias desgarradas en lo más mínimo:

> Prosperidad de "Los Negros": Nuestra sociedad es la primera que existe hoy en Buenos Aires. Compuesta de jóvenes distinguidos e inteligentes, contando con elementos de todo género; con un número inmenso de socios, con activos y capaces Directores, con juegos elegantes y finos, la Sociedad "Los Negros" a llegado a una altura a que hasta hoy jamás había llegado ninguna otra sociedad. Ha formado un centro de reunión ameno, escogido y aristocrático y une a todos sus miembros un lazo indisoluble de amistad y respeto mutuo.
>
> *Los Negros*, 18 de julio de 1869

Paso a citar algunas estrofas del himno "Los Negros", escrito por Miguel Noguera, recopilado en su libro *Recuerdos y Esperanzas*, y estrenado en el Teatro Colón en 1869, ya la sala más grande y prestigiosa de Buenos Aires.

El sol cuyos rayos
bañó nuestra cuna
nos ha puesto el rostro
de negro color;
y él es el emblema
de nuestra fortuna,
que siempre a Los Negros
protege el amor.

Escuchad! ya Los Negros elevan
orgullosos su himno de honor,
porque sienten latir en su pecho
la esperanza, la gloria, el amor.

Se difunde su voz armoniosa
como el tierno gemir de un laud,
y otra voz de los cielos responde:
para siempre a Los Negros salud!

Hoy Los Negros galantes saludan
su existencia risueña y triunfal,
pues los nobles aplausos del pueblo
le presagian un nombre inmortal.

Se difunde su voz armoniosa
como el tierno gemir de un laud,
y otra voz de los cielos responde:
para siempre a Los Negros salud!
(Noguera, 1870, 30-32)

Es imposible para el lector argentino dejar de notar el ingenioso procedimiento integracionista del poema por medio de las intertextualidades entre este "Himno" y el "Himno Nacional Argentino". Noguera en un movimiento de ocupación de espacio simbólico, que mínimamente deberíamos considerar audaz, sustituye de un modo marcadamente explícito al "gran pueblo argentino" por "Los Negros". Donde el Himno Nacional Argentino dice:

> Y los libres del mundo responden:
> Al gran pueblo argentino salud!

Este "Himno Afroargentino" contesta:

> Y otra voz de los cielos responde:
> Para siempre a Los Negros salud!

Por más incoherente que pueda juzgarse este "integracionismo" (cosa que de ningún modo propongo) se pone de manifiesto un profundo orgullo y la reivindicación de la identidad "negra" y en definitiva, a pesar de su aristocraticismo, esta estrategia presupone la igualdad entre todos los seres humanos, la nulidad del "Contrato racial".[9] La experiencia existencial de este grupo afroargentino podría haberse configurado (o ser utilizada por el racismo argentino) como el ejemplo o la prueba de la ausencia de racismo en la Argentina. Propongo que el racismo de la "blanquedad" argentina no pudo ni siquiera negociar o capitalizar esta oportunidad simbólica tan a la mano; la "negritud" del grupo lo vuelve a la larga inadmisible: "negros" que no son "negros" sino intelectuales aristocráticos, "negros" que planifican la fundación de un conservatorio musical nacional cuando se supone que ya ni siquiera existen... De hecho son el grupo más borrado de la memoria argentina. Ni siquiera el biografista Jorge Miguel Ford en *Beneméritos de mi estirpe* los menciona.

Me detendré ahora muy brevemente en quien, sin dudas, no manifiesta la conflictiva posicionalidad afroargentina sino más bien la conflictiva posicionalidad popular argentina. En rigor se trata de un poeta irreversiblemente integrado a la historia literaria popular argentina y a la sociedad de su tiempo.[10] En cierto sentido representa lo opuesto a Miguel Noguera al situarse en el centro del campo popular pero al mismo tiempo en coincidencia con él es una voz que intenta suturar los desgarramientos producidos por la indudable efectividad del racismo. En su movimiento integratorio la voz de Gabino Ezeiza resulta integrada inevitablemente y por derecho propio, aunque la posteridad lo ha sometido al tratamiento generalizado de genocidio discursivo que ya hemos comentado.

Salvo, quizás, la obra de Noguera y el periódico "Los Negros" (pero esto es más complejo y debatible de lo que parece a simple vista) las voces y textos que analizamos en este brevísimo recuento de la producción letrada afroargentina configuran, bastante explícitamente, un discurso de resistencia anticapitalista. Me interesa leer desde esta perspectiva algunas estrofas de un texto en el que Gabino Ezeiza, desde el personaje Gabino Ezeiza, aborda de un modo humorístico y deliberadamente absurdo, el tema del dinero. Propongo que como ejemplo de poesía popular el presente texto posee un muy marcado nivel de consciencia estética e ideológica.

MI CAUDAL

Dos centavos y un cigarro
constituye mi riqueza,
un candelero, una mesa,
una silla y un colchón.
Después de mi mente
brotan los desengaños más crueles,
así es que en estos papeles
hago una improvisación.

Unos pedazos de libros
porque niguno está entero,
el lápiz, pluma y tintero
y un cuadro de Napoleón.
Después sacos, pantalones
y aquel que mejor se halla,
parece que en la batalla
fuera blanco de un cañón.

Otro montón de papeles
que yo llamo mis poesías,
donde hay penas y alegrías
todo remito a la vez.
Cartas, episodios, poemas,
declaraciones brillantes,

se encuentran en este instante
esparcidos a mis pies.

(...)

Tengo en el cajón los restos
de una pasta de pescado,
que la compré en el mercado
anoche para cenar.
Mi pobre guitarra ostenta
una cuerda y dos clavijas,
que pienso en alguna rifa
cinco centavos sacar.
Para empeñar tengo prendas
que es un estribo chileno,
dos argollitas de un freno
y un tarro de kerosén;
una linterna sin vidrio
que se la quité a un muchacho,
y papeles de despacho
que dan en el almacén.

(...)

Tenía dos nacionales
como quien no dice nada
los gasté en una sentada
en mucho menos de un mes;
y después cinco centavos
que antes de ayer he prestado
pero me han asegurado
que han de pagarme interés.
(Gabino Ezeiza, 62-64, 1946)

El uso del "yo lírico" preanuncia los extremados niveles de complejización con que Jorge Luis Borges recreará ese procedimiento estético. Por otra parte creo que, sin atribuirle al texto originalides o valores imaginarios o inmerecidos, el principio constructivo del poema se asemeja a una parodia anticipada de las tan halagadas enumeraciones caóticas del más afamado autor del "alta cultura" argentina.

Intentaré, ahora, bosquejar la producción de quien ha quedado "registrado" (de ninguna manera podría decirse "recordado") como el único "poeta" afroargentino: Horacio Mendizábal. No expondré su poesía, ya estudiada por Marvin Lewis, sino su trabajo ensayístico. De todos modos antes de emitir juicios sobre la calidad estética de su producción (en muchos casos al mismo nivel que la de los sí registrados autores de la"blanquedad") sería apropiado considerar que su primer libro, *Primeros versos* (1865), es la colección de sus escritos entre los catorce y los dieciocho años, edad que tenía al publicar esta colección relativamente extensa: 187 páginas de versos en letra más bien pequeña y sin dejar más de dos líneas entre una composición y la siguiente. Su segundo libro *Horas de meditación*, lo publica en 1869 cuando tenía solamente veintidos años.[11] Lo que ante todo se advierte es una infatigable fogosidad intelectual, una inteligencia viva, despierta y sorprendentemente cultivada considerando los recursos desde los que comienza su itinerario intelectual y el difícil acceso a la "alta cultura" para cualquiera en el Buenos Aires de 1860, y más aun para alguien que sería rechazado por la tonalidad de su piel. Horacio Mendizábal muere en 1871, a los 24 años cuando se produjo la epidemia de fiebre amarilla. Por voluntad propia, sin el mandato de ningún "padre confesor", el joven intelectual participa activamente en el socorro de las víctimas ocupando el cargo de secretario de la junta popular presidida por el doctor Roque Pérez. Muere contagiado por la enfermedad (Veasé Ford, 67) Compromiso, coherencia, generosidad. ¿Qué hubiera escrito Mendizábal a los cincuenta años de edad si hubiera querido correr a refugiarse en 1871 en una quinta suburbana? No lo sabemos. En mi opinión y tras una repetida lectura de su obra considero que en su poesía, casi

siempre de tesis, de opinión, de compromiso con la causa de la igualdad entre los seres humanos, se encuentra en potencia o disfrazada la labor de un ensayista, de un pensador crítico de enorme talento que no tuvo tiempo suficiente para desarrollarse. Más allá de lo meritorio de mucho de sus versos, creo que hay un escrito de Mendizábal que alcanza máxima relevancia y que debiera ser incluido en el canon literario argentino y latino-americano. Se trata justamente de un ensayo de catorce páginas que él coloca como "Introducción" a su segundo y último libro, *Horas de meditación* (1869).

Dentro de la dinámica de acercamiento y enfrentamiento al poder que presupone su obra, "El autor dedica esta pobre obra al eminente educacionista arjentino y presidente de la República Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. Poniéndola bajo la protección de su nombre". A continuación de esta dedicatoria, que puede interpretarse como sincera y como intervención crítico-política a la vez, encontramos la "Introducción". De alguna manera este "prólogo-ensayo" es también una carta abierta a la máxima autoridad de la República.[12] Una carta de denuncia al poder cuya temática son las relaciones entre afroargentinidad y "alta" cultura europeizante o entre "negros" (sectores populares) y "aristocracia" (sectores explotadores, eurocentristas y a la vez tradicionalistas y católicos). Ignoro que impresión le haya podido causar este texto a Sarmiento quien era, incoherentemente, tan progresista y demócrata como racista y antipopular. Doce años más tarde publicará su libro más pedante y menos inteligente *Conflicto y armonía de las razas en América* (1883). Cito algunos fragmentos representativos de la "Introducción" de Horacio Mendizábal:

> Cuando el soplo de la adversidad ha pasado a nuestro alrededor, cuando el hombre ve desvanecidas sus más gratas ilusiones de la edad viril y sus más risueñas esperanzas, cuando ha muerto, en fin, el emblema de su ventura, entonces vuelve en torno la melancólica mirada y va a buscar un consuelo en la religión.[13] El fanático embrutecido con sus dogmas y sus mitos, con sus estúpidas revelaciones, con su encarnación del infinito en el finito, de la luz en las tinieblas, de la verdad en la mentira, llega al pie del altar anhelante de consuelo, y ora ante la imajen del Salvador o ante las efigies del paganismo católico; ora con la fe del verdadero creyente, porque necesita de esa fe, fe ciega, admitida sin examen ni discernimiento, pero que frecuentemente lleva la tranquilidad a su alma y la alegría a su corazón. (Horacio Mendizábal, 9, 1869)
>
> Lima cae bajo el yugo de la más ominosa de las tiranías, la tiranía teocrática. La Santa Inquisición levanta su trono cercado de llamas sobre los cráneos descarnados y la sangre aun humeante de sus víctimas inocentes, que morían presa de los más horribles tormentos. En aquel siglo funesto de lágrimas y desolación un sordo murmullo de amenaza y de dolor empezó a sentirse sobre la tierra bendecida de los Incas. Era el primer grito de sorpresa, la primer alarma del corazón. La tolerancia de los desmanes del fraile y del tirano habia fortificado el abuso: No habia seguridad individual; la casa, la hacienda, la fortuna, todo se hallaba a merced del fuerte, del que en nombre del cristianismo y la civilización violaba con mano sacrílega el santuario de la familia en aras de su ambicion y de su mezquino interés particular. (11-12)
>
> ...se levanta triunfante el estandarte de los libres al grito sagrado de Patria y Libertad. El déspota orgulloso dobló la

soberbia frente ante la voluntad de los pueblos, ante la voluntad de Dios. Valientes jenerales y soldados intrépidos, hombres, mujeres, niños y ancianos derrumbaron el trono del conquistador. No se insulta impunemente a los pueblos. No se mancillan impunemente los derechos del hombre. Los tiranos nunca dormirán tranquilos en su lecho de pluma. (12-13)

Poesía es amor, es luz, es sentimiento, es caridad. La poesía es la poesía. La poesía está destinada a levantar de su marasmo a una raza desvalida, condenada a la esclavitud, al servilismo, al envilecimiento moral y material. Despierte el poeta de corazon, jire la mirada a su alrededor y tienda la mano protectora al pueblo proscripto de Israel. ¿Cómo no sentir dolor ante el infortunio de una raza hermana, hermana ante Dios y ante la razón? ¿Cómo no estremecerse ante el insulto y la humillacion inicua que la raza blanca lanza en nuestro suelo a la raza de color, a mi raza? (17)

¿Cómo gritarle frente a frente: mulato! Eres criminal, porque tu frente es oscura! Canalla! Tú no tienes patria, sinó para morir por ella defendiendo mis intereses; mulato! No te educaré para que nunca levantes la frente donde yo la levanto! (18)

El sacerdote católico no vendrá en su ayuda, porque el catolicismo está basado en la oscuridad, en las tinieblas, en la ignorancia: no levantará su voz en favor de mi raza como no la ha levantado hasta ahora, porque es aristocrático por excelencia, y para él los hombres no son sus hermanos sinó sus siervos; ellos lo dicen: son las ovejas de su redil. Ved sinó al Papa sentado en su sólio púrpura y oro representando al Cristo de la humildad. Ved el antagonismo entre él y su pueblo, entre él y la humanidad. (18)

...y si en la República Argentina no hay cadenas materiales para el hombre de color, hay el desden, el insulto, la humillación del blanco que le escupe a la cara, que le odia! Si sois cristianos, como decis, redimidle, educadle, amadle, llamadle a vuestro lado, dadle la ciencia que tengais, enseñadle la luz, la verdad, pero no le enseñeis el fanatismo, no le embrutezcais, no le lleveis al templo católico, llevadle al templo del estudio de la virtud, del amor, al templo cristiano. No le proscribais en colejios de castas; no le rebajeis, pensad que son vuestros hermanos; (20-21)

¿Tendríais horror de ver un negro sentado en el primer puesto de la república? ¡Y porqué, si fuese ilustrado como el mejor de vosotros, recto como el mejor de vosotros, sabio y digno como el mejor de vosotros? ¿Tan solo porque la sangre de sus venas fue tostada por el sol del Africa en la frente de sus Abuelos? ¿Tendríais horror de ver sentado en las bancas del parlamento a un hombre de los que con tan insultante desden llamais *mulato*, tan solo porque su frente no fuese del color de la vuestra? Si eso pensais, yo me avergüenzo de mi pueblo y lamento su ignorancia. (22-23)

Además de destacarse la brillantez intelectual, la coherencia argumentativa, el extremado valor (en sus dos acepciones más generalizadas) y la juventud del autor; resulta escalofriante el modo en que el texto traspasa los límites de lo aceptable para su tiempo y espacio. Ningún intelectual liberal antieclesiástico (y me refiero al sistema escriturario hispano-americano en general y no meramente al argentino) ha escrito para 1869 una crítica tan sincera como arriesgada de los roles históricamente opresivos de la iglesia católica en general y especialmente en lo que respecta a su sostenimiento de la esclavitud. Considero que muchos de los

comentarios y reclamos que Mendizábal realiza conservan aún hoy su vigencia, la fuerza de su expresión e incluso su peligrosidad. De hecho su inquebrantable lógica antirracista e igualitaria sigue siendo un desafío para una sociedad globalizada de acuerdo a las pautas fundacionales del "contrato racial". De haberse tratado de un texto conocido y difundido en la Argentina a la medida de sus méritos (la primera y muy limitada reedición parcial fue realizada por Marvin Lewis en inglés recién en 1996 y citando sólo unas pocas líneas), hubiera sido un documento clandestino y de muy peligrosa posesión durante muchos momentos de la historia argentina; muy especialmente durante la dictadura genocida de los '70.

Me interesa destacar una línea de pensamiento similar a la de Mendizábal presente en la formidable colección de biografías *Beneméritos de mi Estirpe* de Jorge Miguel Ford (1899). En este libro algunos segmentos, sin dejar de corresponder a una agenda progresista, anticlericalista e intelectualista, cuestionan el valor de la "civilización occidental" y sus estructuras sociales específicamente en tanto sistemas de relaciones de organización capitalista.

> Cuando las concepciones ciclópeas de la humanidad forman el pedestal del progreso del siglo que tiende al ocaso, cuando la aurora de la monetización va llegando al medio día en el jiro del metálico, el cual oscurece los principios del sentimiento i forma el dominio de la sociedad, escribir un libro que refleje los anhelos de una mente joven, afecta a la veneración de los grandes ideales, es una tarea ímproba cuando no negativa. (Ford, 7)
>
> Negar las leyes sociales importa negar las naturales, i en esto estamos con muchos grandes hombres i entre ellos con Enrique Ferri que sigue las doctrinas rejeneradoras del viejo Marx, pero que las leyes naturales, dependientes del sol, del clima, del ambiente, etc., son inmutables, mientras las sociales dependen del hombre que las restrinje, que se insubordina contra ellas, contra la justicia, ora obedeciendo a la necesidad, ora al egoismo ambicioso, ora a la maldad que despierta la supremacía, la aspiración salvaje de los relativamente fuertes que impiden el acceso de los relativamente débiles. (Ford, 13)
>
> ...hallamos el tratamiento eficaz para combatir su propagación a la sociedad futura en las doctrinas del socialismo que no tardarán en proliferar visiblemente dando frutos benéficos al progreso de la colectividad humana. (Ford, 14)

Difícilmente pueda encontrarse una vanguardia ideológicamente más innovadora y revolucionaria para su momento histórico, salvo en textos de otros autores afroargentinos del siglo XIX como el ya citado Mendizábal. Por otra parte nuevamente los ataques a la iglesia e incluso al antisemitismo de algunas de sus concepciones resultan notables y todavía contudentes a comienzos del siglo XXI.

> Dónde está esa fructificación tan sarandeada del cristianismo manteniendo la igualdad en el amor del prójimo, por que se sacrificara el Filósofo Judío? (Ford, 15)
>
> Así no se pierden como luciérnagas en la historia las palabras *nihilis nihilis* de Giordano Bruno a quien ofendió, vituperó i llevó a la hoguera el fanatismo estulto de los clérigos i sus satélites; no oculta la verdad jeológica que hizo vejar por éstos al físico de Pisa, Galileo;... (Ford, 118)

Uno de los rasgos más destacables de

este discurso,[14] además (o a pesar) de su indudable inspiración revolucionaria y su valentía, es su caracter letrado, su tendencia intelectualista y logocéntrica que normalmente conduce a una sobre-valoración de los individuos "destacados" y "tocados por el genio" y a una desvalorización de las masas.

Puede pensarse que la sofisticación letrada o logocéntrica tiende por naturaleza a ser un ejercicio solitario, intelectual y notablemente apartado de las practicas grupales, lo carnavalezco y los lenguajes musicales y corporales. El ensayo ya comentado de Mendizábal tiene la misma tendencia elitista y a la vez revolucionaria tan común en pensadores de la izquierda internacionalista. Resulta evidente que esta tendencia logocéntrica no tiene ningún vínculo con el color de la piel del autor.

> Ellos son los encargados de contribuir grandemente a la perfección humana, los transmisores del pensamiento de las capacidades superiores a las masas del pueblo, son las órbitas de la prosperidad, las moles de la razón que desplomándose sobre los vicios hundirán el fanatismo i los malos réjimenes. (Ford, 79)

Un planteo menos logocéntrico y por lo tanto más popular de la problemática del racismo se formula, por necesidad (por la lógica propia del medio periodístico) en las intervenciones predominantemente arriesgadas, progresistas y revolucionarias de la prensa afroargentina.

Normalmente, en tanto órganos de opinión estos periódicos emitían, a la manera de "editoriales", su enfoque acerca de diversos temas de actualidad desde una perspectiva de "clase" y muchas veces de "raza" pero siempre desde una posición de valentía y en abierto enfrentamiento con los poderosos "dueños" de la Argentina. En algunos casos la redacción era anónima o, mejor dicho, llevaba el nombre del periódico (cuyos integrantes eran conocidos dentro de la colectividad); en otros casos los nombres de los editores responsables debían aparecer en la primera página en función de disposiciones municipales (vale la pena explicitar que este hecho no obtenía ningún tipo de autocensura).

Uno de los temas más recurrentes del periodismo afroargentino es el de la organización de la clase proletaria más allá de la frontera de "raza".

> La Huelga Tipográfica: El lunes por la mañana se declararon en huelga casi todos los operarios de las imprentas de esta ciudad. Hacía tiempo que el tipógrafo vivía en la más espantosa y bajo la más severa y terrible tiranía. No era el operario que se retibuía como se merece. No, era una máquina automática que servía para labrar la fortuna de algunos que se dicen defensores del pueblo y que ostentan al frente de sus hojas el nombre de los que viven del sudor del operario. (...) Siendo *La Broma* órgano de las clases proletarias, les envía palabras de aliento y desea que las ideas socialistas cundan no sólo entre los tipógrafos sino entre todas las clases obreras. *La Broma*, 5 de septiembre de 1878 (Editor responsable Dionisio García)
>
> *La Broma* no vende su consiencia, *La Broma* no transije con caudillos políticos (...) Sigamos; sigamos! Qué nos importa que gobierne Juan Pedro o Diego, que mande quien mande, cuando aunque reconozcamos nuestros derechos y espongamos nuestra voluntad prestando nuestro voto y haciendo propaganda en los centros políticos, la resolución de un número de ciudadanos

que se titulan padres de la patria es contradictoria muchas veces contra la verdadera voluntad de la mayoría del pueblo. (...) No nos inmiscluyamos en la corriente arrasadora de la política hasta tanto un candidato no haga en su programa un recuerdo especial de nuestra desheredada comunidad. *La Broma*, jueves 11 de septiembre de 1879

Entre nosotros no se disipa ni se disipará jamás el amor patrio, el sentimiento nacional. El hombre de color ha contribuido con su sangre desde la guerra de nuestra independencia. *La Broma*, 23 de septiembre de 1879

Sí! porque esa libertad de que gozan los que hoy nos escarnecen no se la deben a ellos mismos sino a los sacrificios heróicos y abnegados de esa raza indomable. (...) ¡Que triste premio se ha dado a esa raza! Hasta donde llega el orgullo humano! ¡Ingratos! Vosotros, blancos, aristócratas de cajón que tanto blasonais de libres e independientes decid, ¿a quién debeis vuestras libertades y vuestra independencia? ¿A vosotros mismos? No! *La Broma*, 20 de noviembre de 1879

Los hombres encargados de hacer respetar y cumplir la Constitución son los primeros en violarla. Empezando por escluirnos de todo derecho a aspirar a cualquier puesto político. (...) La igualdad en nuestra patria solo existe en la forma. *La Broma*, 18 de diciembre de 1879

Es interesante señalar que a partir del 14 de marzo de 1880 *La Broma* adjunta a su nombre, como lema, la caracterización "Organo de las clases obreras".

Nuestra misión: Las artes y la industria traen consigo la riqueza del país, y nuestro pueblo que por si solo es rico, cuanto no lo será el día en que las artes, la industria y la agricultura estén en todo su apogeo, y podamos exportar en grandes cantidades los productos de nuestras fábricas. (...)

El hacer de nuestros hermanos excelentes obreros es cuestión de vida o muerte.

La Broma, 27 de enero de 1881 (Director responsable Juan A. Costa)

Como podemos apreciar estos subalternizados no sólo expresan un punto de vista opuesto al oligárquico en función de la historia nacional y el orden social en general sino que intervienen, con una voz valiente y animada, en situaciones particulares y aportan incluso un lúcido y progresista proyecto de industrialización del país.

Contemporáneamente *La Juventud*, con una comisión directiva integrada por G. M. Arrieta, Juan Balparda, Gabino Ezeiza y Benjamín Ramos realiza una labor comunicacional notablemente similar:

Banderas al viento: La idea de la libertad es la que por segunda vez va a hacernos ocupar un modesto puesto en la prensa periódica de nuestra sociedad. (...) con estos sanos propósitos, hemos de luchar hasta el último instante que tengamos de vida con tal de obtener una verdadera fórmula política y social. (...) *La Juventud*, 10 de enero de 1878

En el centenario del general San Martín: Permítasenos, como hijos que somos de la gran familia argentina, estampar en las humildes columnas de este periódico el sentimiento sublime que inspira la memoria de las grandes épocas. *La Juventud*, 3 de marzo de 1878

Es conveniente percibir que a los redactores de *La Juventud* no se les escapaba el hecho de que San Martín pudo ser "San Martín" gracias al apoyo y el esfuerzo de los regimientos de pardos y morenos: desde esta presuposición básica

se "memorizan" las grandes épocas revolucionarias.

Coherentemente, en un número en el que se conmemora el aniversario de la Independencia Nacional, 9 de julio de 1816, no deja de hacerse una enunciación celebrativa que problematiza claramente el régimen de derechos diferenciados que rige a la sociedad argentina de la época y cuestiona, a la vez, los "derechos de propiedad" simbólicos de la fundación nacional.

> Somos argentinos y pertenecemos a una clase desheredada de todos los derechos y prerrogativas que acuerda nuestra Carta Fundamental, pero no por eso dejaremos de amar, servir y cooperar al florecimiento y prosperidad de la que se llama Patria. *La Juventud*, 10 de julio de 1878.

Es notable la rigurosidad histórica de la que estos fragmentos textuales dan cuenta: la sencillez con que contrastan y desdibujan la imagen falsa y simbólicamente ventajosa de las luchas emancipatorias construida e impuesta por el aparato gnoseológico de la "blanquedad" argentina.

Este artículo ha intentado dar a conocer algunos de los textos y los rasgos más destacables de una producción intelectual tan relevante y compleja como ignorada y desconocida. Estas reflexiones, por cuestiones de espacio, no revisan el imprescindible *Canto al Africa* de Casildo Thompson ni se extienden más detalladamente en las obras sumamente complejas de autores como Horacio Mendizábal o Gabino Ezeiza.

De todos modos considero que a través de este breve recorrido queda demostrado que el espíritu arriesgado y revolucionario de este conjunto de autores se sustentaba en un sólido conocimiento teórico de ninguna manera inferior al poseído por el campo intelectual de la "blanquedad" argentina.

Ante el total desastre que sacude a comienzos del siglo XXI al proyecto mismo y la viabilidad de la nacionalidad argentina me parece una tarea necesaria volver la mirada hacia una experiencia existencial e intelectual tan valerosa y alternativa como borrada de la historia argentina, latinoamericana y occidental.

En contemporaneidad con la escritura de este artículo se están llevando a cabo en Buenos Aires las reuniones del Foro Social Mundial o asamblea mundial contra la globalización "neoliberal". La primera declaración del foro es que Argentina consituye el antimodelo, el ejemplo de la suma de políticas que no hubieran debido realizarse, sobre todo frente a las imposiciones del Fondo Monetario Internacional. Creo que no se trata de un problema exclusivo del último cuarto de siglo; la crisis actual, con repercusiones extrarregionales, nos demuestra más claramente la relevancia de intentar entender quiénes eran y a qué tensiones se hallaban sometidos los argentinos en el momento de consolidar la identidad imaginaria de la nación. Tarea imposible sin recuperar la plenitud de un período de la vida cultural argentina tan absolutamente silenciado como relevante y valiente.

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Notas

[1]Para la invención del personaje "Falucho" basta leer el texto *Falucho y el sorteo de Matucana* de Bartolomé Mitre donde sin

justificación alguna después de "medio siglo" (5) corrije a testigos presenciales y realiza una verdadera ficcionalización y "puesta en escena" de su version personal de un modo descaradamente acorde a sus intereses simbólicos. Para la historia "afroargentina" en general y muy especialmente para el rubro militar es imprescindible el libro *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires 1800-1900* de George Reid Andrews.

[2]Menciono a manera de ejemplo sólo tres libros clásicos que han trabajado esta problemática (pero es un área explorada como en breve se verá): *Cosas de Negros* de Rossi, *Morenada* de Lanuza y *Aspectos de la Cultura Africana en el Río de la Plata* de Ortiz Oderigo. Veansé las referencias bibliográficas.

[3]Para el campo de la producción afroargentina de "alta cultura" debe señalarse el estudio relativamente reciente de Marvin Lewis *Afro-Argentine Discourse. Another Dimension of the Black Diaspora* (1996). Texto que estudia casi todos los autores que mencionaré a continuación por primera vez. Los textos afroargentinos escritos en prosa Lewis los cita solamente en ingles. Pude acceder a sus verisones completas en español sólo como fuentes primarias, del mismo modo los autores o textos que Lewis no menciona se encuentran en este momento sólo como fuentes primarias en estados de deterioro diverso.

[4]Este mecanismo de disminución del componente poblacional con orígenes africanos, abiertamente racista y destinado (dentro del imaginario de la clase hegemónica) a atraer a la "mejor" inmigración, es decir a la "más blanca" o noreuropea, irónicamente refiere a la producción agrícola de trigo que será parte esencial de la riqueza argentina.

[5]Para la figura de Lenzina puede consultarse *Artigas en la poesía de América* de Hammerley Dupuy y Hammerley Peverini, lamentablemente en su edición original de 1951, bastante difícil de encontrar. Para una visión breve pero significativa de la producción payadoril puede consultarse el libro de Beatriz Seibel. Un estudio muy profundo de la "tradición" se encuentra en el artículo ya citado de Donald Castro.

[6]Veasé "De la 'Makawa' africana a la Payada" (103-121) en el citado libro de Ortiz Oderigo.

[7]Me refiero explícitamente al concepto propuesto por Angel Rama en la bibliografía citada.

[8]Curiosamente en el periódico afroargentino *La Igualdad* (1873-1874) se publica regularmente el aviso de un vino italiano ("Vino ferruginoso Aroud, rigeneratore del sangue") y en *Los negros* (1869-1870) "la línea de vapores Lavarelli entre Génova y el Río de la Plata" anuncia repetidamente sus viajes. Este entrecruzamiento demuestra que la inmigración italiana supo tomar elementos de la experiencia y el legado popular afroargentino y se encaramó en organizaciones y aparatos socio-discurisvos ya plasmados como la "payada" o en vías de configuración como el tango.

[9]Hago referencia al concepto formulado por Charles Mills en el libro citado en referencias bibliográficas.

[10]Es interesante cómo su nombre reaparece en el Aeropuerto más importante de la Argentina o en uno de los tangos más clásicos del repertorio nacional (en "Café de los angelitos" Cátulo Castillo escribe: "bar de Gabino y Cazón").

[11]El tema de la edad no me parece irrelevante. Cualquiera que haya leído las primerizas versiones modernistas de los *Heraldos negros* de César Vallejo puede advertir que la madurez estética no se alcanza a los dieciocho años. Otro tanto puede decirse de Jorge Luis Borges y sus "eliminados" poemas a la Revolución Soviética. El archirrenombrado ejemplo (eurocentrista) de la efectividad de Arthur Rimbaud que sería largo de discutir, en mi opinión se vincula con su posterior red de recepción; por otra parte su muerte en Africa, ejerciendo el colonialismo y acumulando

oro, no me parece muy memorable.

[12]El texto es también un "testimonio". En tanto carta al poder se vincula con la *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de Indias* (1542) de Bartolomé de Las Casas y con la *Carta de un escritor a la Junta Militar* (1977) de Rodolfo Walsh, entre otros textos memorables de la tradición hispano-americana.

[13]La comparación entre este texto y algunos fragmentos de la *Contribución a la crítica de la filosofía del derecho de Hegel* (1843) del joven Marx parece inevitable: "Este Estado y esta sociedad producen la religión, que es una conciencia invertida del mundo, porque ellos mismos son un mundo invertido." (Marx, 9, 1968), "La religión es el opio del pueblo. La superación de la religión como felicidad ilusoria del pueblo es la exigencia de su verdadera felicidad." (10)

[14]Por otra parte Ford parece haber adoptado parte de la reforma ortográfica que Sarmiento propusiera en sus años de juventud.

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Maroons and the Palimpsest Landscape
by Margaret M. Olsen

The maroon in historical imagination is a figure that evokes rebellion and freedom, independence and resilience. Escaping to the protection of nature, the runaway slave created his world in the landscape he encountered, regardless how harsh or inhospitable. In fact, the original maroons survived precisely by isolating themselves in hostile, unreachable spaces. By moving beyond the geographic and epistemological limits of European colonial civilization, the maroon communities often remained unapproachable to the colonial authorities from whom they fled. Over time, however, maroons were obliged to renegotiate their relationship to dominant culture, and simultaneously, their relationship to the natural landscape. Adaptability, therefore, has been as key to maroon survival as has the ability to elude dominant culture and remain hidden. But there are very few remaining places that are unseen in the twenty first century. The world has become small in the wake of demographic growth and the development of technologies and economies that link the globe's populations. The seemingly empty spaces in nature beyond the control of dominant society where maroons have historically constructed their reality throughout time scarcely exist today. The globe has been mapped, both literally and figuratively, and a new consumption-based geography draws lines of resources and markets. Despite the disappearance of the unmapped spaces of the world, however, maroon peoples, or to be more precise, their descendants, *do* exist, and they continue to preserve many of the cultural practices they inherited from their ancestors on lands those ancestors fought hard to win from colonial governments. As the maroon has moved from a voluntarily isolated figure to one who approaches, or is approached by, hegemonic culture, the inevitable contest over material and discursive control of the landscape has intensified.

Marronage in its manifestations past and present, is characterized by two key elements: flight and autonomy. The maroon originally sought an escape from the physical and psychological domination of slavery, but worked to secure as well a space for independent cultural expression. This space often implied land on which to cultivate crops, create a community home, and engage in spiritual worship. Cultural *marronage* during the colonial period and within the context of slavery provided an essential space apart for African American cultural expression. Contemporary writers, artists and intellectuals of African descent often mimic this flight from traditional Western concepts of the canonical and the literary in an analogous form of *marronage*. Constrained by limiting artistic forms and linguistic standards, they strive to claim a unique aesthetic territory through an embrace of African systems of knowledge, the incorporation of creole languages and dialects, and an emphasis on African American poetic and prosaic structures. Whether or not maroons of the twenty first century are aware of the intellectual implications of literary *marronage* in the Western world, all are intensely aware of the sociopolitical and cultural stakes of their own ancestors' flight from slavery. And all maroons remain highly conscious of the disparity between their own stories of place and the conflicting narratives of those who would readily appropriate their lands and assimilate them to dominant culture.

This essay traces the relationship of the maroon to the landscape in a trans-historical manner, revealing the means by which maroons have adapted through time to the struggle over physical and discursive control of the land on which they live. Through an examination of

historical documents, along with archaeological and ethnographic sources from across the Caribbean basin, I have divided maroon inscription of the landscape in the region into three generalized stages, which range from autonomy to an increasing accommodation of other models of discourse on the land.[1] In looking at how contemporary maroon communities engage their landscapes and contain their relationship with nature through material culture and oral discourse, one realizes that present day maroon communities and those of the past, which are contained by history, have much to say about each other. Centuries-old documents inform the present as much as contemporary archaeology, oral testimony and self-ethnography illuminate the past. With the arrival of the twenty-first century, the pressures of globalization and concomitant resource consumption swallow up valuable lands, and maroons, like most marginalized peoples, are being forced to redefine once again, in political, economic and cultural terms, their relationship to the landscape. The capacity for continued flexibility will determine if maroon culture survives the most recent onslaught: modernization and the encroachment upon lands against which all contemporary maroon communities are currently struggling.

The ecocritical perspective that informs this study is one that recognizes that both colonialism and capitalism have been driven by the notion that man is essentially at odds with nature. Whether humankind has invented itself as the benevolent force in a hostile world, or conversely as the corrupting force in a pristine world, ecocriticism seeks to reveal this relationship to nature as a construct that can, and indeed must be apprehended in the name of human and cultural survival on the planet. By investigating the ways in which the Western world has invented nature and the landscape towards its own benefit, and by exploring the ways in which competing visions and discourses of the land have clashed throughout time, ecocriticism's overall proposal is a relocation of humankind *within* nature. In asserting that the human species is no more and no less than an element of nature, ecocritics perceive the world's population as intimately dependent upon and ultimately responsible for the survival of the globe, since human survival is implied therein.[2]

The multiple trajectories of ecocriticism continue to be more rigorously defined by critics working in different fields. In general terms, however, ecocritics in literary studies seek to explore how the landscape contains the stories and discourses that peoples ascribe to it. Or, as Ursula Heise so succinctly states: "Ecocriticism examines, in other words, how concepts of the natural are constructed in different cultures and expressed through a variety of practices."[3] However, ecocriticism has not been sufficiently employed to investigate the complex ways in which peoples of indigenous and African descent have struggled to maintain tenancy and discursive control over their land in Latin America. Yet, in Latin America, the land has been the prime contested resource in the region since the conquest, not only as a means to basic subsistence, but as the interface for cultural expression. These groups' intimate spiritual relationships with landscape result in the land existing as both a source and a receptacle for narrative. More properly, the land is the origin of

discourse, for cultural meaning is contained in objects and manipulations of the landscape as well as in oral histories. Colonial and contemporary governments alike have recognized the power inherent in long term tenancy of the land in economic and cultural terms. It has often been precisely for that reason that dominant culture has sought throughout history to displace marginalized peoples from lands that hold great symbolic and spiritual importance to them.

The Discourse of Landscape

> Nature doesn't permit humans to destroy it. Mother Waterfall enchants the fish, the turtles, so that they become *invisible to human beings*. We look around and think that the abundance of which our grandfathers spoke has vanished when it really has gone off to that lake within a lake, which is the true biological reserve. And there *it remains, beyond the reach of intruders* who cut down the trees and kill the fish with poisons from their refineries. But one day, when the world finally comes to its senses, that enchanted lake will become disenchanted. And those riches which *outsiders say are just a story* will be the joy of all humanity. (Woman aged 36, Trombetas River, 1995, Slater 129, emphasis mine)

This quote relates one of the several stories that Candace Slater collected among the *remanescentes*, descendants of African maroons or runaways slaves of *quilombos*, or runaway slave communities, within contemporary Amazonia. The *remanescentes* in the western region of the state of Pará represent only a small sector of the tens of thousands of maroon descendants in Brazil.[4] One of several that Slater collected, the above story is ideal to begin this examination of the way in which maroons, from the consistently marginal positions they have occupied throughout history, have politically, culturally and discursively shaped the natural landscapes that surround them. The story's message of promised continuity and a return to origins is intricately woven into the dynamic of the seen and the unseen, of what humans may perceive, and what is beyond their cognizance. Not surprisingly, in this narrative, the very notion of survival, for nature and implicitly for the maroons themselves, is dependent upon remaining unseen. Intruders and outsiders, the story reveals, see less than the maroons do. Mother Waterfall, a natural feature of the landscape is the mythical protector who assisted the first runaways by hiding them, as another version of the story recalls: "And the soldiers would certainly have grabbed them if Mother Waterfall had not wrapped them in a heavy veil of mist. So then, the soldiers could see nothing, they were forced to turn back in defeat" (169). The lake within a lake is a powerful, magical force that conceals a disappearing nature, a force similar to that which has hidden the maroons, and only in a future utopian moment of well-being and understanding will that magical spell allow nature to be accessible to human eyes. The symbolic implication of the story is that only when it is safe to do so will the maroons allow themselves to be truly seen.

Slater's collection of stories from Amazonia demonstrate the drastically different ways in which its multiethnic inhabitants, the Brazilian government and numerous international interests, environmentalist and exploitative alike, have created narratives to relate their own

unique perceptions of the Amazon. Of key significance is that a single landscape area will generate a plethora of uses and narratives among human groups such as indigenous peoples and descendants of runaway slaves, miners, explorers and anthropologists, narratives which are often at odds. Significantly, each group places itself at the center of the discursive relationship with surrounding nature, relegating outsiders to a periphery of ignorance or destructiveness. For example, when the *remanescentes* tell stories about nature, notes Slater, the vocabulary and the details of content vary consistent with whether the listener is internal or external to the group, since the *remanescentes* are keenly aware, and fearful of, outsiders' interests in the region. This wariness of the outsider stretches back through centuries of mistrust and self-protection by peoples who have always lived beyond or on the edges of dominant society. The result, says Slater, is the ability to easily fluctuate from one vocabulary or language system to another "which leads their enemies to call them 'two-tongued'" (173). In fact, maroons have had to be two-tongued throughout history, appealing both to their own understanding of the world and participating in that of others in a self-conscious process to insure survival. Maroons have always been obliged to recognize that as they formed spiritual and discursive bonds to a particular landscape, those bonds were highly precarious and demanded a degree of transferability through space. Persecution, after all, frequently required maroons to be in perpetual motion. Consequently, maroon landscapes consistently met spatial claims from indigenous peoples, colonialists, slaves and even other maroon groups.

The struggle over working—and wording—the landscape that maroon peoples have participated in is an intrinsic part of all human history. "Nature will *always* be contested terrain," says William Cronon (52). This implies real and practical use of the land as well as the ideological and discursive practices that accompany and define the character of its occupation. The human species has been manipulating the landscape for as long as it has existed on the face of the planet (83). Even the indigenous populations of the Americas, Timothy Silver argues, who have been portrayed as minimally impacting the landscape, significantly manipulated their natural environment prior to Europe's arrival.[5] Nature, then, imposes parameters of possibility in its geology and topology, in its flora and fauna. But humans largely invent what nature is by inscribing it with their own meanings and using it in different ways that change over time. The result is an inevitable battle between different groups over control of the landscape. "Nature is a mirror onto which we project our own ideas and values; but it is also a material reality that sets limits (never completely clear but no less definite for being uncertain) on the possibilities of human ingenuity and storytelling" (Cronon 458). In other words, nature's regional, inherent characteristics may place parameters on the forms that human creativity may take, but ultimately, humankind determines the material and imaginary function of nature.

To attempt to arrive at a single, common maroon story of natural space, then, whether conceptual or narrative, is an impossible task, for there is no single way in which different maroon groups have engaged nature. Several factors that undermine such an endeavor may even seem obvious to mention. The African

origins of slaves brought to the different regions of the Americas may seem the most immediate to come to mind, although Price and Mintz were quick years ago to point out that the creativity and inventiveness required to meet slaves' immediate survival needs often overshadowed the significance of ethnic origin.[6] The circumstances of slavery were multiple, and thus were the circumstances of *marronage* also varied. Some Africans brought with them knowledge of medicine and healing, others were masters of metallurgy. Still others had experience with animal husbandry or the cultivation of particular crops. Many Africans gained new skills while enslaved. The runaways they became, then, were individuals who would confront the various geographies of their *marronage* in uniquely creative ways. At times they would form bonds with local indigenous groups, quickly gaining important natural and geographic knowledge. Such was the case with the runaways of the Caribbean coast of Colombia, who passed on their pastoral practices to the Wayúu or Guajiro Indians of the Guajira peninsula (Friedmann 87), as well as between the runaways from the English colonies allied in a relationship of quasi-servitude with the Lower Creeks in Florida. Due to this interacion, the runaways subsequently became known as the Black Seminoles (the word "Seminole" finds its origins in *cimarrón*, or maroon in Spanish).[7] In other instances, maroons would war against the indigenous peoples, as in the case of the Bayano runaways in sixteenth century Panama and the Caricua tribes (Mena García 416).[8] The geopolitics specific to a region presented maroons with further opportunities for trade or alliances, often with the enemies of the colonial power from which the maroons fled.[9] The creative responses to the many environments that maroons would encounter determined in each case their sociocultural expression within nature.

Despite the uniqueness of different maroon experiences, there do exist some clear commonalities. Enslaved Africans across the Caribbean, Brazil and North America fled slavery from the moment they arrived in the Americas, and regardless of the landscape and geography in which they found themselves, maroons everywhere in the New World located the same thing in nature: places to hide them and protect them. The need to be isolated and unseen led maroons to discover that space: swamps and forest in Surinam, mountains in Panamá and Jamaica, jungle in Brazil. They hid in marshes, valleys, mountains and gorges. (In the Spanish colonial documents, the list of places is long as well: *ciénagas, arcabucos, montañas, montes*, etc..). As the *remanescente* story that began this paper so clearly reveals, *invisibility*—or the ability to become one with the surroundings—and ultimately be shielded or protected by it, would necessarily be integral to the spiritual relationship maroons formed with their environments. For Brazilian descendants of maroons, Mother Waterfall is the screen that protected the first maroons, and protects their children today. For slaves in the North American South, the swamp was a place that afforded the safety of seclusion. It was also a place to be feared, populated as it was by alligators, snakes and mosquitoes. Slaveowners took advantage of slaves' fears and used the swamps as natural borders along the plantations to dissuade flight, but slaves fled nonetheless and devised means to survive, and above all, remain unseen in the inhospitable

swamps.[10] The forest in the North American Lowcountry (the coastal plain of South Carolina and Georgia) was inscribed by the West-Central Africans who lived there as a both place of refuge and a metaphysical space for spirits.[11] Similarly, Martin Lienhard has pointed out that in some colonial documents that contain African voices, as well as in the *mambos*, or ritual songs of Cuban "Congos", the forest (nfinda/mfinda) and the sea (Kalunga) are referred to with reverence for their spiritual as well as protective capacities. Both *nfinda* and *Kalunga*, which retain their original Kikongo names, are dwellings for the dead, realms of the ancestors. "Para os africanos escravizados na América, o mar era la lambrança de sua viagem para o cativeiro, mas também um vínculo com sua terra de origem e um caminho utópico para seu retorno à África."[12] Inevitably, while the sea was a route to metaphorical escape, notions of the sacred and the shield of invisibility provided by the forest and swamps became intricately related for maroon populations, and were central to a formation of maroon identity across the Americas.

Identity of the Hidden

In Surinam, Col. John Stedman, a soldier who was sent to subdue the maroons there in 1773, and who spoke Sranan, the creole language of slaves and some Whites, lists the names of some of the maroon settlements, names which reflect their cherished inaccessibility: Gado Saby (God alone knows it and no person else) Mele Me (Do disturb me if you dare) Kebree Me (Hide me, O ye surrounding verdure) (Stedman 208).[13] Whether these be accurate translations or embellishments of Stedman matters little, since the truth was that many maroon communities were in fact so well hidden they were never found.

As peoples of a consistently marginal world living beyond dominant culture, and, as I have argued elsewhere, beyond the complete discursive control of colonialism and imperialisms of the past and present, maroons created a reality that was and continues to be very difficult to access in meaning.[14] Its central foundation, after all, was inaccessibility. Strategically, they isolated themselves beyond semiotic boundaries, beyond Western knowledge and writing, participating in its discursive power only when they found it beneficial to do so. Their ability to elude the fixity of history by remaining inaccessible, or in perpetual movement or transformation, was heightened by a necessarily enforced secrecy regarding whereabouts and means to subsistence as requisite to survival. All of these factors make maroons of the past especially problematic to speak about today. The documents that contain maroon reality are often skewed towards the colonialist perspective, and are many times records of the military action taken against them, as we have just seen in the case of Colonel Stedman's narrative. Where maroon speech and acts are recorded, they must be read with special attention to their embedded form. Archaeological studies on maroon communities have increased in recent years, but the remote sites and ephemeral nature of maroon communities of the past makes the sites often impossible to locate. Nonetheless, oral traditions and first-hand information on contemporary maroon lifeways, in conjunction with select archaeological and anthropological works,

illuminate the historical document sources to provide a less fragmented image of maroon relationships with landscape throughout history.[15]

From historical as well as archaeological sources, we know that maroon communities, in addition to being secluded, were fortified and on constant guard against attack. Maroons were ready to abandon the site and relocate immediately, if necessary. For that reason, it required trained Rangers (black maroon hunters in Surinam), *rancheadores* (as they were known in parts of Spanish America) or *chasseurs* with dogs (professional Cuban slave trackers) to locate and subdue the maroon villages.[16] Protective walls of sharp wooden palisades, stone or mud surrounded the communities and sentinels were posted on hilltops. When beyond the confines of the village, maroons often camouflaged themselves with brush in order to blend in to the surrounding vegetation. The Surinam maroons had paths to their village hidden just under the surface of the waters of the marshes where they lived (Price, *Stedman's Surinam*, xx). Some maroon communities or *palenques* in Colombia were surrounded by hidden trenches in which poisoned spikes of wood were set (Freidmann 75). Maroons used whatever weapons they could to defend their villages, including spears and bows and arrows, rocks and any guns they could steal from white towns or barter from pirates. Maroon archaeological digs at the sites Nanny Town and Accompong Old Town in Jamaica reveal stone tools and ceramic shards, but also a few musket balls, indicating the bellicose past of maroon villages. (Agorsah 1994, 177-181)

Despite their isolation and at times transient nature, maroon communities did have contact with each other. One very important symbolic item within maroon material culture is the horn, sometimes made of a conch shell, sometimes of cowhorn. These horns allowed maroons to communicate among and between settlements over long distances that were generally covered with dense brush difficult to traverse. The cover of Richard Price's now classic book *Maroon Societies* (1973) reproduces a sculpture by Albert Mangonés entitled "The Unknown Maroon of Saint-Domingue," who is calling to his comrades on his conch shell horn. Jane Landers makes reference to an excavation in eastern Hispaniola of an early-eighteenth-century maroon settlement (or *maniel*) called José Leta, where triton shell trumpets identified as being made by African runaways are among the artifacts that have been found.[17] Both Colonel C.L.G. Harris, of the Moore Town Maroons, and Colonel Martin-Luther Wright, of the Accompong Maroons of Jamaica stress the military, social and spiritual importance of the *abeng* or *akikreh* through three centuries of maroon communication into present day usage:

> The *abeng* is made from the horns of cattle and at full blast it can be heard clearly over a distance of approximately fifteen kilometres and is one of the traditions that our ancestors brought from Africa where it is also still in use as a means of message communication ....The *abeng* message is incomprehensible to non-Maroons. (Wright 68)[18]

Jay B. Haviser mentions both the conchshell (karkó) and the cowhorn (kachu di baka) as significant items among the post-emancipation African-Curaçaoan population as well. Both have musical as well

as ritual or spiritual uses.[19] Interestingly, Stedman records in his narrative that both the Surinam Rebels (maroons) and the Ranchers (slaves who volunteered as maroon trackers) used horns to communicate with each other, especially in military activities (Price 35, 206).

Early maroons lived in huts of wood or mud when they had the stability and time to construct them. They gathered fruits, hunted whatever game they could in the forest or marsh and fished when possible. Contemporary self-ethnographic history by Colonel Harris, of the Moore Town Maroons, describes some of the hunting techniques still used by maroons, and probably passed down through several generations. They include the tar stick, a bamboo pole covered by the sticky tar of the jackfruit used to catch birds, and the chorkie, a long line used to snare birds. (Harris 56).[20] A degree of stability also allowed maroons to cultivate crops, such as cassava, yucca, corn, beans, rice and peanuts. Rice cultivation was a skill that West and Central Africans brought with them into the New World, and the numerous swampy and marshy landscapes where maroons found seclusion proved ideal for growing rice.[21] In Stedman's narrative, he describes a moment of military persecution in which some startled maroons drop their green hampers, in which they had been transporting rice to a neighboring maroon settlement. "The green hampers (which were most curiously plaited with the manicole leaves, and which they call *warimbos*) our men cut open with their sabers, from which actually burst forth the most beautiful, cleaned rice that ever I saw..." (Price 210). In fact the maroon settlement of Gado Saby that Stedman and his fellow soldiers come upon "consisted in nearly one hundred houses, or huts, come two stories high" (213) and is surrounded by three impressive rice fields (217).[22]

While early maroon settlements were relatively isolationist and self-subsistent, they did engage in raids on towns in order to obtain goods they couldn't manufacture, or to punish colonists by robbing or killing them and burning their homes. At times, they kidnapped women slaves. They also formed alliances with any enemies of the colonial powers that they struggled against. One of the reasons that Panama's maroons became so powerful in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was the mutually beneficial relationship they established first with French corsairs and later with English pirates, including Drake in an assisted attack on Nombre de Dios in 1572-3 (Lane 42). From the colonialist perspective, the danger that maroon power and autonomy implied was intolerable and had to be contained, either militarily or diplomatically.

Palimpsest Landscapes

While there is no set time in history, nor in the existence of a particular maroon community, when a second period of increased contact with the colonial center was to take place, that moment inevitably arrived for maroon societies that attained any durability. At this point, a maroon conceptualization of space and nature would be forced to confront Euro-American designs on the landscape. Colonial authorities would have preferred to eliminate maroons entirely by any means, including a universal death sentence, but they proved unable to completely do away with maroon settlements, which were so unreachable

that they countered imperialist efforts to control them, both politically and discursively. The threat of raids and dangerous alliances—as well as the existence of a refuge for potential runaways—compelled colonial authorities to seek pacification of the maroon communities first through force, but eventually through negotiation as well. A perpetual state of siege was costly to the colony and not appealing to the maroons either.[23] Naturally, the maroons also preferred to live peacefully, but only if in freedom. Domingo, one of the "capitanes de Bayano" is reported to assert in 1580 that his people were ready to make peace with the Panama authorities "porque ellos estaban hartos de estar en el monte" (Jopling 361). And so, in Spanish America, as across the Americas, the colonists made efforts to negotiate with the runaways, through simultaneous threats and offerings, and surprisingly liberal concessions for freedom.

The push from the colonialist side was to eliminate the slippery, uncontrollable movement of maroons on the landscape by settling them permanently on lands that were specifically designated and, at times, more accessible. This fixing of place made practical sense, since it ended raids and acts of hostility, but also made the maroons more intelligible to colonialists, by diminishing a degree of difference between the two groups. Difference was defined on the basis of skin color, but also on the runaways being roaming, dangerous bodies beyond law and beyond writing. Clearly, homogenization, or making African runaways as similar to the European self as possible, and as consistent with white, European civilization, was the process through which colonialists hoped to make Africans epistemologically understandable and politically and economically useful. An acceptable relationship to space and "proper," civilized occupation of the land were key in this new interaction. In one drastic case, that of the Trelawny Town Maroons in 1795, British fear and intolerance of maroons led colonists to simply remove them from the colonial landscape altogether. Warring maroons who turned themselves in were promised amnesty and lands upon which to live. Instead, in an act that expressly violated an agreement they had made with the British General Walpole, they were forcibly deported, first to Canada (Nova Scotia), and after four harsh years in an unfamiliar and inhospitable climate, to Sierra Leone. Deportation was dreaded among all slaves and maroons, as a fate worse than death. (Campbell 247) Not surprisingly, all of the Trelawny Town maroons expressed, even from Africa, that they wished to return one day to Jamaica.(Dallas 288) [24]

Deportation was not a common colonial response to *marronage*, however, and most peace accords with maroons granted lands along with freedom and varying degrees of political autonomy. Agreements were specifically intended to bond maroons to the land, and through agricultural activity and animal husbandry make them self-sufficient, productive colonial subjects and who might even provide food surpluses for the colony. In the Spanish American colonies, the *reducción* was a key strategy for settling and Christianizing indigenous populations and African runaway groups. Throughout the Spanish American documents relating to maroons, the act of pacifying or dominating the *cimarrones* and bringing them under the power of the Crown and the Church is referred to as *reducir/reduzir*, a verb that connotes multiple meanings of domination and

control.[25] (Re)locating colonial bodies in specific spaces that were defined by colonialist discourses (rather than those of the marginalized subject) was key to undermining power articulated through land tenancy. In Panama in 1580, for example, General de Bayano Pedro de Ortega wrote to the King, requesting the conditions for pacifying the Bayano runaways:

> ...y dádoles tierras en el río de Chepo, que es la mejor que en este reino hay, donde puedan poblar y vivir. Y que yo cumpliría lo que les había prometido de suplicar a vuestra alteza les hiciese merced de mandarles dar quinientas vacas y cien puercos para que con las crias de ellas se hiciesen ricos... demás de lo que serían aprovechados con las sementeras y granjería de madera que en la tierra tenían de que sacarían mucho dinero ...(Jopling 358)[26]

The 1739 treaty that the Accompong Maroons of Jamaica still proudly display ends hostilities with the British and grants Cudjoe (Kojo) and his people freedom, and states:

> Thirdly, That they shall enjoy and possess, for themselves and posterity forever, all lands situate and lying between Trelawny Town and the Cockpits, to the amount of fifteen hundred acres, bearing northwest from the said Trelawny Town.
>
> Fourthly, That they shall have liberty to plant the said lands with coffee, cocoa, ginger, tobacco and cotton and to breed cattle, hogs, goats or any other stock, and dispose of the produce or increase of the said commodoties to the inhabitants of this island... (Wright 67)

As evidenced by the historical documents above, livestock were a central force in the settlement of maroons. Raising animals would tie maroons to land, and also prevent them from stealing from colonists. Prior to pacification, maroons could and did raise some livestock, especially pigs. But grazing animals were more likely to reveal the secret locations of communities, and so were less desirable until greater stability was established. Throughout a large part of the history of Palenque de San Basilio, near Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, however, cattle have represented a central part of maroon culture and subsistence in, along with cultivation of various crops, including peanuts. The *palenquero* creole words for cattle, *ma ngombe*, and peanuts, *nguba*, are both of Kikongo origen, a Bantú language upon which the creole *palenquero* is based (Friedmann 85). The retention of the Kikongo words and the fact that each activity is gender-specific (cattle raising is male while peanut cultivation is female) reveals that the relationship to both within Palenque was probably established early in the community's existence.[27] It also suggests an important spiritual and cultural relationship to each domain that is likely African in origin (Brown 306). Ras Michael Brown points out "the creative power of certain words" among Africans in the Lowcountry of North America, and states that the choice to retain words of African origin when the colonial language can sufficiently express the meaning of something generally reflects a deeper connotation "as an expression of group identity, a link across generations, and an instrument to access meanings and powers that had only African names" (294). Thus, even as maroons strategically adapted themselves to an increasingly Eurocentric occupation of the landscape, they

maintained numerous relationships with their surroundings that were distinct expressions of their identity as descendants of Africans.

For maroons, freedom and lands came not only at the cost of war, but also responsibilities laid upon the maroons by colonialists once a mutual agreement was reached. Accords always carried the stipulation that maroons act to uphold the needs of local colonialism. In Spanish America, maroons, who had been living beyond the limits of a virtuous Christian life, were forgiven of their "sins" of disobedience and baptized into the Church as they swore to serve the Crown. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of the Counterreformation this was essential to not only secure more souls for the true Church, but also to populate sparsely inhabited lands with loyal subjects who would defend the colony against enemies, such as the "ingleses luteranos y ladrones" (Jopling 362). The desire to fill the countryside around Panamá and Nombre de Dios with loyal subjects was a reasonable one. In an area through which enormous South American riches from Perú passed by means of the *recuas de mulas* or mule trains, there were very few inhabitants to defend the towns from pirates who coveted the wealth of gold and silver. The Spaniards could hardly afford that the large maroon population be hostile as well: in 1575, informal estimates counted 800 white inhabitants in Panama and 5,600 people of color (slaves, freed people and runaways), 2, 500 of which were maroons (Mena García 90-1). The first known urban census of Panama, done in 1607, listed 5,702 inhabitants, of whom 1,267 were white, which means that seventy percent of the population was black (Mena García 31-2, 59) The runaways in the hills by this time numbered in the thousands. Maroons, once pacified, then, were also expected to keep the roads safe and to protect colonists.

Across the Americas, maroons were required by accords to turn over any future runaways, something they did generally when it served their purposes. In Suriname and Jamaica, for example, pacified maroons turned over runaways only when threatened with warfare by the military. As part of the impulse to assimilate runaways into the colonialist system, in a gesture meant to diminish maroon power, Spanish colonists invited newly pacified maroons to make slaves of the runaways who had refused the terms of reduction. But they would also be obliged to hobble and maim the runaways they captured in the same way that the white slaveowners did: "que estos que así se reducieren y poblaren puedan continuar y tomar por esclavos a los negros que estuvieren alzados cuando ellos se reducieren...conque estos que así cautivaren sean desgarrados del pie izquierdo y cortada la oreja derecha..." (Jopling 368). Perhaps the Spaniards believed that by allowing maroons to participate in what they perceived as the privileges of colonialism, they would be more inclined towards loyalty to it. Clearly, an encouraged animosity among maroons as well as between slaves and maroons was desirable for colonists. Price and Mintz point out that the slaveowner was never comfortable with a blurred line between the free and the enslaved, even though it was an inevitability in slave society (25-6). Allowing the pacified maroon to take the rebel maroon as slave may have been an attempt in the Spanish American colonies to diminish the anxiety of these ever-blurring lines.

The various treaties and agreements

reached between colonial governments and maroons in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries allowed maroon communities a significant degree of autonomy and peace that lasted through the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. With communal lands that maroons now consider ancestral and a general independence of rule, maroons have forged strong African-American identities that intentionally resist assimilation into other cultural categories, including nationalism and a general, non-maroon African-Americanism. Globalization and the transnational utilization of labor, goods and resources, however, present many maroons with new challenges to their autonomy.

Contemporary Maroons and the Struggle Over Land

Twentieth and twenty-first century modernization and the push towards massive utilization of the globe's remaining resources have initiated a new stage for maroons in their history of survival. Natural resources, it should be recalled, are generated by human need or conservationist impulse. That is to say, a space in nature previously portrayed by a particular group as empty is inscribed with value only when something required or sought out is discovered there.(28) One individual recorded by Slater in Amazonia angrily condemns the creation of nature reserves near *remanescente* communal lands, where maroons are no longer permitted to hunt or gather, despite an abundance of food sources there (166). As the lands on which they have resided obtain an ascribed worth, maroons face serious consequences. The Saramaka and Ndyuka maroons of Surinam, the Moore Town and Accompong Maroons of Jamaica, the Palenqueros of San Basilio, Colombia and the *remanescentes* or descendants of *quilombolas* in Brazil are some of the most well-known of contemporary maroon groups. All of them face some type of threat to their lands or their political and cultural autonomy.[29]

Both the Colombian and Brazilian constitutions recognize the rights of maroon and indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands and cultural heritages.[30] Afro-Colombians, most of whom are rural, poor and uneducated, nevertheless, have had their lands encroached upon for years. The *palenqueros* of San Basilio complain that over the past century some of their best lands have been lost to neighboring ranchers who take possession by simply occuping the land with their cattle (Friedmann 91-3). Furthermore, the fumigation that the US is undertaking in order to eliminate coca crops in Colombia is especially harmful to the *campesino* population, including indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples. Numerous claims have been made that the chemicals contaminate their water sources and foul their food crops.

The Brazilian government purports to encourage descendants of maroons to seek title to their communal lands, but throughout Brazil, mining, ranching, agriculture, and timber interests are eager to move into these lands. Meanwhile, ecological groups strive to set aside enormous preserves that would prohibit access to any group. Throughout Brazil, in regions that have been hugely ignored throughout history, 724 *quilombos* are seeking title to their lands, the greatest concentration of 259 being in the state of Bahia. The descendants of *quilombolas* are attempting to quickly learn their land

rights, and some have been successful in obtaining titles, while others flounder under the cruel obligation of proving that they are, in fact, descendants of runaway slaves. This is especially difficult when, as a New York Times article from last year states, "the government ordered the destruction of all official records of slavery in 1890, further complicating the titling process now under way."[31] The irony of having been perpetually ostracized and left to languish in poverty is not lost on the ex-*quilombolas*, who now see themselves at the center of national and international interest only because their lands are coveted.

The Maroon groups of Jamaica seem to occupy, relatively speaking, one of the more secure positions among surviving maroon groups. They voluntarily gain some financial benefit from the tourist activities on the island while also maintaining their rural lifestyle. The Jamaican government recognizes the eighteenth-century peace treaties, although it is rumored to be considering a taxation upon Maroons which they vehemently oppose, insisting that their centuries-old treaties exempt them from any type of governmental taxation. "'That we will not tolerate!' declared Accompong Maroon Joshua Anderson, 52. "I myself would go back to the bush to fight the Jamaicans, like we fought the white man!'"[32]

It is the Surinam maroon groups whose situation is the most pressing. Dutch rule came to an end in 1975, and consequently the present government refuses to recognize the eighteenth century maroon treaties with the Dutch colonial government which secured lands to the maroons. Now, Saramaka and Ndyuka Maroon lands and those surrounding them are being sold off to Chinese logging companies and Canadian mining interests. The maroons are attempting to secure land titles from the government, but the destruction of forests has already begun. Unfortunately, Surinam is "the only country in the western hemisphere that does not have legal, constitutional or other provisions that account in some way for Indigenous and Maroon rights to land."[33]

Events like the 1992 Festival of American Folklife presentation of maroon peoples and cultures hosted by the Smithsonian Institute contribute to global awareness of the reality of maroon peoples in the Americas.(34) But, such events should emphasize not only maroon history and lifeways, but also make the public aware of the serious and immediate threats to cultural existence many of these peoples face.

Conclusions

For early maroon communities, a relative invisibility on the landscape was essential to survival. This is not to suggest that maroons did not form intimate cultural bonds with the landscape, or that they left no trace of their passage through it. It is difficult, however, for us to now access those sites and meanings. What is certain is that the runaway figure who was at once elusive and rebellious, a warrior who intimately knew his natural surroundings, is the basis for cultural identity among all surviving maroons. Nature that embraces the maroon warrior and shuns the colonist, the outsider, and the intruder, is for all maroons, a shared image from the past that informs the present.

With pacification, maroon seclusion clashed with colonist impulses towards logistical and epistemological accessibility, and maroons had to partially adapt to colonial conceptions of space. Yet, an

official tenancy over the land granted maroons a new power of discourse over it. The peace accords gave maroons a sufficient degree of autonomy and, above all, *tranquility* to develop a space for cultural growth and a spiritual bond with their land, as is evidenced by linguistic, cultural and religious expressions. Lands that they inhabited and cultivated became infused with the power of ancestral territory. African maroons were and are extremely proud of their rejection of European colonial imperialism and have never been eager to assimilate themselves to the very structures they resisted. Consent to the terms of peace agreements has always been strategic and made in the name of survival. Once freedom and lands were granted, maroons could internally determine to a large degree which cultural elements from outside would be assimilated or rejected.

Today, in the midst of an exploding population, the world has grown increasingly small and cultural survival for the maroons will depend heavily on these very sorts of selective strategies. Competition for land has become violent in some places and resource interests of all sorts have pushed profit-seeking corporations into lands that were previously of little value. Paradoxically, while maroon lands have become more present on the map than ever, maroons remain in a semi-invisibility caused by poverty and marginality, a marginality that *has also been intricately linked to their cultural autonomy*, of which they are extremely proud. Their struggle is a complex one as they attempt secure their lands by becoming conspicuous political and historical actors, and at the same time continue to embrace an identity defined by anti-colonial, anti-imperial elusiveness.

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Notes

[1]Conscious of the pitfalls of generalization, I look at maroon populations in the Americas not only through time, but also across geographic, national and linguistic boundaries.

[2]See Cheryll Clotfelty's Introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, 1996.

[3]*PMLA* "Forum on Literatures of the Environment," 1096-7.

[4]Certainly the most well-known *quilombo* of Brazil was Palmares in the Serra da Barriga hills, which flourished during the entire seventeenth century. Inhabited by several thousand runaways and their numerous generations of descendants, the *quilombo* was ruled by the leaders Ganga Zumba, and later, Zumbi.

[5]See particularly Chapter 3, "Perspectives on the People, 1500," in which Silver discusses some of the hunting and agricultural practices of the North American Indians.

[6]See especially Chapter 5, "Retentions and Survivals," p. 52-60.

[7]Weisman, "The Plantation System of the Florida Seminole Indians..."

[8]In some cases, colonial authorities were aware of the maroon/Amerindian animosities and used them to their advantage. When the attempt was made to pacify maroons, however, and settle them on lands, attempts were made to assuage those animosities and increase peaceful relationships within the colony. Similarly, maroons had varying relationships with enslaved peoples. Slaves often saw maroons as wild or savage while maroons saw slaves as dependent or servile. Jamaican slaves were known to despise the Maroons. (Campbell 211) Yet, in both Jamaica and Suriname, pacified maroons often refused to uphold the treaty stipulation that they turn over new runaways unless it was to their advantage. See Mavis Campbell

and Richard Price (*Stedman's Surinam*).

[9]It is important to recall that maroon populations often arose as Africans took advantage of animosities between colonial powers. In Jamaica in 1655 as Spaniards departed the island, Africans remained behind and battled to maintain their autonomy against the British. When the British departed from Suriname in 1667, released slaves waged a similar war against the incoming Dutch. In Florida, as Jane Landers has pointed out, runaways from the English colonies to the north sought refuge in the Spanish colony, where they were able to gain official freedom.

[10]Tynes Cowan, "The Slave in the Swamp." Cowan cites instances from testimonial sources in which slaves were reported to have dug underground homes in order to remain unseen.

[11]Ras Michael Brown "Walk in the Feenda." "For European settlers, the wilderness represented a threat to their ambition toward dominating the Lowcountry. For enslaved people, the sea of wilderness beyond the banks of the plantation represented a realm in which they could assert their autonomy and initiative" 312.

[12]Lienhard, *O mar e o mato*, 25.

[13]Perhaps it is the same invisibility that the forest provides that leads the Surinam maroons in Stedman's narrative to trust in their *obias*, or amulets: "A poor fellow, trusting in his amulet or charm, by which he thought himself invulnerable, advanced frequently on one of these trees, till very near us, and having discharged his piece, walked off the way he came, to reload with the greatest confidence and deliberation, till at last one of my men (an intrepid Walloon named Valet) broke the bone of his thigh with a ball, and down he came, now crawling for shelter under the same tree which had supported him." (212).

[14]See Olsen, "African Reinscription" and "Africans and Textual *Marronage*."

[15]See all citations by Agorsah, Haviser, Price (*Maroon Societies*), and Singleton.

[16]In Surinam, there was a special corps of slave volunteers called the "Neeger Vrijcorps" (Price, *Stedman's Surinam*, xx). See Dallas' *The History of the Maroons* for a description of the Cuban *chasseurs* and their dogs, volume II. p. 56-67.

[17]Landers, "The Central African Presence" (236-7).

18 Harris, p 45-6. Wright, p. 68. Albert Edwards states that the word for the side-blown cowhorn, *abeng*, comes from the Akan language of present-day Ghana. p. 160.

[19]Haviser, p. 244-6.

[20]Ras Michael Brown indicates a similar type of seabird snare used by ancestors of West-Central Africans in the Lowcountry recorded by an early nineteenth-century observer: "'an elastic twig with a bit of line and noose, which catches the bird's neck.'" Quoted in Brown 309.

[21]Timothy Silver: "South Carolinians probably learned domestic rice cultivation from their slaves, some of whom had either grown the crop or seen it grown along the rivers of West Africa. Slaves knew how to plant the grain by making small impressions with their heels and how to separate the husks from threshed rice by 'fanning' it in the wind. Nurtured by African labor and know-how, rice grew well in the semicleared inland and tidal swamps." (144) See also Brown: "West-Central Africans, along with smaller groups of captives taken from Senegambia and the Bight of Biafra, built and worked the many rice plantations [of the Lowcountry] that set levels of production unsurpassed until the mid-1760s." (300)

[22]P. 216 of Stedman's narrative gives a wonderful description of the various ways in which the maroons made use of the forest products to meet their needs. From various trees and plants, they made salt, soap, butter and wax candles, and manufactured pots, hammocks, rope, brooms, etc.

[23]For a discussion of the economic costs of sixteenth century Spanish military action against *cimarrones* or maroons, see Vila

Vilar "Cimarronaje en Panamá y Cartagena."

[24]The entire story of the deportation of the Trelawny Town Maroons after what came to be known as the Second Maroon War can be read in volume II of R. C. Dallas' *The History of the Maroons*. See also Campbell's chapter 7 "The Trelawny Town War, 1795-1796." Incidentally, a few years before the Trelawny War, the colonial government in Jamaica had tried to dislodge the maroons from a community setting and disperse them across the island with a 1791 act that invited them to give up their rights to maroon lands. In exchange they would be granted "'every right and privilege of a free person of color'" permitted to live anywhere but in maroon towns. Wisely, few maroons were interested in the offer. (Campbell 186)

[25]A *reducción* in colonial Spanish America generally referred to a village of Amerindians converted to Christianity. For African runaway populations, however, the verb *reduzir* implied militarily pacification, resettlement and subjection to colonial obedience.

[26]When referring to the various documents of the Jopling collection, in the name of readability, I will refer only to the page number of the text and not the specific document.

[27]A pardon and provisional freedom and was granted to the maroons of Sierra de María (and thus those of Palenque) in 1713 in an *entente cordiale* by the Bishop of Cartagena Fray Antonio María Casiani (Arrazola 242). Some anthropologists and historians suggest that it was the interaction between Palenque maroons and the Wayúu indigenous peoples in the Guajira Peninsula that led the latter to become pastoral. Contemporary Wayúu raise both goats and cattle. See Friedmann.

[28]See the Prologue to Stewart's "*What Nature Suffers to Groe*."

[29]Because maroons are generally not significant political actors in their respective countries, little is published on their plights. Most of the contemporary information I have found on maroon struggles, I have located on the web.

[30]In the Colombian Constitution of 1991, Title I, Articles 7, 8, 9, and 10 all treat the rights of indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples rights to land and cultural preservation. The Brazilian 1988 Constitution (article 68) states: "The descendants of the quilombo communities who are occupying their land shall receive definitive title to their properties, and the state must issue them their respective land titles."

[31]See the BBC News article from Sept. 17, 2002 entitled "Slave descendants want their land back" at: news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/americas/2002/brazil_journey/2263792.stm

See also the *NY Times* article from Jan. 23, 2001 entitled "Brazil's Former Slave Havens Slowly Pressing for Rights" at: www1.nytimes.com/2001/01/23/world/23SLAV.html

[32]See The *NY Times* article from April 28, 1999 entitled "Past Glories Still Drive Maroons" at: www.rose-hulman.edu/~delacova/caribbean/maroons.htm

[33]See Price, Chapter 1 of *Maroon Arts* and *The Guiana Maroons*. See also "Suriname: Saramacca Maroons Say No to Multinational Logging,"from the Forest Peoples Programme of World Rainforest Movement, April 20, 1998 at: www.forests.org/recent/1998/sarsayno.htm

[34]Richard and Sally Price's *On the Mall* critically documents many of the activities at the 1992 event. The Smithsonian Institute also has a website on Maroon cultures in the Americas where information on the event can be seen: www.si.edu/maroon/tour/visit/e1.htm

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History, Violence and Self-Glorification in Afro-Mexican *corridos* from *Costa Chica de Guerrero*.

by Paulette A. Ramsay

> The poetry, the culture itself, exists not in a dictionary but in the tradition of the spoken word. It is based as much on sound as it is on song. That is to say, the noise that it makes is part of the meaning, and if you ignore the noise (or what you would think of as noise, shall I say) then you lose part of the meaning.[1]
>
> (E.K. Brathwaite)

> Y no importa si es el calipso de Trinidad, o « dancehall » de Jamaica, o el choteo cubano o el chuchumbé mexicano, la expresión popular afro de toda la región ha tendido a aprovecharse del «relajamiento» como arma en socavar la estructura social dominante y a reconstruir un individuo más liberado.[2]
>
> (J. Pereira)

The *corrido* is a musical folk ballad which depicts situations related to different aspects of Mexican history although it is mainly known for its portrayal of events related to the Mexican Revolution. The origin of the *corrido* is a subject of controversy as many folklorists contend that it is derived from Medieval Andalucian verses and ballads brought to Mexico by the Spanish.[3] Others claim to have established a link between the narrative style of the *corridos* and the *Nahuatl* and epic poetry of Pre-Columbian times.[4] Although these accounts exclude any reference to Afro-Mexican corridos, research conducted by other scholars has confirmed that there are *corridos* which originated in the *Costa Chica de Guerrero* region of Mexico and were preserved and circulated by Afro-Mexicans depicting Afro-Mexican contexts.[5]

The *corridos* which will be analysed in this essay, have been confirmed by anthropologist and specialist in Afro-Mexican cultural expressions, Miguel Angel Gutiérrez, as part of the rich repertoire of Afro-Mexican *corridos* from the Costa Chica de Guerrero region.[6] These *corridos* were collected and recorded by the musical band "*Los Cimarrones*," an acclaimed group of Afro-Mexican musicians, who maintained their distinctive characteristics, presenting them as "a poetic medium of expression,"[7] under the title, *Traigo una flor hermosa y mortal*. Gutiérrez is definitive in his explication of the prominence and popularity of the *corrido* in this region of Mexico which is populated by African-derived people. He expressly states: "Podemos asegurar casi con certeza que en ninguna otra región de México el corrido sigue tan vivo como en la Costa Chica de los Estados de Guerrero y Oaxaca, en tanto fenómeno de expresión popular, dinámico y constantemente creativo" (Gutiérrez 11). Luz María Martínez Montiel (1994) also attests to the prevalence of the *corridos* among the descendants of slaves on the Costa Chica of Mexico's southeast coast. Jameelah Muhammad states emphatically in *No Longer Invisible* (1995), that the *corridos* are so popular in black communities in Mexico that since 1990, these black communities have held annual competitions in which *corridistas* compete against one another (174).

People of African descent have occupied Mexico since the initial stages of Spanish conquest and colonisation. Mexican anthropologist Aguirre Beltrán, established in his work *La población negra de México*

(1946), that the importation of blacks into Mexico began with the arrival of *Hernán Cortés* in 1519 and continued until the end of Spanish rule in 1810. It is estimated that more than five hundred thousand Africans were imported into Mexico as Spain's need for labour increased following their annihilation of some of the indigenous people, with the result that the black population outnumbered the Spanish for a long time. Some regions around the port of Veracruz, for instance, were heavily populated by Afro-Mexicans in colonial times.

In the 1600's the brutality of the system of slavery resulted in numerous slave rebellions and many slaves escaped from the plantations and established settlements called *palenques* in the mountains. Moreover, strict laws of segregation, and the inhumane treatments to which blacks were subjected made it easy for them to welcome the movement for independence from Spanish rule. Consequently, blacks accounted for a significant number of the military troops in Mexico's 1810-1821 War of Independence with Spain. As the group which had known subjugation and oppression, they gave full support to the war in an attempt to end racial inequality and oppression. In fact, one of the principal leaders of Mexico's independence movement, who later became president of Mexico, *Vicente Guerrero*, was known as Mexico's "first Black President." His main objective during his presidential rule was to achieve equality in class and race,–a determined fight which culminated in the abolition of slavery in 1824.

Today, there are other groups of African-derived persons in the northern states of *Yucatán and Quintana Roo*, comprising mainly descendants of runaway North American slaves and free blacks from Florida, who escaped in the seventeenth century.[8] The majority of persons of African descent, however, mainly occupy the *Costa Chica* in the provinces of *Guerrero* and *Oaxaca*. Aguirre Beltrán claims that these are the descendants of maroons who escaped the plantations:

> Los núcleos negros que en México todavía pueden ser considerados como tales, derivan principalmente de los cimarrones que reaccionaron contra la esclavitud y se mantuvieron en libertad gracias a la creación de un ethos violento y agresivo en su cultura ... Estos núcleos negros son los actuales afromestizos de la Costa Chica de Guerrero y Oaxaca. (Beltrán 1942)

The question may be raised concerning what makes these *corridos* from the *Costa Chica* distinctively Afro-Mexican, considering they do not make explicit reference to blackness. Before any kind of answer is posited, it should be established that this absence of clear reference to blackness fully reflects the fact that the black presence in Mexico is still not acknowledged by many; for Mexican culture and identity are defined as a combination of European and indigenous influences. This official concept of *mestizaje* totally ignores Mexico's 'third root'–the African component which is undeniably integral to a definition of Mexican heritage.

With this in mind, I suggest firstly that the ethnic identities are encased in the postures evident in the different *corridos*. These postures bear great similarities to the defiant attitude and adversial tone taken by the heroes/protagonists in Afro-Caribbean oral culture, in particular, popular songs–a posture which has been highlighted in the second epigraph by J.

Pereira. Secondly, I believe that these *corridos* reflect some of the same concerns as Caribbean songs which are preoccupied with the affirmation of self and the insistence on recalling their history of violent confrontations. Thirdly, the *corridos* reveal certain cultural values which are characteristic of the oral culture integral to Afro-Mexican society such as self praise and the valorization of violence. Gutiérrez underscores the importance of the *corridos*: "como instrumento de control social y por tanto, como artificio destinado a reforzar los valores que dan su perfil al *ethos* de la cultura local. El corrido afro-mexicano muestra la relación que tiene el corrido con la vida social y cultural de la región costeña" (Guitiérrez 9).

For these reasons the Afro-Mexican *corrido* cannot be simply submersed within generic groups of other *corridos* which may exist in Mexico particularly in light of the claims posited by some anthropologists about the relation between cultures in multiethnic/multicultural societies:

> There co-exist two separate cultures at the heart of any society divided into classes, a culture of the oppressors and another culture of the oppressed. Now it is clear that these two cultures, precisely because they co-exist, aren't to be seen as watertight compartments; in fact they are more like intercommunicating vessels between which there is a constant reciprocal flow. The dialectical nature of that flow usually gives the impression of homogeneity, but in fact no such homogeneity really exists–indeed it could only exist in a society *without* classes, and only then after a long process of consolidation. By contrast, in any society with classes the true relation between the two cultures in that society is one of dominance, with the culture of the oppressors dominating and the culture of the oppressed being dominated. It follows that what is often passed off as "the general culture," even as "the national culture," is, naturally enough, merely a description of but one of these cultures–the dominant culture of the oppressors (González 3).

Indeed, Brathwaite's epigraph underscores the fact that popular music which often appears to many as unintelligible "noise" does merit serious critical analysis, for when the lyrics/the noises are studied they reveal sharp commentaries on various socio-political and cultural issues. The second epigraph by J. Pereira also points to the fact that Caribbean and post-colonial cultures share a commonality which is linked to the colonial past that informs, influences and moulds socio-cultural patterns and political behaviours. This essay will examine a selection of Afro-Mexican *corridos* to show the extent to which they are permeated by a distinctive ideological and political position. The discussion will be located within a comparative Caribbean post-colonial context to establish them as artistic expressions which encode much about the histories and motivations of a particular group of blacks in Mexico. I interrogate the extent to which they are informed by a "heritage of rebelliousness" and "heroic perseverance" to present a socio-political challenge. I suggest that the focus on history, violence and self-glorification creates a political discourse, that is, a discourse on behalf of the powerless and marginalized. I maintain that history has been "preserved by myth through memory" to "provide consciousness and create an awareness" of

what the Afro-Mexican society can achieve (Glissant 7).

The *corridos* which have been selected for this study are appealing because of the meanings of the words to be analysed in the scribalised form as well as for the haunting, penetrating manner in which the voice of the singers resonates in the consciousness of the listener. The *corrido* is a central aspect of Afro-Mexican oral tradition and a full understanding of the centrality of the *corrido* in the lives of the Afro-Mexicans necessitates an appreciation of the place of orality, in their folklore and culture. In the words of Gutiérrez:

> Para entender cabalmente la fuerza y vigencia del *corrido* en la cultura afro-mestiza es preciso señalar que la oralidad es para los negros de Costa Chica la piedra angular de su cohesión social, de cierta manera de su herencia africana; y que las diversas manifestaciones de la literatura oral: cuentos, versos, adivinanzas, proverbios, y corridos son el fundamento de su cultura y el perfil de su identidad. (Gutiérrez 1985).[9]

In consonance with the oral tradition, the *corridos* are thought-provoking and anecdotal. They are typified by tradition, action and performance. They are perplexing and depict various settings and experiences. They employ several verbal techniques which include repetition, assonance, multiple rhymes and internal rhymes and unfold in a type of Afro-Mexican dialect which is typified by a very expressive diction which lends a distinctive rhythmic structure to the songs and functions as an act of resistance to the mainstream cultural/linguistic domination. The *corridos* are narrated in either the third or first person narrative forms with the majority of them commencing with an announcement by a narrator–"Voy a cantar un *corrido*" or "Voy a empezar a cantar."

The narrator functions as griot, who in his cultural role as historian and chronicler transmits community history and values from generation to generation. A sense of collectiveness is also evoked through the use of the griot who emphasizes the communal aspect of the songs. Both the hearing of these *corridos* and the reading of the songs intimate that the manipulation of words plays a critical role in the lives of the Afro-Mexicans. This is particularly true in the case of words and phrases which in conveying a sense of history, violence and self-glorification are ascribed "magical potency".[10] These three interconnected themes are conveyed in very poignant language, employing words which effectively communicate particular meanings and enunciate the ideologies of the Afro-Mexican people.

History

History is the fulcrum on which the Afro-Mexican *corrido* pivots: "El corrido es esencialmente historia. Se dice en la Costa Chica que los mejores *corridos* son los que tienen más historia; historia para ser contada, cantada, escuchada con goce y atención para ser aprendida y transmitida" (Gutiérrez 1985). Indeed, one of the first Afro-Mexican *corridos* which was sung by a black slave woman toward the end of the eighteenth century registers the protoganist's sense of history which is conveyed through the focus on the Afro-Mexican's historical experience with displacement and slavery. The persona speaks to her ill-fated life evidenced by her uprooting from her place of birth, Havana, Cuba, and of how her isolation from family and her status as someone's

property have shaped her life:

—Nací en la Habana, Dominga llamo
como azabache negro nací,
con una suerte tanto más negra
que yo a mis padres no conocí.
—Francisquio, Francisquio,
dice tu amo que te ha de vender.
—¡Ay, Señora! ¿Y por qué?
—Porque no sabes batir
la conserva de mamey.
—Bata uhte, que yo batiré.
Bata uhte, que yo batiré
(Mendoza 1955:1100).[11]

As in the case of this early *corrido*, the songs in the collection being studied are framed by one historical event or another. In other words, the raw material of the songs is drawn from some aspect of Mexican history as it affects/affected the Afro-Mexicans. Moreover, the history on which the *corrido* draws is tragic history (Gutiérrez 1985). It points to ways in which various stages of Mexico's history fraught with rebellions, impinged on the lives of the Afro-Mexicans who played leading roles in the Mexican War of Independence (1810–1820) and in the Revolution of 1910 (Pérez, 1993). Through vivid accounts, the Afro-Mexican *corridos* recall different periods of Mexico's history in which Afro-Mexicans on the *Costa Chica* were intimidated subjected to violent attacks by Government soldiers and para-military groups, referred to in different *corridos* by terms such as–*la motorizada, el guacho, los federales.*

This history, however is not simply recorded for the sake of recalling an event from the past but is integrated to create certain ideological implications in what may be described as a discourse of marginality. This view is substantiated by Gutiérrez who asserts:

> Pero al trovador y su auditorio no les interesa la historia por la historia misma, van más allá. La historia tiene sentido si señala, denuncia, pone en evidencia a los actores del drama y reafirma un conjunto de maneras de vivir propias de la identidad. El que no lo sabe debe saberlo y el que lo sabe debe recordarlo. El *corrido* evoca lo pasado en función de lo presente. (Gutiérrez 1985)

Indeed, history serves not as just an organising strategy and theme in the Afro-Mexican *corrido* but also as a revealing device,–bringing to mind Glissant's theory that history in literature functions much the same way as myth in that it disguises while conferring meaning, obscures and brings to light, mystifies as well as clarifies and intensifies that which emerges...It explores the known–unknown (Glissant 7).

This interaction/interrelationship between myth and history hinges on the imaginative content and general inventive nature of the Afro-Mexican *corridos.* The mythic imagination is freely engaged in the creation of these *corridos*, giving further emphasis to the oral tradition out of which they emanate. This is to say that the actual stories which the *corridos* narrate are more probably imaginary mythic accounts rather than ones with any basis in reality, even though they use historical events as their broad frame. *Corridos* about violent plunderings of Afro-Mexican communities and attacks by *carrancistas* and soldiers of different Mexican governments seem to have embellished real life situations to present the Afro-Mexicans as victors rather than victims and thereby create an alternative to the history of defeat of the Afro-

Mexicans.

Indeed, the Afro-Mexican *corridos* exemplify the view that:

> All human societies betray a preoccupation with their own past... Much of course, of what is presented, celebrated and passed on from age to age may have only a tenuous relationship to the past as it really happened: much of it will be 'myth' or fable. But then myth believed by one generation and passed on to the next also becomes a part of this awesomely large and complex cluster of events and ideas, great systems and trivial pursuits, 'the past' (Marwick 1989).

The "Corrido de los zapatistas de San Nicolás," and "El Zanatón" are therefore creative legends or communal narratives in which it is hardly probable that the heroes of the *corridos* accomplished the feats for which they are apotheosized. The songs draw on the historical tension and conflict which characterized the different historical periods in which Afro-Mexican guerrilla groups were overpowered and annihilated by the force of government and other para-military troops. However, as part of the process of subverting the discourse that forms part of this historical background and in order to create a sense of triumph and liberation despite official historical accounts, the outcome of these clashes are revisioned and reversioned from a predominantly mythical perspective to present a new version of history:

"Corrido de los zapatistas de San Nicolás"

Cuando Bruñela llegó
llegó muy desesperado,
quemando y matando gente
y sacándola del bajo.

Llegando tiró la voz
como persona decente,
aquí me van a entregar
a toditita esta gente.

Ahora si los carrancistas
andan de ados carilleras,
Zapata para pelear
no necesita trincheras.

Cunado los vieron tirados
Todos pegaron de gritos,
¡Viva Melquíades Román
con todos sus zapatistas!

Ya nosotros nos vamos
dijo Everardo Román
como a las seis de la tarde
murió Teodor Montealbán

Ya me voy a despedir
Con gusto y con muchas ganas,
¡si me quieren agarrar
allá estoy en La Bocana!
Zapata nunca acaba
Y se acobardaron todos
llegando a San Nicolás
y mataron a don Lolo.

"El Zanatón"

Voy a cantar un corrido
señores porque ahí les va,
les voy a dar a saber
lo que pasó en Palomar,
donde murieron los guachos
por no saberse tantear

Cuando venían de San Marcos
venían muy desesperado,
pasaron por Las Lomitas
con el fusil preparado,
en busca de los Hernánde'
porque los traiban de encargo.

Al llegar al Palomar
una mujer les habló
se buscan a los Hernánde'

se los juro que por Dios,
están en el Campo Santo
bajo palabra de honor.

Ay, les dice el fusilero:
sobre aviso no hay engaño,
vámonos pa'l Campo Santo
dicen que están esos gallos
si con Constancio me encuentro
no quedará disgustado.

Ay, les dice el fusilero:
cuidense que ahí les va una
soy pescador de la mar
no de esta pinche laguna,
he toreado toros bravos
no zanatilla sin pluma.

A los primeros balaso'
le gritaban tú le llevas,
luego tumbaron a Marcos
y a Alfonso Villanueva,
pero les quedó Constancio
peleándoles pecho a tierra.

Ay, les dice El Zanatón:
por mi lado no hay cuidado,
ya me tumbé al fusilero
llevo el fusil a mi lado,
y a otros tres compañeros
que aquí quedaron tirado'.

Ay, les dice El Zanatón:
encomenden su alma a Dios
encomenden su alma a Dios
porque ahi les va El Animal,
se los juro que por Dios
ese sí los va a acabar.

Pobrecitos de los guachos
ya no jallaban que hacer,
arrancaban pa' las casa'
queriéndose defender,
El Zanatón los búscaba
como cosa de comer.

Pobrecitos de los guachos
se andaban volviendo locos,
arrancaban pa' las huertas
queriendo baja' unos coco,
pero al llegar a la barranca
se quedaron otros pocos.

Pusieron un radiograma
al Presidente Camacho,
que vinieran a saber
a ver como estuvo el caso,
que vinieran a saber
donde murieron los guachos.

Bajaron dos aeroplano
a cargo de un General,
bajaron dos avioneta
a cargo de un General,
pero con el Zanatón
ya no quisieron pelear.

A powerful rhetoric of resistance and counter attack is created through the derisive effect of the picture of the government soldiers who arrive heavily armed and use all their resources–aeroplanes and sophisticated means of communication, but are forced to surrender to El Zanatón and his men because they are totally overwhelmed by their force: "murieron por no saberse tantear." Derision is achieved as government troops become the subject of ridicule through the image created of their confusion and bewilderment.

The achievements of the heroes –"Zapata", Zanatón/Melquiades Román are therefore "world historical macro-cosmic triumphs".[12] This reversioning of history in the *corrido* serves as a mythic distillation of colonization/dictatorship and other political systems to project them as periods which brought triumph to the Afro-Mexicans, rather than defeat and ignominy. The effect of this–intentionally or unintentionally–is to create for the Afro-Mexicans, a sense of the possibility

to achieve their own freedom. History in the *corrido* and its interactions with myths may therefore be described as:

> "Le mythe est Histoire et pas seulement histoire. Il est l'Histoire d'un groupe, d'une communauté, d'un ensemble culturel, Il se nourrit de l'Histoire du groupe.... Mais il est toujours réesplication de l'Histoire. En ce sens, le mythe redouble toujours l'Histoire, parce qu'il n'apparáit historiquement que comme Histoire compensatrice. C'est le manqué (reel ou tenu pour tel) de certaines réalités ou données historiques qui explique comment le mythe apparaít, se dit et s'écrit comme Histoire seconde. Cette definition ...permet de voir l'histoire/Histoire mythiques comme une donnée compensatrice face à une situation de souffrance, de nanque."
> (Daniel-Henri Pageaux 154).

> ...Not just story. It is the History of a group, a community, a cultural collectivity. It is fostered by the History of the group...but it is always a reinterpretation of History...The absence (real or perceived as such) of certain historical realities or factors explains how myth emerges, is told and is written as second history. This...permits us to see mythic (history) as a compensatory factor in a situation perceived as frustrating, in a situation of suffering and absences.
> (Translated by B. Webb 40).

Indeed, history in the *corridos* has been re-created, reinvented as a way of "revealing the hidden traces of historical experiences erased from the collective memory of an exploited and oppressed people, so that history may be reconceived as a future history to be made "l'histoire a faire" (Glissant 1984).

Violence

The *Costa Chica* de Guerrero region has been linked to a history of violence. Aguirré Beltrán attributed what he characterized as "un *ethos* violento y agresivo en su cultura" to the fact that the inhabitants of the region are for the most part, descendants of maroons who rejected slavery, established Maroon communities and chose to defend their freedom primarily by violent means (Beltrán 19).[13] Other historical accounts point to the fact that these descendants of maroons also combatted colonial powers to establish a modicum of independence. Furthermore, following the end of colonial rule, Spanish jurisdiction was replaced by various foreign entities which after strategizing and swindling the Afro-Mexicans' lands, established para-military groups to protect these lands and tyrannize the Afro-Mexicans in the process.[14] Hence despite the abolition of slavery, the social conditions did not really change for blacks. In fact, blacks were constantly persecuted and "hunted" by various para-military groups and only resisted control and domination through various acts of marronage:

> Si bien es cierto que los negros que habitaron la Costa chica no fueron en exclusiva cimarrones, fueron estos quienes marcaron profundamente el carácter de la sociedad afromestiza. La posibilidad de fundar una sociedad de relativa independencia con respecto al poder colonial estuvo determinada por una respuesta armada y agresiva de los cimarrones. (Gutiérrez 21)

One method of counter-attack which was used by Afro-Mexican communities was the establishment of *brosas* or "bands of soldiers" which employed violence to counter the violence used against them by the *guachos* (army), la *motorizada* (municipal police). The *brosas* always had

the full support of the community since they were seen as rebelling against unjust authority figures. Hence, the community has been considered as one which came into being through violence as well as having to depend on violence for its survival: "En el origen mismo de la sociedad [afro-mexicana] se ubica la violencia como mecanismo o instrumento indispensable para subsistir como individuo y como sociedad. De ahí que el *ethos* violento venga a integrarse como un pilar de la identidad del grupo" (Gutiérrez 21).

The portrayal of violence in the *corrido* seems inextricably bound up with the history which is being conveyed. Although many historical details and specifications are not provided in them, it is clear that they draw on different periods in which the inherent violence of the situations affected the lives of the Afro-Mexicans. Violence is evoked in the *corridos* through the visual and sound images created by the abundance of harsh sounding vowels, the poetic devices and overall use of language. The violence of the language is unmistakable in the meanings of the words as well as the sound of them. From one *corrido* to the next an atmosphere rife with pictures of: "disparos, escopetas, armas, cerrojo, calibre" is created. The violent attack on Prisco by soldiers is presented through hyperbolic descriptions-"Les disparó tantos tiros que las astillas volaban ("Prisco Sánchez"). And Prisco succumbs to "diecinueve balazos" ("Prisco Sánchez"). In "Fan Chanito," Fan succumbs to "cuarenta balazos," and his attackers came with "–diez escopetas y un calibre 30-30... dos de cerrojo y una 380." The vocabulary is characterized by volatile words which fall mainly in the categories of harsh sibilants, fricatives such as "fusil, fusilores" and bilabial stops "balazos, baloceros" as well as verb forms and phrases which converge to project the image of a violent environment. The "enthusiastic description of violence" has been cited by Walter Ong as characteristic of oral traditions and bears out the claim that these *corridos* are influenced by African orality.

In "Corrido de los zapatistas de San Nicolás," attention is drawn to the violence of "Bruñuela the leader of the *carrancistas* and his men who ruthlessly invade and plunder an Afro-Mexican community: "quemando y matando gente." His violent nature is captured in the description of his voice,–"tiró la voz" –juxtaposed as it is with the comparison with "persona decente." This single characteristic of his voice points not only to his violence but also to the entire group which he represents. For, the voice is usually raised, lowered, modulated, never thrown/shot as it characterized in this *corrido*. Similarly, the violence with which the *carrancistas* are met by the Afro-Mexican *zapatistas* is also highlighted in the syntactic and lexical constituents of the phrase which describes the Afro-Mexicans' reaction to the defeat of the *carrancistas*: "todos pegaron de gritos." Through the preposition *de* the phrase is transformed into an image of fighting similar to phrases such as "pegar de bofetadas", "pegar de puñetazos" and similar fighting expressions.

In "El Zanatón," the song alternates between descriptions of the violence of the establishment soldiers and the guerrillas. A picture of the leader of the guerrilla group is painted through the sustained metaphor of "El animal"–the nickname given to him because of his fearlessness

and the terror he unleashes on federal troops. His destructive and violent force is unmistakable in the description of his response to the attack of the federal troops in "El Zanatón"–"los buscaba como cosa de comer"–undoubtedly, a graphic image of violence which substantiates the view that: el hecho violento es registrado en todos sus detalles...el corrido no hace apología de la violencia (Gutiérrez).[15]

Needless to say, the violence reflected in the *corridos* is not portrayed for the sole purpose of shocking the sensibilities of readers or listeners. Rather, violence is linked to the function of the *corrido* as a record of events which have left deep marks in the collective memories of the Afro-Mexicans and are reinterpreted within the frame of a particular aesthetic.[13] Violence in the *corrido* is therefore testimony to the violence experienced by the Afro-Mexicans and fulfills an ideological function, a view which is substantiated by Guttiérrez who claims: "El corrido de la Costa Chica es la expresión más clara y fuerte de una ideología de la violencia" (Guttiérrez 1985).

This is to say that violence is valorized because it is seen as a means whose end is justified. In general, the intention in the *corridos* is to point to the violent attack of federal troops, but it is obvious that violence is also an expression of active self-defence. In other words, violence is linked to the fact that marronage is a concrete historical phenomenon in the history of the Afro-Mexicans. So while the forces of the establishment are presented as using violent force against the Afro-Mexicans, the Afro-Mexicans themselves also obviously subscribe to a philosophy that places value on violence as a means of resistance and self-defence.

Many *corridos* depict a situation in which violent antagonistic forces are at work in the community. This images the Afro–Mexicans as victims of a system which does not favour them. "Lupe Baños" for instance, shows the senseless, unjust killing of Lupe by the police with full support of the authorities: "No tenía delito/... lo mató la policía."

"Lupe Baños"

Voy a cantar un corrido
con el permiso de Dios,
mataron a Lupe Baños,
y el presidente mandó

Lupe Baño' se paseaba
con todos sus amiguito',
él se paseaba tranquilo
porque no tenía delito.

Ay, le dijo su mujer:
Lupe le dijo esta noche no salga',
están ladrando los perro'
no' va' a pasar una de mala'.

Lupe no quiso entender
él como quiera se fue,
me vo' a echar una cervecita
y luego vo' a devolve'.

Ay, cuando Lupe llegó
el presidente lo vió,
le invitó una cervecita
para poderlo matar.

Ese Evaristo Rodríque'
es un hombre ganagracia',
de la esquina de su casa
ay!, le apareó tres balazo',

El que mató a Lupe Baño'
ya se andaban dando cuenta,
porque la pistola 'e Lupe
ya la cargaban de venta

Ya me voy a despedir
señores no los engaño,
mataron a Lupe Baño'
con la pistola en la mano.

Esta es otra despedida
parece que ya es de día,
mataron a Lupe Baño'
lo mató la policia.

Violence is often placed within a context which necessitates the Afro-Mexicans' struggle for liberation. It must needs be used against authority figures who use force and terror to subdue or control the Afro-Mexicans. The heroes of the Afro- Mexican *corrido* are not presented as initiators of violence, but are seen to use violence to respond to the violence unleashed upon them. This way, violence is used to allude to the history which was experienced by oppressed people who were forced to engineer their own liberation. An example of this is seen in "La Mula Bronca," which is said to be one of the most popular *corridos* from the *Costa Chica*:

"La Mula Bronca." (Emilio Petatán) Cantan: Ildefonso Rendón y Tiburcio Noyola.

Voy a cantar un corrido
y a favor, no es a la contra,
el día 7 de noviembre
se murió La Mula Bronca,
y tambien Faustino Ruiz
también echaba su ronca.

Se querían como hermanos
y se estimaban bastante,
estaban de acuerdo con Meza
y el gobernador Cervantes,
y todos los expedientes
los cargaba el comandante.

Salieron de Ometepec
los de la motorizada,
en buscar la "Mula Bronca"
decían que estaba baleada,
pero le traiban recelo
ni al gobierno respetaba...

Sus amigos le decían
cuídate de Petra Morga
tengo buenas garantías
con el jefe de la zona,
los halló la judicial
en la cantina de Chona

Ese Epifanio Quiterio
tenía larga la correa,
de aquí les voy a pelear
de a tiro que se los vea
si me salgo, el comandante
en la puerta me capéa

A los primeros balazos
le mataron a Faustino,
La "mula" se puso bronca
Se puso como un remolino,
lástima que lo dañaron
era un muchacho muy fino.

Cuando se estaba tirando
pura raza huehueteca,
acoreando mi pistola
ni el diablo que se los meta,
cuando se las descargaba
que parecía 'metralleta.

Legítimo huehueteco
Municipio de Azoyú
jóven se echó a la malas
no gozó su juventud,
el hombre nació para morir
no va a estar de esclavitud

Ya me voy a despedir
perdonen lo mal cantado,
ora digan mis amigos
si esta bien o mal trovado
murió Epifanio y Faustino
solo recuerdos dejaron

Violence is used by the persona against the law enforcing group–"los de la

motorizada," to avenge the unwarranted murder of his best friend. The soldiers arrive to annihilate Epifaneo Quitero and his friend because they claim that he has no regard for the government. Here, violence is projected as a means of survival against powerful oppressive forces. La Mula becomes enraged in response to the violence unleashed on him and on his friends. His violent retaliation is captured in terms which are normally used to create a graphic picture of wildness and frenzied movement–such as "bronca" and "remolino."

Similarly in "El Zanatón" federal soldiers launch an attack on "Zanatón" and his men while they are in the cemetery. They have been targeted because of their anti-government stance. When their time in the cemetery is violently interrupted, Zanatón and his men retaliate with violence. "El Zanatón" presents a powerful, "stylized verbal tongue lashing" (Ong. 44) in which derision plays a key function in establishing the *corrido* as a metaphorical revolt against government troops and organized oppression and in general, against a system which is perceived as tyrannical and oppressive.

This derisive picture represents an effective metaphorical stripping of the government soldier's of their power and simultaneously "turns history upside down" achieving a metaphorical reversal of historical events, for the purpose of subsuming the stereoypical images of defeat of the Afro-Mexicans and of creating a sense of liberation.[17]

Self-Glorification

Self-glorification is an important element of the Afro-Mexican *corrido* and functions as a means of empowerment for the Afro-Mexicans as a marginalized group. Characters who are projected as lauding themselves are in fact engaged in an active "self-constituting process so as to escape the images of formal history and the dominant discourse of colonization" (Gilbert 344). Self-glorification is evident in the Afro-Mexicans' boasting about their fighting skills and their ability to face/confront and defeat the violence of Government troops and other military groups. This self-glorification is even present when the central character dies at the hands of Government troops, for he is considered as dying a hero's death both as a result of the many feats he accomplishes before his death as well as the fearless manner in which he faces the violence of his opponents and fights to the bitter end. J. Periera, who sees a parallel between self-glorification in the Afro-Mexican *corrido* and Jamaican dancehall music claims: La jactancia se puede interpretar tanto en ese ejemplo mexicano como en el «dancehall» jamaicano como una manera de rescatar la valoración de sí mismo, negada por la sociedad y la cultura dominantes y deshumanizadas por un concepto de «masas» en el sistema socio-económico. Una forma más de resistencia de los grupos marginalizados afirmando su yo (Periera 55).

In "Corrido de los zapatistas de San Nicolás," the hero Zapata is projected as invincible: "Zapata nunca se acaba," and totally undaunted by the heavy ammunitions of federal troops. His feeling of confidence in his ability to defend his people without sophisticated weapons and his contempt of the opposition's weapons are conveyed through the condescension with which he belittles and ridicules the powerful ammunitions of the opponents: "Zapata para pelear. No necesita

trincheras." Similarly, Prisco Sánchez, "un hombre valiente," in a daring show of belief in his prowess clamours for the soldiers to continue to attack him: "Arrímese acá, acabemé de matar." This same confidence and glory in self is demonstrated in the image of Filadelfo Robles, the leader of a village group–in a *corrido* of the same name. He exudes fearlessness and evokes feelings of terror in everyone else: "Cuando él salía ni los perros ladraban" ("Filadelfo Robles"). Even the metaphorical representation of his personality as "una sombra pesada" points to his disposition as a fearless, self-assured hero as well as draws attention to his status as an extraordinary individual (Hernández 1999). The use of "sombra pesada" moreover suggests that he possesses supernatural powers. His personal philosophy is to challenge every opposition even to the point of death: "Si en este barrio me matan, no haces más que alevantarme" ("Filadelfo Robles").

This same disregard for sophisticated weapons and trained, organized armies is noted in "El Zanaton," in which the hero's condescension toward the federal troops and the contemptuous manner in which he dismisses them is noted. The implication of his pronouncement: "He toreado toros bravos no zanatillas sin plumas," ("El Zanatón") is that the soldiers represent not even the least threat as when compared with others against whom he has fought, their bravery and strength are comparable to that of tiny birds and pale miserably.

This self-exaltation based on confidence in fighting abilities, galvanized by a spirit of autonomy and refusal to fear even the most powerful opponents, is also a defining trait of the persona of the song–"La mula bronca," who seems to abide by the belief that: "pa' morir nacen los hombres/no va a estar de esclavitud." In other words this persona would choose death rather than not have his freedom. The persona violently rejects the dominant system of authority displaying a level of toughness which is unmatched, to dismantle the images of the easily manipulated or cowardly Afro-Mexican.

Self-glorification and fearlessness go hand in hand with the belittling of representatives of the status-quo and the undervaluing of and disregard for their importance or office. The *corrido* "Lupe Ramírez, "El Diablo," dramatically reveals this subversive intent of self-glorification. The heroes are projected as having total disdain for the government and are not the least intimidated by the prospect of being confronted by government representatives: "Eran los tres bandoleros / Leyenda 'e La Caña Hueca. / jugaban con el gobierno / como jugar con muñeca" (Lupe Ramírez "El Diablo").

The portrayal of the hero figure of "Pedro Chicharrón," similarly highlights how this fearless, self-certain, self-assured attitude is accompanied by the disdainful disregard of the government's power: "El Pedro 'El Chicharrón' / era hombre y no se rajaba, / le decía a sus compañeros / que hasta risa le causaba, / que si el gobierno le caiba / con el gobierno peleaba" ("Pedro El Chicharrón" 54) Fearlessness is accompanied by mockery when he is warned of the arrival of the army general: "El Chicharrón se reía / porque no tiene mielo" (p.55).

Self-glorification in the *corridos* also facilitates the restoration of masculine identity. The exaltation of toughness functions as a means of "channelling undermined manhood into rhetorical aggression and defiance" (Habekost 1993). This is evident in the correlation between

self-glorification and *machismo*. All the heroes of the *corridos* are males to whom reference is made using nicknames such as "el gallo" (cock), "el azote" (whip), "La mula bronca" (the wild mule) "el Diablo" (the devil), which point to their sense of manliness and military prowess. Bravery in fighting becomes a marker of manhood, –an important aspect of recovering and affirming subjectivity.

This fearless, contemptuous confrontation of the status quo and exaggerated confidence in the ability to defeat all antagonistic forces, which leads to a reckless approach to life is sharply expressed in the dancehall song "Murderer" by Jamaican deejay Wayne:

Nihilist?
Lumpen?
Uptown bullshit!
Respeck I ah deal wid.
respeck mi area,
respeck mi don,
respeck mi woman.
Dis mi,
an yuh mamam papa granny pickney a go feel it.
Dis mi, boom bullet fire!
It no matter, I have a dog heart.
If mi dead, ah so!
Man born fi dead.
Accepting the offering,
Papa Ogun sits on his hilltop,
wondering when his own mortality
will be tested.
And in history's dustbin,
Marx bides his time.

The lines "Dis mi, boom bullet fire! / It no matter I have a dog heart / If mi dead ah so / man born fi dead" are reminiscent of the attitude taken by the protagonist in "La Mula bronca." Indeed in this song, as well as in the *corridos,* self-glorification becomes an important means of self-vindication and validation in a system whose dominant hegemonic group undermines and mitigates against the formation of self-worth by marginalized individuals.

Finally, the *corridos* studied in this essay constitute a rich socio-cultural and political discourse which alludes to the experiences of the Afro-Mexican populace. They represent an art form which should be appreciated not just for their recreational function but for the wit, complexity and subtlety with which they unfold. Indeed they seem to record for us some of the most important events which the Afro-Mexicans presented through memory for a long time. Through the *corridos* the essence of the Afro-Costa Rican communities' way of life, philosophy and the events which have shaped and influenced their positions are revealed. Indeed, Guitiérrez underscores the fact that the *corrido* reveals so much about the Afro-Costa Rican community and their way of life when he states:

> Habíamos dicho que el corrido tiene como principal característica registrar los acontecimientos o sucesos más notables de la vida de un pueblo. Acontecimientos que dejan una profunda huella en la memoria colectiva y que son reinterpretados en el marco de una ética y estética social. (Gutiérrez 17)

The study of history, violence and self-glorification in the *corrido* discloses an inner discourse which bears an overall message of cultural and political significance–one which points to the possibility of engineering individual and communal liberation and promoting self-validation. Self-glorification then, together

with violence and history serve a transgressive/subversive ideological position in the Afro-Mexican *corridos*.

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Notes

[1]Excerpt from E.K. Brathwaite's *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*. 1984.

[2]Excerpt from J. Pereira. "La literatura afromexicana en el contexto del Caribe." *America Negra* 9 (1995).

[3] Online Article on the *corrido* and the proliferation of interest groups in the United States studying the *corrido*. <*corrido@csrc.ucla.edu.*

[4]M. A. Gutiérrez–in his book *Corrido y Violencia*. Gutiérrez claims that one reason there is so little attention given to the Afro-Mexican *corrido* is the intense focus on proving that the *corrido* originated among Indian groups.

[5]See Merle Simons, (1957), Miguel Angel Gutiérrez (1985), J. Periera (1992) and Jahmeelah S. Muhammad (1995).

[6]Gutiérrez as anthropologist, has spent much time collecting and scribalizing *corridos* from Guerrero.

[7]See Guillermo Hernández who argues that recordings, or the use of *corridos* for commercial purposes has not altered the nature or message of the *corrido*.

[8]Jameelah S. Muhammad. "Mexico and Central America." *No Longer Invisible*, London: Minority Rights Publications, 1995.

[9]All 1985 references to Gutiérrez are taken from the jacket cover of the album.

[10]Phrase borrowed from Ong, 1982.

[11]This *corrido* is not among those recorded by *Los Cimarrones*, but was brought to my attention through research done by J. Pereira.

[12]Joseph Campbell's delineation of the folk hero in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. 1973.

[13]See Gutiérrez, 1988.

[14]Yanga was a maroon settlement in the mountains of Veracruz where rebellions by African slaves were frequent. The most renowned maroon rebellion occurred here and was led by Yanga (from whom the area as named), who today, is a symbol of black resistance and rebellion in Mexico.

[15]Taken from the jacket cover of Los Cimarrones' 1985 record *Traigo una flor hermosa y mortal.*

[16]I draw on the ideas of Gutiérrez concerning the ideology of violence as held by Afro-Mexicans.

[17]Phrase used by Carolyn Cooper. *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the Vulgar Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*, 1993.

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Haitian Revolutionary Studies. By David Patrick Geggus. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002, 335 pp.

Reviewed by Flore Zéphir

The Haitian revolution that started in 1791 and culminated in Haiti's declaration of independence on January 1, 1804 is the component of Haitian history that has received the greatest amount of scholarly attention. The interest in the Haitian revolution is undoubtedly due to the fact that it is the only successful slave revolution in modern world history. It inflicted a humiliating defeat to one of the most important colonial powers of the eighteenth century: France. Moreover, it posed a significant threat to every single slave-holding society in the Americas, the United States included. As such the Haitian revolution challenged the economic system of slavery to its core; "it seized international attention with images of apocalyptic destruction and a new world in the making" (Geggus 2002: vii). Therefore, it is not surprising that historians to this day continue to explore new historiography and archival sources in an attempt to shed new light on the various political and socioeconomic factors that shaped the development and success of the Haitian revolution.

Geggus's *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* endeavors to dip deeper into what he calls "underexploited sources," and to conduct unprecedented archival research in order to unravel in the most authoritative manner the complexities and the multifaceted determinants of the Haitian revolution. Part Two of his book, Historiography and Sources (pp. 31–51), is compelling. Not only does it provide a thorough review of all significant works thus far produced on the topic (chapter 2); in addition it offers a very informative examination of "underused sources" (chapter 3). These neglected materials are found not only in France, but also in Spain, Great Britain, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United States. Geggus provides the reader with a meticulous discussion of these materials (manuscripts, court documents, eyewitness accounts of events of the revolutionary period, reports, correspondence and letters), and indicate where (cities, libraries, archives, and universities) all of these documents are housed. The extent of Geggus's archival research is impressive. Therefore, his discussion of the complex determinants of, and catalysts in, the formation and unfolding of the Haitian revolution is persuasive.

Haitian Revolutionary Studies leaves the reader with a good sense of the volatile sociopolitical situation that existed in Saint-Domingue at the time of the revolution. It discusses the major social categories that made up the colony: the Whites, the *Gens de couleur libres*, and the slaves. Additionnally, it offers a serious analysis of the sub-classes that existed within the major social categories themselves, and competently discusses inter- and intra-class relationships. For example, the White category included the *grands blancs* and *petits blancs*, each with different aspirations and different relationships with the metropolis. In a similar manner, the slave group comprised the plantation slaves, the domestic slaves, the "slave elite," the maroons, and "the Swiss" (a body of slaves armed by free coloreds to defend their cause of equality with Whites). The strength of the book resides in the fact that it provides additional information, not usually found in most of the popular texts on the Haitian revolution that tend to focus a great deal (if not exclusively) on the Black heroes, Toussaint Louverture in particular. While Black leaders and slaves are

certainly not shortchanged in *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, Geggus's well documented discussion of other forces present in the revolutionary context of Saint-Domingue enables the reader to be perhaps more fully apprised of the magnitude of the chaos and contradictions that ravaged the wealthiest colony of the Caribbeean.

In this regard, I found Part Four, Slaves and Free Coloreds very informative. Chapter 7 (the first of this broad section), examines the "Swiss and the problem of slave/free colored cooperation." It underscores in a salient manner the very ambivalent role that the free coloreds or mulattoes played during the revolution. On the one hand, they wanted legal equality with Whites and were prepared to fight for it by the force of arms, even if it meant arming their own slaves, who became known as the Swiss. Yet, on the other, they also allied themselves with Whites in their efforts to maintain slavery by supressing slave rebellions, and hunting maroon slaves. As the slaves in the North began their massive insurrection in August of 1791, mulatto slave-holders, fearing that the institution of slavery was at stake, made new deals with the Whites. The Swiss were soon seen as a threat to colonial security; as part of those deals, it was decided that they had to be deported to the coast of Central America. "Under the pretext of distributing new weapons, the Swiss were disarmed and then marched at gunpoint on board a ship and put in chains" (p. 106). In the end, the Blacks "got screwed" by the *gens de couleur*. Geggus concludes that "the lesson the most militant slaves must have learned from this episode is that they needed to fight their own battles" (p. 117), and presumably not trust free coloreds. This incident convincingly attests to the ambiguous relationships that existed between the two nonwhite groups of colonial Saint-Domingue. This feeling of mistrust permeated future relations, and shaped post-independence events. The role played by these Swiss, their impact in the volatile situation of revolutionary Saint-Domingue, and their fate has thus far been a topic understudied. This chapter underscores Geggus's concern to bring to the fore the various elements that converged and collided to produce a successful slave revolution that created a new world order.

Chapter 8, "The 'Volte-Face' of Toussaint Louverture," is equally compelling. Readers learn (some perhaps for the first time) that Toussaint was a freedman, and apparently had been so since the mid-1770s, some twenty years before the revolution. This chapter provides a fresh analysis of why Toussaint joined the Spanish army (in the eastern part of Hispaniola that remained under Spanish rule) to fight against the French, and later shifted his allegiance to the French. It explores the subtle relationship between Toussaint and other Black leaders who had also joined the Spanish army, namely Biassou and Jean-François. Moreover, it explains how Toussaint might have perceived at the time the balance of power between colonial nations, namely France, Spain, and Great Britain. The same concern for the complete picture is also seen in Chapter 9 that discusses, through the career of a particular slave named Jean Kina, the "strange" case of a group of Black slaves in the South who were armed and granted freedom this time by the Whites to protect their own interests against those of the mulattoes. In order to defend their owners' plantations under

attacks by mulatto forces, several southern slaves were made soldiers and their masters played on the degree of hostilities that existed between Blacks and Mulattoes to obtain their loyalty. The situation became more complicated when the British temporarily occupied the southern cities where they were located. In consequence, these Blacks began serving under the British Crown against the French. When the British were defeated later by Toussaint's troops after his volte-face, Kina refused to join Toussaint, and left for Great Britain with the last detachment of British troops. The information about this "Negro Militia," particularly their leader Jean Kina, will surprise many, as it has not received coverage in most books about the Haitian revolution. Moreover, this piece of historical evidence highlights the strong contradictions of the colonial system: Both White and Mulatto slave-holders armed their slaves, "at the risk of destroying their own-slave based wealth in the struggle over racial equality" (p. 138). In short, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* reveals in a persuasive manner that not only every single faction of colonial society was at war against each other, but also at war against it own self, at least in the earlier years of the revolution.

In the same compelling manner, Part Five, The Wider Revolution (chapters 10-12), deals with events occuring in France and wartime Europe (particularly Spain), that had repercussions on the slave revolution in Saint-Domingue. In chapter 10, Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession during the Constituent Assembly, Geggus focuses on the colonial question in the French Revolution. According to him, this question involved three broad issues: "self-government for France's overseas possessions, civil rights for their free colored populations, and the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery itself" (p. 157). The merit of this chapter is that it looks at the reciprocal effects between events in Saint-Domigue and in France, a correlation that is often overlooked by historians. Those of the Haitian Revolution tend to focus on internal events in the colony; similarly those of the French Revolution concern themselves with problems residing in metropolitan society. Rarely has the link between the two contexts been underscored on the basis of critical examination of historical and archival documents. This chapter fills the void. On the one hand, the political climate was changing in France: Growing antipathy and dissatisfaction with nobility and aristocracy gave rise to different radical ideologies embedded in the revolutionary motto *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. Sympathy toward the plight of the *gens de couleur*, who brought their claims to the metropolis, grew; the *Société des Amis des Noirs* was formed; new antislavery concerns emerged in the 1780s, particularly with the works of the Marquis de Condorcet and l'Abbé Raynal; the Declaration of the Rights of Man was passed. On the other hand, in the midst of these metropolitan currents, the prosperous colony of Saint-Domingue, torn by its own internal structures, was in complete chaos, and blood shed was the order of the day: The slaves were fomenting a massive insurrection and were already burning plantations and poisoning their masters. The mulattoes had taken arms against the Whites and were turning up the heat, as one of their leaders, Vincent Ogé, was executed. In addition, they were at war with the Blacks who rebelled against slavery. As for the Whites, they were fighting with both

Mulattoes and Blacks. Consequently, in March 1790, the National Assembly allowed the colony internal self-governance "under metropolitan supervision," and in May of 1791, the National Assembly granted political rights to "freeborn men of color." Subsequently, in August 1791, a massive slave insurrection erupted in the North and soon spread to other parts of the colony. In February 1793, war with Spain and Britain broke out. In Saint-Domingue Black leaders (Toussaint Louverture, Biassou, and Jean-François) joined the Spanish army to fight the French. In August 1793, a French civil commissionner, Sonthonax, abolished slavery in Saint-Domingue, and in February 1794, the French Jacobin government ended slavery altogether in all French colonies. In the Spring of 1794, Toussaint Louverture made his volte-face. Geggus succeeds in pointing out the interconnectedness of the two revolutions.

Chapter 11, "The Great Powers and the Haitian Revolution," looks primarily at the impact France's war with Spain had on the Saint-Domingue revolution. In 1793, the balance of power seemed to have shifted. The Spanish were making headway and diligently recruited most of the marroons, slave rebels and several of their leaders as *tropas auxiliares* to fight within their ranks, in the hope of restoring to them a piece of the wealthy colony. As Geggus judiciously explains, "the Spanish decision also reflected the high stakes the colonial powers were playing for and a desire to recover from the French what had been part of Spain's first American colony" (p. 175). These Black auxiliary troops in return for their services received "land, honors, and freedom" (p. 175). The Spanish planters of Santo Domingo feared an invasion by thousands of armed Blacks. In the meantime, events in Europe (the Treaty of Basle of July 1795) forced Spain to cede Santo Domingo to France; Spanish colonial officials were left to determine what to do with the Black Auxiliary. Toussaint shifted his allegiance; most of the others were sent to various regions of the Caribbean, Central and Latin America. Chapter 12, The Slave Leaders in Exile: Spain's Resettlement of its Black Auxiliary Troops, follows the fate of these Blacks relocated in Cuba, Trinidad, Florida, Honduras, Yucatán, Panama, and Spain. The reader learns, for example, that Biassou went to St. Augustine, Florida; and Jean-François to Spain. Perhaps indirectly, this chapter demonstrates that, in a strange way, since Haitian revolutionary times a Haitian diaspora was being formed.

Geggus undoubtedly does a very good job at documenting the various internal and external forces that came together to produce the Haitian revolution. In this perpective, it can be argued that he approaches the Haitian revolution from "above" and from "below." However, in his treatment of these events from below, I note that he tends to downplay the role of the marronage in the slave revolution. He clearly states that "it remains highly uncertain that marronage contributed in any direct way to launching the black revolution" (p. 41). This is somewhat problematic as other historians, in particular Fick (1990)—whom Geggus credits for having produced "a major history of the Haitian Revolution,"—have convincingly demonstrated that marronage was a structured form of Black resistance and, as such, can be seen as the beginning of the greater revolt movement. Moreover, he does not really acknowledge the connection between marroons and

slaves, particulary the slave drivers who had under their direct command the plantation slaves. This connection is apparent in the first structured slave uprising that occurred in the 1750s under the leadership of Mackandal, himself a marroon. The account given in Fick (1990: 62) merits attention and cannot be discarded:

> Finally, the day and hour were set when the water of all the houses in le Cap [northern capital] was to be poisoned. Within the core of his bands he had disciplined agents—captains, lieutenants, and various other officers —operating and organizing on the plantations. He knew the names of every slave on each plantation who supported and participated in his movement. He had an exact list of those slaves who, once the poison had struck panic throughout the town, were to organize the contingents from le Cap and spread out into the countryside to massacre the whites.[1]

Although Mackandal's great plan never reached fruition, it nevertheless suggests that marroons acted in connivance with slaves on the plantations, who were their allies in burning the plantations and poisoning their masters. Moreover, it is well documented that the Whites feared so much the activities and influence of the marroons that they created a local law-enforcing unit, known as the *maréchaussée*, that, according to Fick (1990: 20), was exclusively composed of free coloreds for the chief purpose of hunting down and capturing runaway slaves.[2] In light of this evidence, I find it difficult to accept Geggus's position that "marronage was primarily an alternative to rebellion, a safety valve that helps explain the remarkable absence of slave revolts in eighteenth century Saint-Domingue" (p. 74). For those who perhaps would have wished to see more "slave revolts," could the colossal events that started in August 1791 and shook the world have realistically sprung just on the spur of the moment? The phenomenon of marronage could reasonably indicate that these events were long in the making, and can constitute in itself a form of, not an alternative to, rebellion. At any rate, readers are urged to consult other analyses and reach their own conclusions.

Irrespective of my criticism of Geggus's assessement of the impact of marronage on the Saint-Domingue revolution, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* achieves its objectives of shedding new light on the events surrounding the Haitian revolution. Particularly compelling is the presentation of facts that clearly showed that in times of turmoil in Saint-Domingue (and Europe), all sides turned to the Blacks to do their fighting for them, while at the same time wanting to keep the institution of slavery alive. This flagrant contradiction only serves to magnify the scope of the Black revolution of Saint-Domingue that was to change forever the course of history. There is no question that Geggus has written an authoritative work, unequaled by the depth of his archival research, and the new details he offers. In this perspective, Chapter 13, The Naming of Haiti, is also worth mentioning, as it provides reasonable explanations as to why the name "Haiti" was chosen for the new nation after the proclamation of its independence. In sum, no serious study and empirical investigation of the Haitian Revolution can be undertaken without consulting *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*.

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Notes

[1]Fick, Carolyn. 1990. *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.

[2]Fick (p. 279, note 32) consulted a *mémoire* (written in Mars 1779) on the creation of a corps of *gens de couleur*. This document could prove that ten years before the revolution marronage was alive and well in Saint-Domingue.

Blasfemia del escriba
por Alberto Guerra Naranjo
La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2000, 179 pp.
Reviewed by Mauricio J. Almonte

Blasfemia del escriba is Alberto Guerra Naranjo's third collection of short fiction. The book gathers thirteen stories dating from 1986 to 1998, several of them award-winners in Cuba, dealing with such varied topics as Ernest Hemingway, Angola, fate and tourism. As suggested in the title, and emphasized by the book's chronology, the most palpable unifying theme of the collection is the act of writing; furthermore, writing in contemporary Cuba. The first person, employed in six of the stories, is invariably a male writer acutely conscious of his craft and its challenges; he is similarly at center stage in "Giros" and "Tiempo de viaje," narrated in the third person. One of the book's most recurrent images, in fact, is that of an elderly typewriter, reminiscent of the seventy-five pound Remington in Mario Vargas Llosa's *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977).

But that image might be the only point in common between Vargas Llosa's novel and Guerra Naranjo's collection of short stories. Its title advances a reformulation of an aging dichotomy between subjugated scribe and autonomous writer/artist, which has long informed notions of literary value. (Nathaniel Hawthorne's abhorrence of the 'mob of scribbling women' that had a stronghold on the literary marketplace is an early North American example. In Spanish America, the connection between popular and 'poor' literature first gains general usage with the homosexual Colombian novelist José María Vargas Vila, 1861-1933, arguably the most widely read author in Spanish American letters. The image of a blasphemous scribe, defined in opposition to its more obedient colleagues, maintains the hierarchical difference between writing, confined to its utmost basic, mechanical sense, and writing that has taken the liberty of altering dictated discourse. The matter of autonomy, however, is significantly modified; it becomes an issue of degrees, subtle differences whose power rests on being immediately (un) noticed. One of the best examples of that power (and its limits) is also the most widely known instance of a blasphemous scribe in recent literary history: the 'Salman' in chapter six of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and the ensuing extra-textual affair.

That conceptualization of literature as hypertelic rewriting—at the hands of a blasphemous scribe who turns the text into a site of struggle—readily manifests itself in the diegetically self-aware "Finca Vigía." It is set in the middle of the 1990s and highly informed by Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), particularly if one reads Hemingway's novel as an allegory of writing. The unnamed narrator, a twenty-five year old aspiring writer, tourist guide, and apprentice of the revived 1954 Nobelist is also fishing for a prized catch. He has recently entered an eminent literary contest and, projecting himself onto the writer/protagonist of the submitted story, penned himself the award. The maneuver is largely motivated by the sentiment that there might not be another way to win, i.e., succeed as a writer within post-Soviet Cuba. More than a way of coping with discouraging circumstances, the gesture of writing the winner—assuming a power not properly his—amounts to a proclamation of (impossible) self-sufficiency uttered before readers in power: literally, judges. That bi-directionality of power relations is spectacularly reiterated in the concluding paragraph of "Finca Vigía" as Hemingway, in an apparent case

of boomerang anxiety of influence, imitates his apprentice. Within that paragraph, and further emphasizing that point, the narrator/apprentice, who assumes a scribal function in relaying the words of the 'maestro', overrides his master with an assertive "*(sic)*" (29). Indeed, Hemingway's style is ostentatiously simulated throughout the entire story—succinct syntax, adjectival economy, iceberg effect, cubistic repetition of phrases—not by way of gratuitous tribute but rather to call attention to the cultural and historical specificities of its writing, thus distancing itself from its model. That distance enables a parallel relationship between the narrator and the prominent member of the Lost Generation; it also points to a larger implied parallel between that group and Cuba's most recent generation of writers, or *novísimos*, particularly those trying to establish themselves within the island at a historical moment likewise marked by disillusionment and social reevaluation.

Rewriting informs five of the stories, "Finca Vigía" included; the respective narrators of "Otra vez Arnaldo" and "Los heraldos negros" actually frame their narrations as such; "Espejo de paciencia" significantly opens with an epigraph from Silvestre de Balboa's homologous seventeenth-century epic poem, and "Tiempo de viaje" thematically recalls Gabriel García Márquez's *Cuando era feliz e indocumentado* (1975) though it is structurally closer to *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (1961).

What is chiefly rewritten in "Otra vez Arnaldo" is documentary discourse. The story features a confessional first person nearly obsessed with his integrity as narrator. His maxim, "La sinceridad con el lector es un preciado atributo de quien intenta servir con la palabra" functions as *raison d'être* for the story (31). It is framed as a rewriting of an earlier, apocryphal account culpable of dissimulating its full complexity, "En aquella ocasión el deseo [mío] de contar se impuso sobre la propia historia" (31). But the same inherent desire, he admits, governs the narration at hand, implicitly discarding truth claims involving extra-textual terrain. The ensuing narration, in fact, is largely a vindication of the desire that fuels imaginative processes and breeds literature, fictions, embodied in the fleeting character of Arnaldo.

Here is the story: the narrator distinguishes a woman amid a carnival crowd, secludes and romances; their encounter culminates in a humbling coitus interruptus as Arnaldo makes an apparition which displaces narrator and reader alike onto the role of stationary spectator. Arnaldo, the nameless woman explains, "[...] es el hombre de mi vida [...]. Se me aparece de tan sólo pasarme por la mente" (42). The narration is structured into three paragraphs, incrementing levels of intimacy delivered in a confessional mode of discourse so as to conflate intimacy with sincerity, an illusion that is consistently undermined through various recourses at the service of ambiguity. Like Arnaldo, who later waves his hand to the lonesome narrator from a departing public bus, the story flutters its fictionality. If, as he reiterates, "La sinceridad con el lector es mi más preciado atributo" holds true, it is not as an inherent quality but as a property given by the reader (41-2).

Although the narrator of "Otra vez Arnaldo" largely fashions himself as a scribe, "[...] quien intenta servir con la palabra," attempting to remedy past

transgressions, the only scribes in *Blasfemia del escriba*, 'escribanos' as such, appear in the story entitled "Cuesta abajo," Guerra Naranjo's most elaborate incursion into Afro-Cuban history. Racial difference is a constant subtle current throughout the collection: the narrator of "Finca Vigía" complains about literary contests generally being won by "Tipos como Alberto Guerra, un negro con ínfulas de gran escritor [...]" (16); the protagonist of "Tiempo de viaje" is arguably the first Afro-Cuban character to win the lottery since Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's Bernabé; "Los heraldos negros" is, of course, a direct reference to César Vallejo's memorable poem but the title also points to the fact that most of its protagonists are Afro-Cuban (transporting a mattress from one side of Havana to another, a trajectory in which blows of vallejoesque proportions are exchanged with a tourist), and, in "Espejo de paciencia," the soldier José Antonio Fascenda mirrors his literary black ancestor in Silvestre de Balboa's text, this time faced with an equally unenviable epic task (defeating a menacing airplane with an arrow) to defend a land that is and is not his: possibly Africa (104).

"Cuesta abajo" showcases a largely Afro-Cuban faction, most of them writers, fighting for Cuban independence, and led by captain Evaristo, "el gran Evaristo," a readily available allusion to the principal organizer of the Partido Independiente de Color, Evaristo Estenoz (154). One of the combatants descends, an activity generally interpreted by both sides as desertion, imagining the outcome of his descent. That imagined future history is the bulk of the story: in it, the struggle continues, though carried out primarily through writing, from within adversarial ground. At the end of the journey awaits a group of scribes/interpreters, at the service of Spanish colonial power, ready to take note of desertions and receive surrendered swords. The story may chronicle a descent but, structurally, it is an unceasing ascent, appropriately culminating at its highest climactic moment, as it is unclear what a group of descendants will do with their arms; that outcome hinges, in part, on whether scribes—converts of sorts—decide to alter dictated discourse or not.

The image of the blasphemous scribe, and the position of literature Guerra Naranjo connotes with it, equally applies to the literature produced by a growing portion of Cuba's *novísimos* for whom the tropicalizing gaze of a readership outside the island commands a dictated discourse. The editorial success, mostly in the publishing empire of Spain and in the United States, of Zoé Valdés' *Te di la vida entera* (1996) and Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's *Trilogía sucia de La Habana* (1998), for example, is largely due to their respective eroticism and hyperbolic hedonism, ways in which these writers address and satisfy the readerly desire behind that gaze of purchasing power. The importance of this new 'literary economy', though recently studied with considerable depth by critic Esther Whitfield, has generally received little attention. Self-awareness is contagious, distancing, at times a necessary condition for the articulation of one's own discourse—*Blasfemia del escriba* does no less.

Alberto Guerra Naranjo is one of the most published Afro-Cuban *novísimo*, and an emerging literary critic. He is a social historian, born in Havana, 1963, and is currently at work on his first novel. His previous collections of short stories, *Disparos en el aula* (1992) and *Aporías de*

la Feria (1994), were both published in Havana by Editorial Extramuros. He lives, works and publishes in Havana.

Vanderbilt University

Coplas Esmeraldeñas
por Luz Argentina Chiriboga
Quito: NP, 2001, 168 pp.
Reviewed by Paulette Ramsay

Coplas Esmeraldeñas (2001), Luz Argentina Chiriboga's latest work is a collection of Afro-Esmeraldan *coplas*. The *copla* is a popular lyrical composition or ballad, which ranges in length. The stanzas may vary from three to five lines of eight to twelve syllables each. Rhyme or assonance generally occurs in the even lines. In *Coplas Esmeraldeñas*, Chiriboga's stanzas are four lines of eight syllables. In most of the *coplas*, the second line rhymes with the fourth in a perfect rhyming pattern, although there is also an imperfect rhyming pattern in which the lines rhyme.

The *coplas* in the collection were compiled over a number of years during which the author claims she encountered difficulties as she traversed the Province of Esmeraldas, "de diversos modos- en canoa, a caballo y a pie."[1] According to Chiriboga, she undertook the project to revive this aspect of the Afro-Esmeraldan oral tradition—"la tradición coplera" which is being threatened into extinction by the influence of radio and television and other modes of communication.

The *copla*, like the *décima* is an integral part of the cultural heritage, which was taken to Esmeraldas by black slaves and has been used through the years by many Esmeraldans to express their desires, history, frustrations, anxieties, and sense of harmony. According to Chiriboga:

> Otra característica de la copla afro-esmeraldeña es su erotismo, su picardía, aquella forma de mostrarle al mundo su capacidad de reírse de los problemas propios y ajenos y su valor para enfrentar de manera optimista los conflictos del mundo. El corazón del afro-esmeraldeño palpita siempre vehemente, imaginativo y transparente:
>
> «Pan calientito y reciente»,
> gritaba una panadera
> y otra gritó desde afuera:
> «Yo lo tengo más caliente». (p. 8)

The collection is best described as a compilation rather than a composition, because there is only one *copla* which has been attributed to Chiriboga herself. Indeed, in keeping with the Oral Tradition, the *coplas* do not belong to any one author, but have been related by different narrators in different settings. So although Chiriboga acknowledges the narrator of each *copla* this does not mean that narrator is the original creator of the particular *copla*.

Chiriboga presents a variety of *coplas* which include some which develop as an exchange between two speakers, usually a male and female who try to outdo each other in a verbal exchange of insults or in "self-glorification" which is typical of the oral tradition. In some *coplas* the male and female speakers are clearly identified as in the following two stanzas of the very first copla in which both male and female engage in serious "self- bigging up" and "verbal tongue lashing.":

Ella:

> Yo soy la media naranja,
> yo soy la naranja entera,
> yo soy morenita linda
> pero no para cualquiera.

Él:

> Yo soy el medio limón,
> yo soy el limón entero,
> he visto muchas muchachas
> que parecen un lucero.

Ella:

> Los muchachos de este tiempo
> parecen una hoja seca,
> cuando tienen pá el arroz
> no tienen pá la manteca.

Él:

Yo sí tengo pá el arroz
y también pá la manteca
y los reales que sobran
para ti que eres coqueta. (p. 12)

Some *coplas* do not carry distinct indications of the speakers as in the one just quoted, but it is clear in their development that they are interchanges.

In some the male voice expresses strong *machista*/sexist attitudes. While the female voice disparages infidelity among males and sexism:

Tú dices que no me quieres
porque soy color canela,
invítame a tu cama
y verás que soy candela.

Los monos por ser monos
andan de rama en rama,
los hombres por ser hombres
andan de cama en cama. (p. 26)

Or in the following in which the reliability of the male's words is brought seriously into question:

Calla la boca muchacho
castillo de cucaracha,
que a tu madre la sacaron
de una cantina, borracha.

De la mar salen las perlas
de las perlas los collares,
de la boca de los hombres
salen puras falsedades. (p. 40)

The themes in the *coplas* vary, some express or extol the virtues which make a person honorable. Money is dismissed as being unimportant:

Ninguno con cuatro reales
puede hacerse varón noble,
porque para atrás camina
él que nació para pobre. (p. 57)

Male bashing is central to some coplas as in the excerpt below:

Cuando el hombre está de novio
nos ofrece mar y cielo,
pero cuando está casado
se vuelve trozo de hielo. (p. 165)

Mi marido se murió
el Diablo se lo llevó,
allí él me la está pagando
la paliza que me dio. (p. 43)

Female bashing is also present:

Las mujeres son el Diablo
parientes de Lucifes,
se visten por la cabeza,
se desnudan por los pies. (p. 113)

Pride of the region is expressed as in the following:

Ecuatoriana soy, señora,
orgullosa del País.
tengo fe en mi provincia,
soy de Esmeraldeña raíz. (p. 158)

Some of the *coplas* are short and comprise one or two stanzas and vary from being brief anecdotes to riddles and advice:

Si el cigarillo se te apaga
no lo vuelvas a prender
y si un hombre te traiciona
tú no lo vuelvas a ver.

No importa la edad ni color
ni tampoco la estatura,
si hay un poquito de amor
el resto es solo basura.

Some *coplas* affirm African heritage or origin. More than anything else, the

coplas reveal the Afro- Esmeraldan's sense of humor and his ability to laugh at himself. They show moreover, the function of the *coplas* in amusing, entertaining, and delighting people.

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Note

[1]Luz Argentina Chiriboga, *Coplas Esmeraldenas* (Recopilacíon) 5. I