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CUBAN ANTISLAVERY NARRATIVE WITH A *COSTUMBRISTA* TWIST: FRANCISCO CALCAGNO'S *ROMUALDO, UNO DE TANTOS.*[1]

By Claudette Williams

Francisco Calcagno wrote *Romualdo, uno de tantos* in 1869 in the midst of the political turmoil of the first Cuban Independence War, which had started the previous year. The slave trade had come to a belated end, and gradual abolition of slavery had been turned into a collateral issue of the war. Final emancipation (already a reality in other areas of the Americas) was two decades on the horizon. On the literary side of antislavery activity, the Del Monte group had disintegrated,[2] and state-sponsored censorship continued to be sensitive to expressions of opposition to the system, however veiled, which explains why *Romualdo* was not released until 1891. The author's name does not feature on the list of famous contributors to antislavery narrative fiction. His claim to fame rests more on his work as a biographer and historian, and on his compilation of the first collection of Afro-Cuban poetry published in 1878, than on his output in what is normally regarded as creative writing. A member of the Creole elite, this son of an Italian doctor was a founding member of, and active participant in, the Del Monte *tertulia*. The liberal values espoused by the group are, not surprisingly, those that he seeks to promote in this literary effort.

Calcagno's composition belongs to the subsidiary grouping of *noveletas* (novellas) which have been upstaged by full-fledged novels such as Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco* (1839) and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841), hence the modest critical interest it has attracted. Yet it offers a unique though not fully acknowledged anti-slavery perspective. The importation and sale of Africans was not the complete story of Cuba's illegal slave trade. Kidnapping and selling free blacks and mulattoes as slaves, a phenomenon known as *plagio*, was also a rampant practice, though it does not feature as a prominent theme in historical or literary accounts. Calcagno makes this underground activity together with slave marronage, (another conspicuous absence in antislavery narrative), the focal points of his story.

At age six, Romualdo, a free mulatto, is kidnapped and sold by the slave trader, Jacobo Vendialma, to the owner of the Esperanza sugar estate, Don Juan Castaneiro. For thirty years Romualdo endures this bondage in which he is pitted against the white overseer, his sexual rival for the black slave woman Dorotea, who bears Romualdo's daughter, Felicia. After Dorotea's death Romualdo escapes from the estate with his daughter to save her from increasing physical abuse. Felicia dies and Romualdo subsequently joins a band of maroons, but his spirit has been crushed beyond repair by her death. Thereafter the plot shifts its focus to the activities of a group of maroons led by Juan Bemba, himself a victim of *plagio*. At the end the fugitives are betrayed and massacred, but not before they kill the slave trader and Don Robustiano the overseer. In a final twist to the plot and through the intervention of the village priest, it is revealed just before his death that Romualdo is Castaneiro's illegitimate son.

Calcagno chose as his basic narrative resource the *costumbrista* sketch popularized in the art and literature of nineteenth-century Europe and Latin America, and dedicated to documenting the peculiarities of the time in which the artist or writer lived. In one manifestation it consisted of largely entertaining portraits of picturesque local scenery, traditional customs, and popular character types. Side by side with this more innocuous brand of *costumbrismo*, however, were the satirical portraits

painted by those artists and writers who used the genre as an instrument of social commentary and criticism. The *costumbrista* sketch, regarded in some quarters as a precursor of the Latin American novel, thrived as a literary fashion in nineteenth-century Cuba. The *costumbrista* approach emphasizes the (stereo)typical over the unique; individual human interest is minimized and documentary description holds sway over creative invention. Calcagno put together a literary potpourri by adding historical ingredients to a collection of vignettes and binding them with a slender fictional thread. The thinness of this storyline is what, possibly, has discouraged detailed commentary on this work. According to Roberta Day Corbitt, one of the first Cuban examples of the *costumbrista* sketch was written by Ventura Pascual Ferrer who published a series of eight letters in a Spanish newspaper in 1798 "to correct some erroneous statements respecting his country made by the editor of the paper" (Corbitt 41). In a similar spirit, Calcagno sought with his sketches to fill some of the gaps in the antislavery works written during and about the period of the 1830s.

All antislavery narratives are historical to a greater or lesser extent, but few are more manifestly so than *Romualdo*. It is this historical consciousness that no doubt influenced the writer's choice of the *costumbrista* approach because of its ready association with empirical truth. The work's full title *Romulado, uno de tantos*, signals the heavy weighting given to fact over fiction. Romualdo is not the one-of-a-kind protagonist in the fables created by Suárez and Avellaneda; he is merely one of the many actual cases of real free blacks and mulattoes sold illegally as slaves. To add a historical accent to the narrative, the author introduces what he claims to be facsimiles of two authentic documents: a list of the slaves (including Romualdo) sold to Castaneiro in 1806, and a copy of an agreement for the sale of a female slave in a slave market. Both documents purport to confirm the veracity of his account. The author's obsession with historical precision manifests further in the phrase "estamos en 1836", repeated throughout like a refrain to keep the time of the story's action constantly in the reader's mind. But even as he presents a snapshot moment from a bygone era, the author is careful to include allusions to the present to foster an optimistic sense of Cuba's history as progressive. Exposure and denunciation of malpractice carry in their wake the assurance that the sins belong to the past. Things and times have changed and are changing (for the better), the author states or implies, and will continue to do so in the future: "¡Las cosas de otros tiempos! Se rechazaba al judío y al protestante porque no eran de nuestra religión y se admitía en sociedad al corredor de esclavos. Estamos en 1836. Los tiempos van cambiando mucho..."[3]

Romualdo invites comparison with Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab*. Though written nearly three decades apart, these two works share a common historical and geographical setting. *Sab* treats events of the 1830s from a contemporary perspective, while *Romualdo* is a late 1860s recreation of the state of affairs in 1836. Yet there is little resemblance between their fictional worlds. In many ways *Romualdo* serves as a counterpoint to *Sab*. For her part, Avellaneda divorced slavery from the real world in which it was practised. She painted a bright picture of peaceful coexistence between enslaved and enslaver. While this representation might have borne some relation to the pre-sugar boom period of Cuban slavery, it does not completely reflect the state of affairs in the 1830s when sugar production was at its highest and exploitation and abuse of slaves and their labour at their most brutal. In fact, by some accounts the slave experience in the area of Puerto Príncipe, the location of the action of both narratives, was one of Cuba's harshest. This is a reality to which Calcagno's story

appears to be far more attentive. While it does not make for complex character development, the *costumbrista* method allows the author to capture the complexity of slavery and its grim manifestations in the human, social, and economic spheres of the life of the period.

Calcagno has woven a storyline into what is essentially a documentary account of slavery. Documentary art, in its film or written version, typically provides information, often about a little known or hidden subject. It is, of course, not unusual for a political purpose to be coextensive with this educational intent. The documentary impulse in *Romualdo* manifests itself at various intervals in objective descriptions of the operations of the plantation system. Calcagno also carefully fosters the impression that the atrocities he is bringing to light are only the tip of a scandalous iceberg. Snapshots of the more infamous horrors of the slave experience are sprinkled throughout the story to remind the reader of the pervasiveness of the oppression and abuse. Explanations of estate jargon and descriptions of *realia* are included for the benefit of a presumably ignorant reader. Far from being neutral, the explanations are designed to demystify the language and discourse used to put a civilized gloss on savage practices. The author has left us with a perspective of slavery as engendering and sustaining a web of industries and occupations – whip manufacturers, slave hunters, slave traders – in addition to manual labourers on the estates. Instruments of torture are put on display as products of industry and described in terms of their manufacture and abstract use. But the writer's interest also goes beyond documentation of their inert properties to describe what these instruments signify in the practical and painful life experience of the individual slave.

Though it avoids the maudlin narrative of earlier productions, the story of *Romualdo* is not told through lifeless sociological discourse. The author adds emotive ingredients and puts a human touch to his protest, but sparingly, through brief digressions from the more dispassionate narrative of *costumbrista* realism. The tragedy of slavery as lived human experience presents most dramatically in the compassionate depiction of Romualdo's nerve-racking flight from the estate, his frantic efforts to save his daughter's life and the grief brought by her death. Here the author shows that the slaves, in the words of Rebecca Scott, could be treated worst than beasts, yet not become beasts (19). At the same time his general sympathy for the slaves does not blind the author to conflict in their internal relations. The threat perceived in Romualdo's status as a mulatto and a *habanero* places him between the rock of the overseer's hatred and the hard place of the resentment of his negroid companions on the plantation.

Although his opposition to slavery bears considerable resemblance to the posture assumed by Anselmo Suárez y Romero in *Francisco*, Calcagno's vision and message manifest differently, for he compels the reader to view the institution primarily through a socio-economic lens. In his way of seeing, one cannot and should not criticize slavery and its practitioners without condemning the society that breeds and feeds them. Slavery as a practice, though reprehensible, is engendered by social and cultural norms from which it can hardly be divorced. This message, alluded to in *Sab* and *Francisco*, becomes a dominant theme of *Romualdo*. The author returns to it again and again with an almost evangelical insistence.

Calcagno's concern with the problem of slavery centres equally on the detriment to the slave person and on the damage to the society's moral character. He imbues his judgements repeatedly with a Christian-humanist sense of slavery as a contravention of the teaching that all men are equal in the sight of God: "Queremos máquinas a los que Dios hace hombres" (299). As he sees it, violence against the

slave is normalized in a society that has become inured to cruelty, and, he observes wryly, the human capacity for adaptation is inexhaustible – "a todo se habitúa la máquina humana" (281). Through skilful *double entendre* he shows how material interests become the new measure of morality in slave society. Goodness loses its moral meaning in the sugar-plantation system; the overseer's worth is measured only by his ability to use violence to increase production. Economic ends justify brutal means.

But while condemning the illegal practices of slavery, Calcagno accepts the premise on which slave society is built:

> Los tiempos van cambiando mucho. Hoy el corredor de esclavos comienza a avergonzarse de su profesión. Y qué mucho si no ha de tardar el día en que nos avergoncemos también de ser amos. Por ahora no hay derecho de reprochar a nadie lo que todos practicamos. Lo que hay es el deber de ir alumbrando las inteligencias y rompiendo el velo de la preocupación para preparar el día de la justicia y de la honra. No hay delito en ser amo, sino en abusar de serlo (280).

Such support for the benign form of slavery is understandable; after all, Mosaic Law in the Judeo-Christian tradition permitted slavery. (Leviticus 25:44). The author vents his distaste instead on the ill-treatment of slaves and the corrupt practice of *plagio*. His last comment contains clear echoes of the gradualist approach to abolition embraced by some slave owners and many members of the Cuban intelligentsia of the period, and by the leaders of the revolution of the Ten Years War.[4] Taken to its logical conclusion, the argument recognizes, albeit halfheartedly, the need for, and inevitability of, eventual abolition. Change is in the air, the author seems to say, and slave owners too will (have to) change; but in their time. Cuban Creole support for gradual abolition, as Rebecca Scott points out, reflected both "a strategic acceptance of an eventual transition to free labor and a tactic to delay that transition" (40).[5] Calcagno voices this white Creole interest. Slavery is legal, not criminal; the need for reform is more urgent in the (illegal) practice of slave trading than in the (legal) practice of slave owning. Such uneven criticism points, nevertheless, to a nagging sense of slavery as a fundamentally immoral practice for which humanitarian treatment would not quite compensate. What is therefore needed in the meantime, Calcagno intimates, is a reconditioning of the minds of slave owners in conjunction with good treatment of the slave to maintain some measure of social peace.

Romualdo is built on a firm historical foundation, but what the author has produced is not a historical document. This work tells us as much about the author as it does about his subject. What he omits or implies elicits as much interest as what he expresses. In true *costumbrista* fashion an element of self-portrait is inseparable from his portrait of Cuban slave society. *Francisco* and *Sab* make use of a preface for the author's self-reflection. This strategy gives rise to the illusion of the author as separated by an arm's length from the work. Calcagno makes no such pretence of self-effacement; everything in the story points to a conflation of author and narrator. Not only does he intrude unmasked to deliver editorial asides and clarifications, but he does so self-reflexively, identifying himself as a slave owner through first-person plural narration. And indeed although the writer's family might not have been plantation owners, they, like the majority of the Cuban Creole elite at the time, would have owned slaves. Apart from his conscious self-identification, the author also unconsciously frames his own persona while constructing the identity of his characters. This self-portrait serves as a means of positive self-presentation, in the interest of which he repeatedly puts an ironic distance between his enlightened posture and the dominant perspective of the boorish slave trader and the

practitioners of a 'vulgar' form of slavery. His lack of self-righteousness, coupled with the candour of his criticism and self-criticism, beguiles the unsuspecting reader.

As urgent as his denunciation of the overt practices of slavery is the author's demonstration of a deeper and wider understanding of the nature and meaning of slave-owning power. Power in slave society, Calcagno proposes, resides in language; the holders of power – ("seres que *se titulan* civilizados" my emphasis, 249) use language to shape reality and to construct identities in a manner that ensures their supremacy over those they have subordinated ("seres que *llamamos* salvajes," my emphasis, 349). A power advantage permits, for example, the corrupt use of language to vary the definition of a crime to suit the race and social position of the victim. Euphemisms in the plantation vernacular which render the rape of a slave woman, as "un *desliz reproductor*" (281) or "a reproductive mishap" and a shipload of slaves as a "*cargamento de ebano*" (281) or a "load of ebony", are exposed for what they are: insidious naturalizing of horrific practices and flagrant whitewashing of vile abuse. The author magnifies to the point of parody the master's awesome power over the slave, deriding it through brilliant mimicry of the Old Testament God of the Ten Commandments: "el amo manda como padre, manda como madre, manda como juez, manda como ser supremo. Todos estos mandamientos se reúnen en dos palabras: señor absoluto" (299). It is an omnipotence that he demonstrates practically by pointing to the owners' exercise of control over the slaves' most elementary acts of will, such as their reproductive rights or the freedom to choose their own names.

By invoking these realities Calcagno displays his profound grasp of the psychopathology of slave subjugation in the plantation regime. The savage treatment of Romualdo, the proud slave, who refuses to be humiliated, is shown to be logically justified by the system of power relations: "la humildad es la virtud mayor que deseamos en un esclavo; mas ¿como fijar los ojos en un mulato que quería tener dignidad … y no pedir misericordia cuando era castigado? Eso fuera anacronismo"(367). With the succinct comment that "sugar is not produced with dignity and pride" (con dignidad y vergüenza no se hace azúcar (298) the author interprets the constant mortification of the slave, not as acts of gratuitous physical cruelty, but as a psychological ploy to reduce them to sugar-producing automatons. Pointing to such a neurotic obsession with psychological control betrays the shaky foundations sustaining slave-owner power. At the same time, the irony of these (under)statements serves to further the author's agenda of putting a safe distance between his own enlightened thinking and the dominant ideology.

According to one school of thought the greater its empirical basis, the less likely will be a text's effectiveness as literature. By putting a premium on fictional elements, such a normative view tends to inhibit consideration of the strategic design of works like *Romualdo* that do not live up to classical expectations. But the documentary mode is associated not only with notions of accuracy and veracity, but also with ideas about artistry. Calcagno has carefully crafted his story to achieve his ideological purposes, using various creative means. The very first sentence gives a hint of his narrative method: "Empezaremos por conducir al lector a la vieja villa de Guanabacoa, que allí en la calle de los Cocos, es donde podemos encontrar el tipo que aquí me propongo describir" (279). In addition to serving as a *costumbrista* flag, the *double entendre* of the Spanish word "tipo" which, neutrally speaking, means "type" but also has the derogatory meaning of "fellow," foreshadows the basic satirical strategy to which the author will have recourse in his portrayal of the slave trader. Also noteworthy in this opening of the story is

the fixing of the reader's position in relation to the author who presents himself as both mediator and guide, "leading" the reader into unknown territory and in the process controlling her or his response to what is revealed. Reader and author will retain these relative positions throughout the story.

Rather than rely on lurid descriptions that appeal to the emotions, Calcagno adopts the standardized language of commerce to provide a graphic understanding of the total dehumanization of the slaves. In fact, the signature of his narration is its dispassionate tone. The matter-of-factness of the subdued voice that recounts slave abuse intensifies the sense of horror, because of the muted suggestion that such horrors were normalized and taken for granted. Deadpan humour, satire, and biting irony serve to savage and stigmatize the objects of the author's disfavour. It is with mild amusement that he mocks, for example, the habit of referring to gray-haired slave masters as "niños" (304). Understatement quietly conveys horror when the narrator explains that in the old days "el hijo de mi esclavo, era mi esclavo, como el hijo de mi yegua es mi potro" (292). While distancing himself from this way of thinking, the author underlines the impregnable logic of the belief system that rationalizes and justifies the commodification of the slaves: "la voluntad del vendido no cuenta para nada. No hay voluntad en lo que es cosa" (284). He conveys, through irony, an awareness of the unimaginable inhumanity of the traffic in slaves by invoking, for example, mundane comparison – selling a slave is like selling a horse. And the criticism in such "simplifying" analogies is all the more powerful because of the dead-pan tone in which it is uttered.[6] Far from minimizing the atrocity, the coolness of the voice in such instances has the paradoxical effect of magnifying it.

Yet another strategy the author uses to drive home his perception of Cuba and other New World slave societies as modern anomalies is the comparison of their corrupt culture with the civilized mores of which European countries were held to be the benchmarks: "En Europa no se daría crédito a esta relación. En Cuba, o en cualquier otro país esclavista, no habrá quien nos tache de exagerados" (316). He cites, for example, the vicar of Wakefield, an emblematic priest in English literature, as the standard from which Cuban priests deviate. He invokes the difference between the conventional European usage of the term *plagio* to mean plagiarism – the more "innocuous" theft of ideas – and Cuba's application of the term to people theft. In short, the practice of slavery makes colony inferior to imperial centre.

In contrast to *Francisco* and *Sab*, which were written primarily for non-Cuban readers, *Romualdo* is a depiction of Cuba for Cuban consumption. Circulation of earlier antislavery narratives was essentially limited to members of the Del Monte literary circle and in some instances to British Commissioner, Richard Madden in the late 1830s.[7] Calcagno, writing three decades later, has a sense of a wider Cuban readership to whom he speaks directly and with an air of cosy familiarity. In the interest of effective persuasion he inscribes the reader into the text of his narrative, using a conversational tone to establish the desired rapport. He anticipates and answers questions and guides the reader away from those points of view he wishes to discredit and towards those that he favours.

Though he writes with Cuban readers in mind, Calcagno still assumes their ignorance of or, even worse, their willful blindness to slavery as lived experience. Unwilling to leave it to the vagaries of the individual imagination, he uses his authority to explain in detail: "Sabe el lector lo que es el cepo? El tormento de la inmovilidad, el torcedor de la inacción, el resumen de todas las angustias, la agonía continuada. Una hora, dos, un día, una semana, a veces un mes, en una posición,

sin moverse, unido al dolor intelectual el dolor corporal" (298). But he vacillates between this (feigned) assumption of ignorance and appealing to a reader who is no stranger to what is being described: "Bien sabe el lector que el corredor de negro es.... (pronto felizmente podremos decir era) es uno de los seres más dignos de supresión de la familia cubana." (280). He dares to imagine that his story will reach even the people against whom it is written. "Si mi lector es corredor de esclavos, negará lo que afirmamos, pero lo creerá *in pecto*" (280). By drawing the readers' attention so bluntly to the hidden face of slavery, he leaves the impression of one who assumes the duty of shaking his society out of its complacent acceptance of the nefarious practices of the institution.

Forever mindful of the socio-genetic nature of the problem of slavery, Calcagno implies a need for change in worldview as much as in laws and institutions. Nonetheless, this admission does not lead him to deny all individual responsibility. Rather, he also seems to lean towards Fanon's postcolonial view that, though formidable, the power of the system can be defied. These twin faces of his vision manifest in his characters. Although the drama of slavery offered a variety of actors, the constraints of short fiction forced Calcagno to be selective. His choices and omissions are instructive.

Jacobo, the man behind the illegal trade in slaves, is the author's primary target. Appropriately demonized, and in a turnabout of the African slave stereotype, he is referred to disparagingly as "that creature" (aquel ente), not fit to be labelled human – "nos duele llamarlo hombre"(280). The author is relentless in his satirical portrait of Jacobo. Adopting a tongue-in-cheek strategy, he sows the seeds of derision by investing the man, who, figuratively speaking, has sold his soul to the devil, with the pretentious title of "el señor don Jacobo Vendialma" (279). And as if the discrepancy between the pompous-sounding name and the character's ignominious occupation were not enough, he further diminishes him with a humorous taunt: Don Jacobo is "as short in stature as he is mean in spirit" (279). The indignation of which this character is repeatedly the object surpasses in intensity any sympathy that the story elicits for the slaves who are the slave trader's victims.

The author's antipathy towards Jacobo is inseparable from the virulence of his opposition to slave trafficking:

> Como el usurero, como el testigo falso, como los armadores de la trata y otros tunos del mismo jaez, el corredor de esclavos tiene el alma a la espalda y el corazón de piedra. Jacobito lo tenía de cieno. Los corazones de piedra son leones, los corazones de cieno son hienas; sólo así se comprende que un ser humano se dé a semejante ocupación (280).

High on the list of the slave trader's sin is his appalling lack of compunction, which makes him totally irredeemable (279). Even though he is acknowledged to be a creature and "blind instrument" of the system, the *negrero* is only partially exonerated, for he has refused a decent occupation befitting his social status – "albañil, carpintero, torcedor" - and freely chosen a disreputable one – "vender a sus semejantes" (280). If Jacobo is being condemned, even more so is slave society of which he is a product and which accepts his immorality. Time and again the author creates the impression of the illogical, topsy-turvy value system of a society which, for example, sees no conflict between the observance of religious practice and the practice of an inhumane form of slavery, or which bases social exclusion on religious and ethnic identity rather than on ethical conduct.

Individual traits of characters are hardly the focus of *costumbrista* literature. Such characters are typical rather than unique. Calcagno adheres to this practice selectively, for while he conveys the impression of the villainous slave trader

and overseer being typical examples, in portraying the priest and slave owner he resorts to indirection, portraying only obliquely the norms from which they deviate. His portrayal of the estate owner Don Juan Castaneiro is yet another example of the manipulation of the story to control what he considers important for the reader to both know and think. His representation is informed by both candour and subterfuge and takes on added significance when compared with the depiction of the slave trader. Calcagno makes a tacit distinction between Castaneiro, whose status as a master of slaves is his birthright, and Jacobo whose ignoble profession, as seen before, is a matter of choice. Indictment of Jacobo's selling of his fellow human beings for profit, makes very glaring the exception made for this and other slave owners who buy and use them for a similar purpose.[8] Like Avellaneda before him, who relegated the more brutal reality of slavery to the margins of her story of unrequited love, Calcagno surreptitiously leads the reader away from a direct view of the slave master and justifies his summarily painted portrait by declaring Castaneiro of only secondary importance to the story, and thus expendable. By anticipating and pre-empting the potential charge of bias, the author has effectively disarmed the reader. Castaneiro is talked about impersonally as a distant figure, shielded from the direct glare of *costumbrista* scrutiny. Furthermore, when he finally puts in a personal appearance he bears little resemblance to the Godlike slave master with boundless power described previously. Every attempt is made to mitigate any condemnation which he might appear to deserve.

Citing psychosocial reasons becomes part of the author's agenda of exonerating individual owners:

> muchas veces la culpa consiste más en el error de las instituciones que en la perversidad individual. Con facilidad transigimos con la conciencia, y aceptamos y nos perdonamos el mal, cuando lo vemos practicado por una colectividad... Por eso es preciso convenir en que el mal trato a los esclavos procede en algunas personas de hechos *inconscientes* a que los arrastra la costumbre inveterada (282, my emphasis).

Castaneiro's shortcomings, in Calcagno's view are therefore not idiosyncratic; they are defects of the institution of slavery, and common in the majority of planters. He sums up the entire syndrome in the classic declaration: "Había más crimen en su época que en su carácter" (367). Moreover, any misdeed of which Castanerio is guilty belongs to his rakish past, and his spontaneous reformation after his father's death prepares the way for his full exoneration in the end. To give the appearance of even-handed treatment he is created with some imperfections – (excessive) pride, authoritarianism, irritability and un-relenting demand for subservience – but the author seems to beat a hasty retreat from any outright condemnation this might suggest. As another manifestation of his will to deflect blame from the master, the author makes his truly evil white characters of a lowlier rank, associating sexual exploitation of the slave woman, for instance, only with the estate overseer. The thesis of the evils of slavery as being socially determined does not apply universally; it serves as an alibi for the slave master but it cannot completely wash away the sins of the slave trader. The possession of a moral conscience by Castaneiro, this "man of good faith," also stands in contrast to the slave trader with his "heart made of mud." There is a sense of innocence, ignorance even, that is imputed to, and excuses the former Don Juan. In a manner reminiscent of Sab's benevolent slave-owner father, Romualdo's father wants to assume his paternal responsibility for his mulatto son when he discovers his identity. Compared with the volume of energy he expends on excoriating the slave trader, Calcagno has given no more than a perfunctory slap on the wrist to the slave owner.

His obvious bias notwithstanding, Calcagno cannot be accused of being an uncritical defender of slave owners. Shared class identity does not amount to unqualified identification with his kind. One of his aims seems to be corrective – to create a different consciousness and to warn his peers about their mistaken assumptions about the slaves and the error of some of the practices of slavery. In a rare impassioned moment, he emphatically defends the slaves against their white detractors, albeit with a Eurocentric trace:

> Los blancos nos figuramos que los negros no aman, y separamos fácilmente la hija de la madre. ¡Error! Los negros sí aman, tal vez más salvajemente, pero más. El corazón humano siempre necesita amar algo…aman a su mujer, a veces; a su hijo, siempre (295).

He appears to lash out against those members of his group who by their inhumane treatment of slaves bring slavery as an institution into disrepute. Calcagno wishes to give the impression that he is liberal-minded without being self-righteous. He criticizes the institution without alienating his fellow slave owners, a stance which all but converges with the proslavery apologetic.

It is true to say that whether their dissent is firm or feeble, Cuban antislavery authors typically do not labour under the illusion that the slaves are happy with their condition. All take some account of their resistance, most frequently of the covert kind. But the image of controlled confrontation that recurs in these fictional works obscures the radical spirit of open rebellion displayed historically by many slaves from the very moment of their enslavement. Few fictional antislavery narratives of the period capture this spirit as dutifully as does *Romualdo*. With the shift in emphasis from victimhood to dramatic resistance in this story, the classic themes of other narratives are displaced. Rivalry for the female slave that is acted out between male slave and white overlord, for example, is relegated to the sidelines of the story. Similarly, the author's imagination refuses the ineffective and futile submissive-slave response, and admits only the varied expressions of resistance. The very conditions of slave oppression and exploitation, Calcagno is at pains to show, breed, not quiescence, but defiance. Thus he translates Francisco's psychological resistance and Sab's verbal defiance into action through slave characters he conceives of primarily as agents endowed with not only the ability to recognize their subjugation, but, more importantly, with the will to actively resist it. Though awesome, the enslaver's power over the enslaved is not absolute.

His representation of their acts of self-assertion counteracts the prevailing view of the slaves as mindless chattel. At every turn the author pictures resistance as the slaves' instinctive and unequivocal reply to abuse, from the slave woman who silently curses her rapist, to the slave coachman who reacts with anger to a whipping. Romualdo is a figure of the rebel slave inside the plantation. Though he is not given a voice or psychological depth, his recalcitrance is perennial. In fact, his dignified and unflinching endurance of ill-treatment is recognized for the defiance it signifies and earns him the hatred of both overseer and slave master. Romualdo's silently rebellious temper is not subdued by thirty years of enslavement; rather, it matures into open action when he escapes from the plantation. Moreover, slave suicide in Calcagno's story is an instinctive exercise of autonomy rather than the Romantic solution to despair it represents in the case of the broken-hearted Sab and Francisco. At the same time, although he displays an intellectual understanding of the religious significance of this suicide, and accords it legitimacy as a politically motivated act of resistance, the author cannot stretch his imagination to take seriously the efficacy of African spirituality. He appears

oblivious to the slaves' perception of suicide as escape through death from the hell of slavery to the paradise of freedom. But while he does not conceive of religion as a possible source of their liberation, neither does he, unlike Suárez before him, endorse an attitude of Christian martyrdom on the part of the slaves.

In the search for fictional slave rebels *Romualdo* has been largely overlooked in favour of Miguel Barnet's biography of the runaway slave, Esteban Montejo. Yet Calcagno could hardly have avoided taking marronage into serious account, given its pervasiveness in rural Cuba at the time that he wrote. Two famous slave-hunter perspectives of marronage have been provided by Pedro Morillas's *El ranchador* and Cirilo Villaverde's edition of Francisco Estévez's *Diario del rancheador*. *Romualdo* complements them by adding a slave-owner perspective. Romualdo is our first introduction to a maroon. Fierce-looking and eyes filled with hate, he is, nevertheless, not the typical fugitive. His fighting spirit dies with the death of his daughter. It is to the members of the original maroon community, that Calcagno turns instead for the expression of a more drastic form of slave resistance. This is also the realm in which the tension between the author's conflicting ideological impulses is most striking. The *costumbrista*-sketch format gives the work the appearance of structural fragmentation rather than cohesion; each sketch can virtually stand on its own. A similar lack of coherence is discernible in the structure of the author's ideas. Calcagno's resolve to display a consistent attitude is repeatedly threatened and sometimes thwarted by contradictory urges.

Romualdo and *Sab* present opposite ends of the spectrum of slave responses. In Avellaneda's novel the mulatto slave protagonist's desire for acceptance by Euro-Creole society assumes pre-eminence. The maroons in *Romualdo*, on the other hand, are shown as examples of the slaves' outright rejection of coexistence with their enslavers. The free will that is violated or denied in the commodified slave is powerfully expressed through the actions of Calcagno's maroons who flee the plantation, establish their own community, and fight their oppressors to the death. Adopting a posture akin to ethnographic surveillance, the author observes keenly the nuances in the human and social elements of the maroon scene. Surveillance, as theorized in postcolonial studies, is one strategy of imperial dominance, for it implies a viewer with an elevated vantage point from which to project a particular understanding of what is seen, and to fix the identity of the viewed (colonized subject) in relation to the surveyor (colonizer).[9] In one sense Calcagno's observation of the maroons and their lifestyle originates from such a position of superiority.

As his antislavery will struggles with an obstinate Negrophobia that clouds his perception of maroon identity the author cannot contain the revulsion evoked by these "hellish monsters" who are indistinguishable from an equally monstrous nature (350). The alliterative force of the language that describes the maroon leader distils the author's disgust: "era tan fríamente feroz su alma como feas y repugnantes todas sus facciones" (350). Josefa Lucumí, the female maroon, fares no better; she is identified as "horrible ejemplar de la hembra Africana" (350). These descriptions show no trace of the authorial distance noted elsewhere in his exposition of proslavery ideology. Rather, they rival and surpass the most grotesque images of black people commonly found in the early artistic tradition of Spain and other European countries: "como si fuera reptil monstruoso, se vio arrastrarse ... a un coloso negro de pelo rojizo.... Juan Bemba era un digno jefe para aquellos monstruos de la montaña" (372). Calcagno adopts a strategy of deliberate negative stereotyping in the physical description of the maroon leader whose

given name, Juan Bemba, recalls the *negro bembón* (blubber-lipped Negro) image associated with an earlier Iberian burlesque tradition. Close-up shots of individual maroons create the most hideous effects. The author's eye picks out their leader for sharp focus. Though deceptively neutral at times, ("nariz aplastada, labios gruesos, frente pequeña, cuello corto, dientes blanqísimos,") the adjectives used to describe him, also convey aesthetic prejudice with parodic malice: "Juan Bemba era un bello modelo de su raza; por lo tanto feo, si comparado con la circasiana" (355). The portrayal of these blacks as fearsome is an unmistakable projection of the morbid dread of a mythical "African barbarity" felt and propagated by colonial white society. Calcagno's perception of the maroons' Africa-derived culture mixes awe with contempt. He recognizes its uniqueness but is hard-pressed to hide his disdain for the difference that it represents, implying, in the process, his subscription to the notion of the civilizing benefits accruing to African slaves from their bondage. Thus, his unconscious Eurocentric bias has succeeded in sabotaging his conscious wish to present an enlightened self-image.

But there is more than racist prejudice in Calcagno's portrait, for his description of the maroons in their world seeks to correct the pernicious myths that demonized them. He constructs a different identity for these fugitives, showing them to be bound by common adversity despite national and ethnic differences, and challenging and reversing their official depiction as predators and threats to the social order. In positing an image of the group as harmless, beleaguered "savages" escaping from the "civilized," doing what they need to survive and defending their right to freedom, the author succeeds in making the white slave trader (*negrero*), slave hunter (*rancheador*) and bandit into types who by comparison represent a social menace. The revulsion the author feels for their physical appearance, the Eurocentric prejudice that colours his perception of their culture are not sufficient to render null and void his expression of admiration for the maroons' courage. His celebration of their recalcitrant spirit stands as no less potent a protest than his more direct denunciation of the slave trader and the overseer. Calcagno has captured in his group of fugitives the characteristic maroon spirit: defiant, freedom-loving, self-reliant, and preferring death over a life of bondage. Where the slave in other narratives has recourse to submission and accommodation, or see freedom as a gift, Juan Bemba and his band fight to maintain their autonomy. Ultimately, therefore, their indwelling spirit of defiance and their heroic struggle assume more positive significance as an antislavery statement than the pessimism that might be conveyed by their eventual defeat. Disgust describes the author's vision of both maroon leader and slave trader, but while the moral repulsion aroused by the latter is implacable, the frank admiration for the maroons' bravery takes some of the burlesque edge off his aversion to their physical appearance and cultural expressions.

His awareness of the signifying power of the language and discourse of representation also manifests itself in the author's naming of the maroons. He refrains from designating them mere "slaves," conferring on them instead the more politically appropriate status implied in names such as "africano," "apalencado," "negro," and "esclavo prófugo". In this context even the more controversial label of "salvajes," with its connotation of wild or untamed and uncivilized, translates into affirmation of their intransigent struggle for autonomy. A comparison of the author's unequivocal condemnation of the banditry of the white Juan Rivero, on the one hand, with his apparent support for the guerrilla-type maroon freedom-fighters, on the other, further strengthens the work's antislavery agenda.

The close-up shots used for individual portraits combine with longer shots of the maroons in the environment that they created for themselves. Carefully avoiding the temptation to collapse them into a single (stereo)type the author describes the mixed motivations of the members of the maroon village. These maroons, hunted so mercilessly as criminals, constitute a *society* of families with their distinct customs and cultural expressions (354). A community of diverse national constituencies, removed from the divisiveness of the plantation-slavery dynamic, maroon society fosters a counter-culture of collaboration. Romualdo who is hated by the black estate slaves because of his colour (and presumed affiliation to the white world) is received reticently and coldly by the maroons at first, but is later treated with compassion and integrated into the group. As a community and in their consciousness these maroons are the answer to their lone-wolf counterpart Esteban Montejo, memorialized in Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón.*

Calcagno's maroons are not rebels without a political cause. Their uncompromising demand for their autonomy summarizes the conscious grounding of their stance in an ideology of resistance:

> Que no querían más funche, ni más mayoral, ni más cuero, ni más esclavitud: que querían morir allí antes que volver al ingenio; que los dejaran quietos en las sierras; y que se les diera la erial llanura inmediata, donde vivirían sembrando viandas y sin meterse con nadie (373).

And Isidoro, the Creolized maroon, in anticipation of Afro-Cuban nationalism, loves Cuba but hates the humiliation of slavery.

Focussing on the maroons also affords the author an alternative mode for the expression of his antislavery views. Whereas he previously relied on denunciation of the slave trader, affirmation becomes the dominant idiom in the maroon episode. When, for example, the narrator characterizes their attempt to defend themselves as an act of "madness," he intends it not as a negative judgment, but as a remark on the incredible courage of these rebels, even in defiance of the dictates of prudence. Further eroding the ideological foundations of slavery, Calcagno links the maroons to a pre-slavery past. He pictures the *palenque* (maroon commune) both as an emblem of resistance and as a site for the preservation of an African identity, "una especie de pequeña Africa, (353). His depiction also provides a first glimpse of the process of cultural interchange that Fernando Ortiz would latter define as transculturation. In the maroon settlement Calcagno perceives the effect of the African influence on the process of creating a Cuban cultural identity. By casting them in the role of agents of cultural transformation, the author has generated an alternative to the image of African slaves as inert objects of Eurocentric acculturation – the civilizing of the savage – which was one of the main arguments used to justify slavery. That it is a white Creole of the dominant class who is already imputing this cultural agency to the slaves in the nineteenth century is not insignificant.

In *Romualdo* the maroon centre represents the main, but not the only, site of resistance against slavery. Calcagno is mindful of the white contribution to the struggle against the enslavement of Africans and their descendants. Priests, like slave traders, are rarely featured in the narrative of this period, perhaps because of what Franklin Knight and others recognize as the Church's ineffectiveness and loss of influence during the period of Cuba's sugar boom. For the portrait of his priest of Magarabomba Calcagno uses an economical approach conceiving him, in reverse *costumbrista* fashion, as the exception that proves the rule. Though the author alludes to the norm of clerical complicity in the abuses of slavery, this

village priest represents the minority of whites who put "good Christian principles" into practice. Not only does the priest denounce abuse of the slaves, but he acts in pursuit of justice for the wrongly enslaved. Testimony to his subversive role is the fact that he is regarded as a threat by the slavery establishment. As chief and most outspoken defender of the slaves among the characters, he is endowed with insight into the mechanisms of slave oppression. Of Romualdo's dilemma the priest has this to say, "se le odia porque es inteligente, porque piensa. Un esclavo que piensa es juez mudo que acusa y condena el crimen social" (337). Moreover, the priest is recruited by the author to help heap ridicule on slave society's racist prejudice and to bring about the slave master's eventual conversion. The priest's success in this regard is one sign of the author's optimistic projection of hope at the same time that the novella puts to rest the myth that the influence of the Catholic Church made slavery in the Spanish empire less harsh.

Although the author's voice is dominant, the entire story is not narrated as a monologue. Towards the end the voices of the slave trader and the priest come to the fore. Each articulates an antislavery message but with differing intent and consequence. The subversive rhetoric of Jacobo, who poses as a champion of the maroons, comes across as specious and hollow and is an oblique indictment of the hypocritical voices raised against slavery in the real world. It recalls the treachery of his Biblical namesake who stole his brother Esau's blessing by deceiving Isaac, his father. In like fashion, Jacobo, the imposter, brings about the demise of the maroons by betraying them to the slave hunters at the end of the story. As the author's alter ego, on the other hand, the priest plays an oratorical role similar to Sab in Avellaneda's novel. Slave masters, he believes, are guilty of dereliction of duty in not giving slaves a Christian education, thereby, it may be inferred, denying them a source of strength to bear their condition. His choice for this role is not fortuitous, for religious faith is one of the author's prescriptions for the travails of the slaves (295, 299). By giving this instrumental role to the priest as mediator between the enslaved and the enslaver the author signals his belief in the efficacy of moral suasion rather than force as an instrument of change. The successful revolution he envisages will come not from slave rebellion but from the goodwill of white society, in this case the enlightened priest and the reformed slave-owner. At the end, even though Romualdo dies, what matters is that his father recognizes him as his son. In the redemption and reformation of the slave owner, Calcagno implies, lies the path to a willing acceptance of the slave-descended person as part of the Cuban family.

To do justice to *Romualdo*, our understanding must take equal account of its positive achievements and its contradictions. An allegorical reading of the story's denouement is tempting. In spite of the author's prior declaration of the relatively unimportant role of Castaneiro the slave master, his survival at the end of the story proves the contrary. The slave master survives because of his perceived innate capacity for moral reform, already demonstrated by his renouncing of the evil ways of his youth. The slave trader, on the other hand, is eligible for no such redemption. He dies at the hands of the rebel slave, as well he should, it is implied, because he represents that incurable malignancy that must be excised from the body politic. After all, the author-narrator had already willed his elimination at the start of his tale, labelling him as "uno de los seres más dignos de supresión de la familia cubana (280). Don Jacobo Vendialma has served his purpose as scapegoat for the sins of the slave-owning elite. In the case of the slave master, however, although his repentance guarantees his survival, still he must pay the penalty demanded by poetic

justice. Romualdo's death frustrates the father's desire to make amends. He must suffer the anguish of knowing that he had been complicit in the abuse and ultimate death of his own son. Romualdo's death also serves as a veiled warning, for he is, in the words of the priest, the endangered symbol of a possible rapprochement between whites and blacks (376).

From a Black Nationalist standpoint Calcagno's account poses an interesting paradox, for it is both an anathema in its Negrophobia and a monument to the heroism of the African slaves who fought against their oppressors. The story takes on a dramatically charged tempo in the final episode, rising to a near-epic climax in the showdown between the maroons and their white adversaries. In his heroic last stand Juan Bemba comes to represent fearlessness rather than a fearsome savagery. Like the warrior-protagonists of epic literature, the maroons sacrifice their lives in a fight for freedom. So this story does not end with the feeling of despair remaining at the end of the earlier narratives with an antislavery theme, for the maroons are not honourably outdone but cravenly betrayed. Their demise itself might be a concession to the awesome power of their oppressors, but their heroism mitigates the potentially tragic meaning of their deaths. The author acknowledges slave resistance as warranted and worthy of admiration, even where it is futile.

Calcagno's ambivalence may be usefully understood in the light of the tension between conflicting impulses which Mikhail Bakhtin perceives at the heart of virtually all aspects of the human experience, including language and ideology. Bakhtin theorizes that a centripetal tendency towards coherence and unity must always contend with a centrifugal movement in the opposite direction of disunity and dispersion (271-3). The confluence of aversion and admiration in Calcagno's attitude, his wavering between empathetic involvement and detached voyeurism, are the evidence of this syndrome. If this work is outstanding for its antiblack fear-mongering, it is, paradoxically, just as remarkable for the antislavery resonance of its defence of *marronage*. The one cannot be acknowledged without the other.

Calcagno's vision of slave resistance is, arguably, the most significant aspect of the antislavery purpose of *Romualdo* and a reflection of a liberalism that was not alien to his class during this period. As Caribbean historian Gordon Lewis reminds us, in their struggle for independence the emergent Cuban bourgeoisie embraced the liberal philosophies of their European counterparts, adding racist prejudice to their class-based bias (159). The racism that compromises Calcagno's antislavery efforts might appear to be no different from the racism of the advocates of slavery. What the preceding analysis of *Romualdo* has shown, however, are the inflections in his representation that stand in the way of a complete equation of the two. It is possible to decry Calcagno's Eurocentric leaning while recognizing the value, however minimal or unwitting, to be found in his critical perspective. Writing more than a century after him, Gordon Lewis places Cuba's antislavery novel and its "morally inspired social analysis critical of the slavery institution" in the same politically subversive category as *marronage*, which posed a challenge to the sovereignty of the emerging European nation-state (236). That Calcagno's view from the centre of the colonial scene coincides with Lewis's postcolonial perspective is telling. For if he is attentive to the power of language as an instrument of slavery, the author of *Romualdo* is no less conscious of the subversive power of the language available to him as a writer – the power to speak out against social iniquity. Hence he includes among the evildoers, not only those who commit atrocities, but also those who do not condemn them. "Silence," the author concludes, "is also

criminal" – "el silencio también es crimen" (325).

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Notes

[1]The research for this essay was supported by a Fellowship awarded by the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus.

[2]Domingo del Monte was the famous patron of the literary arts in Cuba during the nineteenth century. He hosted a regular gathering of liberal writers and thinkers which fomented the production of various narratives on the antislavery theme.

[3]Francisco Calcagno, *Romualdo, uno de tantos* in *Noveletas cubanas,* (1864): (Havana: Editorial de Arte y Literatura, 1977): 280. Subsequent references will be indicated in the text by page numbers).

[4]For a full discussion of this period in the history of Cuban slavery see Rebecca Scott and Franklin Knight.

[5]Rebecca Scott points out this ambivalence displayed by Cuban reformers in an 1866 meeting of delegates from the colonies and the Spanish government: "In theory, they believed in the eventual extinction of slavery, and in theory they also believed in the superiority of free labor. But they insisted that, for the moment, slavery had to be sustained to prevent the collapse of the sugar industry… On slavery itself, the furthest they could go was to support a very "gradual" emancipation" (39-40).

[6]Abundant newspaper advertisements from the period attest to this lack of distinction between dumb animal and black slave. Donkeys and slaves were put up for sale as a single package and the exchange of a slave for an animal was not an unusual offer.

[7]Richard Madden was commissioner of the Mixed Court established by treaty between British and Spanish governments in 1817 and designed to enforce the decision to put an end to the Cuban slave trade.

[8]Scott also explains the hidden agenda in this ambivalence in the following manner: "Cuban reformers did support … repression of the slave trade, for the contraband trade appeared to them as a weapon of Spanish merchants against Cuban planters, and the influx of Africans seemed a threat to the racial balance of the island" (39).

[9]For more on this concept see Ashcroft et al. pp. 226-228.

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ESCAVAÇÕES NA LÍNGUA E NA CULTURA

Prisca Agustoni de Almeida Pereira[1]

A organização econômica das sociedades coloniais, estruturada através do sistema da plantação – considerada o paradigma do funcionamento da multiplicidade de atitudes culturais e o ponto inicial que fundamenta uma série de valores tidos como inerentes às sociedades mencionadas, tem provocado repercussões estéticas tais como as evidenciadas por Benítez Rojo, no tocante ao Caribe, no livro *La isla que se repite*, ou Edouard Glissant, quando se refere ao surgimento do "grito poético" (GLISSANT, 2005, p.43), repercussões estas que interferem no ritmo e na dicção poética ou narrativa dos escritores pertencentes a essas sociedades, tais como o próprio Édouard Glissant, Derek Walcott, Dany Laferrière, entre outros.

Aproveitando esse tipo de aproximação entre a estrutura sócio-econômica e a produção cultural de determinado pais, queremos propor, por meio desse trabalho, é um contraponto à tendência estética ligada à *plantation* considerando, para tanto, a atividade da *mineração* como uma possível metáfora, entre outras, do processo de criação literária[i]. Trata-se de uma categoria que, como suporte teórico, nos permite interpretar a prática de "garimpagem" do texto e da linguagem evidenciadas nas poéticas do angolano Ruy Duarte de Carvalho e do brasileiro Edimilson de Almeida Pereira. Ou seja, a metáfora da mineração representa a idéia da busca realizada a partir de um discurso fundamentado pela escassez, uma busca, em termos estéticos (ou de uma poética da garimpagem), que tanto Carvalho quanto Pereira têm realizado por meio de diferentes estratégias inscritas nos textos; estratégias que lhes conferem um ritmo específico, o da procura, "que oscila entre a historia e o mito" (BENÍTEZ ROJO, 1998, p. 395), ou seja, um ritmo híbrido, entrecortado, que não se rende totalmente à linearidade da história nem à circularidade do mito.

Conforme assinala Aires da Mata Machada Filho (1985, p. 34), a lógica de mundo dos garimpeiros está pautada nesse fluxo da sorte, ou melhor: "a escassez ou abundância do diamante marca o fluxo e refluxo da existência". Como conseqüência disso, podemos dizer que essa tensão entre a exuberância, por um lado, e a escassez por outro, deixou suas marcas simbólicas nas práticas culturais decorrentes desse universo. Aplicando tal leitura às ambigüidades do texto literário, isso remete à idéia da escavação no interior da linguagem, para transformá-la em manifestação de uma tensão, quanto à idéia da reapropriação ou reinvenção da cultura, uma vez que Ruy Duarte e Edimilson Pereira se servem destas modalidades criativas para escrever uma obra poética que apresenta numerosas possibilidades de incursão em seu interior. Incursões, na maioria das vezes, sobrepostas, simultâneas, labirínticas, que multiplicam as perspectivas e os olhares acerca de questões relacionadas à identidade.

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modalidades criativas para escrever uma obra poética que apresenta numerosas possibilidades de incursão em seu interior. Incursões, na maioria das vezes, sobrepostas, simultâneas, labirínticas, que multiplicam as perspectivas e os olhares acerca de questões relacionadas à identidade.

Nessa direção, tentaremos, a seguir, mostrar como as obras dos dois poetas tornam-se emblemas de um trabalho criativo sustentado pela capacidade de "escavar" - no sentido de cavar seguindo diferentes e imprevisíveis pistas – e de "ordenar" as palavras de maneira a gerarem camadas de significados postos uns sobre os outros, uns dentro dos outros. Esse procedimento de encaixar as camadas de significados é particularmente evidente na obra do poeta angolano e do brasileiro, uma vez que os dois desenvolvem uma estética do encaixe, na medida em que o diálogo que travam com a cultura popular – paradigma de uma lógica de mundo estruturada como um palimpsesto – ata e desata os nós com a própria cultura e o próprio tempo.

A propósito dessa questão, analisada na obra de Edimilson Pereira, o poeta e crítico Sebastião Uchoa Leite sinalizou o fato de que "poder-se-ia dizer que sua poesia tem caráter antropológico, mas não no sentido superficial de uma poesia temática e sim no sentido vertical que incorpora o ponto de vista nuclear do ser humano como centro de suas preocupações" (*apud* PEREIRA, 2003a, p. 13). Por seu turno, a professora Enilce Albergaria Rocha observa que a voz poética em

> *As coisas arcas* embrenha-se pelas trilhas e ravinas da terra – lugar do sagrado das Minas Gerais, à espreita e à escuta dos tambores e ritos do presente que perenemente ressignificam os gestos e signos, pois é na linguagem, e graças a ela, que a tradição se renova, se reatualiza e se mantém viva. Nesse sentido, *As coisas arcas* desvenda fragmentos do relicário negado, destruído ou ocultado pela sociedade mineira e brasileira, mesmo se lavrado na memória de arquivos históricos. (2003d, p. 4)

Essa idéia do "relicário negado" constitui o fio fundamental que percorre os volumes inseridos na reunião intitulada *As coisas arcas: obra poética 4* e, de modo particular, torna-se o elo entre os poemas do livro *Sete selado*, que traz em sua abertura uma epígrafe enigmática, extraída dos cantos de vissungo registrados na região mineira de São João da Chapada. A epígrafe, citada abaixo, remete a um contexto histórico determinado, mas não delimita o campo de leitura apenas à interpretação histórica, pois, como podemos observar, ela aponta também para outros campos semânticos que interferem na composição do universo poético de Edimilson Pereira, ou seja, a oralidade e a estética barroca do "mundo encaixado", no qual as coisas, as palavras e os significados estão embutidos uns nos outros, à maneira das sete bonequinhas russas que se encaixam, uma contendo em si a outra, que por sua vez contém a outra, etc. Esse vem a ser um dos sentidos atribuíveis às "coisas arcas", ou seja, a idéia de um mundo contendo outros mundos possíveis:

> SOLO
> Jambá tuca rirá ô quê
>
> CORO
> Jambá catussira rossequê
>
> SOLO
> Rio, rio
>
> O menino grita para o pai que encontrou
> um diamante; este responde que o esconda
> no cascalho e – Silêncio!
> (PEREIRA, 2003d, p.1)

A epígrafe se articula, de acordo com a tensão barroca, entre aquilo que é visível e aquilo que é sonegado, entre aquilo que é dito e aquilo que permanece não dito. Enquanto os mineradores eram vigiados, tecia-se uma resistência através daquilo

que silenciavam, os diamantes escondidos, os achados-perdidos. O autor lança sua lente sobre essa sonegação, construindo sua fala a partir dela e do silêncio onde se escondem "os cantos da sala virados pelo avesso" e onde, por meio dessa travessia na linguagem, "o que se acumulou (ou escondeu) volta a se oferecer" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p.144). É importante ressaltar esse aspecto porque ele compõe a moldura e o ancoradouro cultural do livro *Sete selado*, no qual as coisas aparecem "expostas", porém, "seladas", cifradas e em permanente estado de tensão entre a visibilidade e a invisibilidade. Essa tensão passa do conteúdo para a forma, para enraizar-se numa poesia que, de acordo com Rita Chaves, "sem poder ignorar a desordem das coisas, assume a inquietude como uma forma de estar e exercita o papel de semear interrogações e cultivar perplexidades" (*apud* PEREIRA, 2003d, p.17).

É sintomático, nesse sentido, que o livro se abra com o poema "Senha" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p.143), como se fosse preciso ter um código de entrada que permitisse o desvendamento do universo. No entanto, nada nos é dado de mão beijada, pois, inclusive coisas comuns têm inscrições enigmáticas, na medida em que o poema exibe "movimentos que objetivam descamar objetos, mobilizando a memória na decifração de coisas e gentes" (CHAVES *apud* PEREIRA, 2003d, p. 19), como é o caso dos tecidos que são "bordados em nós / mais que em si mesmos" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p. 143).

Compreende-se, por meio do *incipit* do livro, que o autor condensa em imagens as contradições, os paradoxos da realidade, de maneira a gerar uma mediação entre a linearidade do cotidiano e o estranhamento da representação literária, que diz respeito ao mundo do qual se está falando, onde tudo é uma coisa e outra também, como demonstram os seguintes versos do poema "Sítio":

> Na chácara moramos, os outros em nós/ [...]
> Os cômodos prosseguem com
> menos coisas e mais enredos. A falta de uma
> peça rende mil conversas
> (PEREIRA, 2003d, p.164)

No universo aqui representado, a precariedade material é suprida pela abundância da fala e adquire um novo sentido em função dos desdobramentos que ocorrem nos signos da linguagem, neste caso, da oralidade. Esse poema expressa o paradoxo característico com o qual trabalha Edimilson Pereira ao longo do livro, ou seja, não obstante o título evocar a noção de propriedade, de bem material ("sítio"), de espaço geográfico delimitado, o poeta inverte a lógica ao falar da escassez, da decadência material, pois, como lemos no poema, se "os cômodos prosseguem com menos coisas", ao mesmo tempo indica-se que "nesta chácara morou Antônio Francisco, / a lepra morando nele" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p.164). Isso quer dizer que a degradação (material e física) invade pelas fissuras invisíveis, come de dentro para fora, enquanto se dá a construção de algo que perdura em outras incisões. Podemos falar, a esse respeito, de uma "metafísica da escassez", na qual a linguagem sublima os hiatos da vida real.

Em vista disso, o poeta se vale com freqüência de binômios opostos (imobilidade *versus* movimento, escassez *versus* abundância), de paradoxos, de oxímoros e do *non-sense* para provocar um estranhamento que rompe a representação linear. O absurdo, nessa perspectiva, passa a fazer parte da realidade, na tentativa de se dar conta dos elementos estranhos que, embora inexplicáveis, se encontram dentro da vida das pessoas. Contudo, a maior erosão operada pelo poeta se situa no interior da linguagem, uma vez que ele deixa permanentemente em aberto o campo de significação das palavras, que se movimentam no texto de acordo com as diferentes leituras que incidem sobre elas ("palavras esperando / se tire delas o insólito" [PEREIRA, 2003d, p.177]). A

maleabilidade dos signos, uma das marcas da poesia do autor, dialoga com suas pesquisas de campo no interior de Minas Gerais, desenvolvidas ao longo de duas décadas, nas quais o autor, em parceria com a professora Núbia Pereira de M. Gomes, coletou informações sobre manifestações do sagrado, tais como o Congado, a Folia de Reis, os mitos serpentários e as benzeções, analisadas em diversos livros.

Em vista da duração e da intensidade dessas pesquisas de campo, compreende-se que as informações coletadas, além de influenciarem a poesia do autor, apareçam também nos textos poéticos como agentes fundadores de uma cosmogonia pessoal, retrabalhada e ressignificada a partir das experimentações da linguagem. O livro *Árvore dos Arturos & outros poemas*, publicado em 1988, é o melhor exemplo dessa intersecção entre o corpo vivido e o corpo ressignificado, entre a experiência na carne e a experiência na linguagem, já que o autor propõe poemas inspirados na convivência com a comunidade dos Arturos, em Contagem, em razão da pesquisa que originou o livro de ensaios *Negra raízes mineiras: os Arturos*, também de 1988. Como afirma o poeta numa entrevista,

> as viagens no interior de Minas Gerais mudaram minha poesia, porque abriram caminhos lingüísticos e ricas representações culturais para mim [...] A paisagem humana está freqüentemente revelada através dos nomes das pessoas [...] Crio uma metalinguagem como uma maneira para encarar meu trabalho e os fatos sócio-culturais que discuto nele [...] Na especificidade de Minas está o meu caminho para atingir o universal como ser humano e como artista. (*apud* WHITE, 1996, p. 50)

Percorrendo os livros de ensaios publicados em co-autoria com Núbia Pereira de M. Gomes, tem-se a impressão de que eles contêm as chaves que nos permitem abrir (e entender) as arcas seladas nos versos do autor. O livro *Mundo encaixado: significação da cultura popular*, publicado em 1992, por exemplo, traz como epígrafe um depoimento recolhido na cidade de Guaraciaba, no interior de Minas, e revela uma visão de mundo estruturada e dinâmica:

> Ah, dona, tudo nesse mundo de Deus tem explicação, tudo é uma coisa só, com outras coisa dentro. Eu falo que é encaixado igual telhado, a ponta de uma telha juntano na outra. Se quisé consertá goteira, tem que trocá no mesmo jeitim: se as telhas do remendo fô maior, ou menor, tem até que desmanchá um pedaço grande, pra dá encaixe. O mundo é encaixado, tudo certim.

Podemos nos recordar desse depoimento ao lermos estes versos de "Escariações", título que sugere, uma vez mais, as idéias de alargamento e de incisão dos signos: "Fila de casas / com orgulhos enfileirados./ Uma ordem dentro da outra./ Quartos, metade quartos" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p.180). Esse recorte do universo poético de Edimilson Pereira, povoado por coisas dentro de outras coisas, por "recados atrás de calendário" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p. 181), por sulcos abertos "sob o retrato" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p.180) decorre da maneira como a cultura popular decifra o espaço, o tempo, a vida e a morte, enfim, os elementos que fundamentam uma certa filosofia de vida, e compõem os traços gerais de uma determinada ordem cultural, a qual confere, nos textos literários, mobilidade aos signos (semânticos e lingüísticos) que não se cristalizam num significado único, mas que circulam nas entrelinhas do texto.

A esse respeito, vale evocar a leveza com que as palavras atualizam o passado e vislumbram o futuro, apesar de estarem carregadas de presságios e de rituais sagrados que as vinculam a um lugar e a um tempo presente. Cada palavra, ao fazer isso, cumpre a tarefa de se desdobrar, como um buquê, em muitas outras, pronunciadas ou não. Trata-se de uma economia lingüística que, se por um lado preza a contenção, a precisão, a idéia da

misura, por outro lado, se movimenta em silêncio e multiplica suas referências e significações, não pertencendo apenas a coordenadas específicas (Minas), mas abrindo-se para significados mais amplos.

Para ilustrar esses elementos, e a maneira como se explicitam no texto de criação, escolhemos os seguintes fragmentos: "para exibir a sete chaves o invisível só / mesmo a arca e a família que nos habita" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p.157); "Vem da umidade / a enumeração dos nomes" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p. 156). Pensamos ser pertinente, na leitura dos versos referidos, remeter aos conceitos de raiz e rizoma que Deleuze e Guattari propuseram a partir da classificação botânica das raízes. Em nosso caso, isso se torna relevante pois, de acordo com Deleuze e Guattari, "um rizoma não cessaria de conectar cadeias semióticas" e, além disso,

> Um rizoma não começa nem conclui, ele se encontra sempre no meio, entre as coisas, inter-ser, intermezzo. A árvore é filiação, mas o rizoma é aliança, unicamente aliança. A árvore impõe o verbo 'ser', mas o rizoma tem como tecido a conjunção "e...e....e....". Há nesta conjunção força suficiente para sacudir e desenraizar o verbo ser. (1995, p. 11-37)

Como podemos notar, esse pensamento perpassa a cultura popular. Essa linha de pensamento aparece nos versos do poeta, mesmo que de forma disfarçada, quando ele nos fala de raiz (o signo) com suas múltiplas florações. Pensamos também que a teoria da arbitrariedade do signo de Saussure encontra-se implícita na visão de mundo proposta pela poesia de Edimilson de Almeida Pereira, para quem o signo não diz apenas aquilo que lhe é conferido por atribuição e por código, mas é deslizante, foge das cristalizações e procura a subversão da linguagem, dialogando com diferentes registros lingüísticos: do popular ao erudito, do coloquial ao arcaico. Em suma, essa tendência poética de Pereira incorpora uma multiplicidade de fatores culturais, sociais, históricos, étnicos e éticos, à maneira de um rizoma.

É válido observar como esse tipo de discurso multifacetado aflora quando o que está em jogo é a abordagem da questão relativa à identidade do sujeito, como revelam as palavras de Stuart Hall: "A identidade torna-se uma 'celebração móvel': formada e transformada continuamente em relação às formas pelas quais somos representados ou interpelados nos sistemas culturais que nos rodeiam" (2002, p.13). De maneira semelhante se porta o signo, rebelde, desassossegado, como um camaleão disfarçado nos versos do autor, como demonstram os seguintes fragmentos: "a noite/ engorda signos, o pai / a altura do filho" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p.153); "O manuscrito/ se imprime e circula" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p. 149); "Passando de casa em casa,/ de um parente a outro atinge a inércia de /jamais ancorar. Embora seja esse o plural/ da vida, alguma raiz reclama seus gumes" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p. 157).

Pensamos que, no caso de Edimilson de Almeida Pereira e dessa sua vertente poética específica, trata-se do emprego de uma palavra que busca a concisão e, ao mesmo tempo, expõe a flexibilidade da cultura popular, a palavra que nasce no contexto da Folia de Reis, do Congado, das benzeções e que, a partir desse contexto, opera a desconstrução no interior do discurso poético e, de certa forma, no interior do universo estético do leitor que desconhece, ou conhece em parte, esses elementos culturais. Essa estratégia exprime, do ponto de vista do eu poético, a tentativa de inserir uma dinâmica de substituição, troca, mistura e transformação dos códigos situados no limite entre a flexibilidade da oralidade e a rigidez da língua padrão, de maneira a que os códigos da oralidade e da escrita se afetem um ao outro, mutuamente.

Em vista disso, cabe salientar que o aprendizado obtido ao lado das comunidades do interior de Minas associou-se ao processo criativo do poeta, para quem "o trato com o sagrado

ensinou-nos a multiplicidade de significações contidas em um gesto ou em uma palavra" (GOMES & PEREIRA, 1988, p.15). A partir disso, é pertinente o fato de lermos em seus versos que "gestos são metáforas" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p.146), "linguagem são golpes, ainda que a fragilizem as falhas / da comunicação" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p.172), "os tecidos de suas / barcas, alvejados, viram história" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p.183). Sob esse aspecto, a densidade que cada palavra assume no interior dos poemas decorre do fato de o poeta ser um aprendiz da palavra sagrada, que possui suas fórmulas indecifráveis e que exige dos interessados um percurso de iniciação, do mesmo modo como sucede aos que conservam, ainda hoje, a memória dos vissungos, assim como comentamos no início do trabalho.

A poética de Edimilson Pereira, no entanto, não está voltada apenas para a busca dos sentidos imutáveis do sagrado, já que o poeta, uma vez aprendidos os códigos da iniciação, os transforma em signos deslizantes que dialogam com outros signos, decorrentes de contextos disfarçados, deslocando-os, portanto, do lugar "raiz" do sagrado para que circulem nos espaços rizomáticos da cultura. Assim como recitam os versos de "Escariações" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p. 180), essa estética se serve da astúcia que "abre sulcos sob o retrato", num movimento de escavação que remete novamente à idéia da mineração. Como observa a professora Rita Chaves, "ao atravessarmos suas páginas vamos nos deparando com movimentos que objetivam descamar objetos, mobilizando a memória na decifração de coisas e gentes. O processo é o da escavação, referenciando a urgência de uma descida a espaços ainda não explorados" (*apud* PEREIRA, 2003d, p. 19).

Por sua vez, Maria José Somerlate Barbosa descreveu com sutileza essa superposição de camadas e afirmou que

> a produção poética de Edimilson imprime estratégias de uma linguagem reinventada na qual vai-se descortinando um palimpsesto cultural. Se a sua poesia apresenta a heterogeneidade de momentos históricos e representa práticas culturais de origem africana em Minas Gerais, também oferece uma investigação lingüística e uma estética apurada. (FIGUEIREDO & FONSECA, 2002, p. 187)

De volta à poesia de Edimilson Pereira, observamos que a idéia do palimpsesto, no seu sentido de rasura, borrão e superposição de camadas, está presente de forma explícita em poemas como "Insurrectos", no qual se lê:

> Espátulas tiram camadas de pinturas, umas sobre
> outras dizendo e calando coisas. O que machuca as pare-
> des não é o tempo, mas os exílios.
>
> Raspa-se a história, aqui e ali se movem cavalos. Uma
> negativa ao templo. Uma vida dentro, outra entre
> macerações. Raspa-se o pathos.
>
> Este e outros deuses respiram livres da cadeia de
> cores. De agora em diante, as leituras serão mudadas. O
> mudo léxico rasurou o que estava impresso.
>
> Raspa-se o cárcere. Efes e erres. A concha-índice da
> era em que tivemos rêmoras. Raspa-se, pois há códigos
> que não se abrem aos instrumentos rápidos.
> (PEREIRA, 2003d, p.190)

O poema remete ao universo sócio-político de Minas, terra da Inconfidência, mas também terra na qual os escravos tramaram numerosas insurreições durante o século XVIII. Embora não haja referências explícitas à experiência dos afrodescendentes, a temática do poema é a da superposição de camadas de pinturas nas igrejas coloniais, cujas presenças revelam os legados que os escravos, na maioria das vezes, registravam,

clandestinamente, sob a camada de pintura oficial[2]. Talvez, por isso, o poeta evoque a idéia de "dizer e calar coisas", uma vez que atrás da pintura exposta foram encontradas outras pinturas, signos e interrogações deixados a amadurecer ao longo do tempo. No poema, o movimento de raspagem não se refere apenas ao ato de raspar a parede; há, isto sim, outro movimento subentendido, que consiste na raspagem da história, como se escavando o passado pudéssemos descobrir novas perspectivas que mudam não só a interpretação dos fatos ocorridos, mas também dos fatos do presente ("de agora em diante as leituras serão mudadas"). Estes signos, depositados no tempo, são como uma escrita cuja decifração é trabalhosa, demorada, pois, como lemos no último verso, "há códigos que não se abrem aos instrumentos rápidos".

Na realidade, não somente aquilo que é relatado no poema se refere ao palimpsesto, mas o próprio texto se constrói a partir dessa estrutura, pois escava significados nos meandros e no esplendor barroco de Minas Gerais, que encanta, mas que nem por isso deixa de inquietar e de acenar para as facetas obscuras da história: "raspa-se a história [...] Uma negativa ao templo. Uma vida dentro, outra entre macerações. [...] O mudo léxico rasurou o que estava impresso". Essa escavação produz novos sentidos, inesperados, e tenta recriar (mesmo que não seja de forma linear e unívoca) o elo entre uma história escrita e aprendida e outra, sonegada, e que por ter sido silenciada, oferece múltiplas pistas abertas de interpretação.

Por outro lado, na poética de Edimilson Pereira o fundo cultural relativo à prática da mineração se torna explícito em versos como "Séculos de ouro secos,/ a busca de pedras não" (PEREIRA, 2003d, p. 147). Se o ouro acabou, não é possível dizer o mesmo do espírito de busca que anima o minerador, ou seja, ainda que exilado no tempo, o ser humano continua sendo estimulado por valores e objetivos que, não obstante a passagem do tempo, contribuem para definir a sua própria condição de humanidade. A lembrança daquilo que o homem foi, especialmente dos fatos ligados à sua capacidade de superação dos obstáculos, permite-lhe elaborar um ideário de crença no presente, ainda que as evidências deste presente mostrem que não há razões para tal atitude. O poema "Garimpo" explicita as tensões inscritas no universo da mineração e do garimpo, e revela a maneira como o poeta olha e ressignifica essa realidade de acordo com a sua leitura:

> O casario vive seu desamparo.
> Para excitá-lo só um poeta-arqueólogo
> que avia a foto dizendo: nesse laivo
> de crime e oratório deus grifou
> minha infância. Entre as ruínas, o levante
> de escravos, outras arengas se inflamam.
> Quem trama? onde ? Fiel ao nome,
> o território se inventa na avaria.
> O poema tira os arreios da sombra.
> (PEREIRA, 2003b, p. 213)

Podemos observar que o poema está construído a partir da lógica binária entre o registro semântico da precariedade e dos elementos que se desgastam no tempo ("desamparo", "ruínas", "avaria"), e o registro semântico da rebeldia, desenhando-se, desse modo, um micro-universo no qual as coisas permanecem e tramam, onde se tece o levante, as "outras arengas se inflamam", o território "se inventa". Trata-se da tensão barroca já salientada no capítulo, que aqui se configura sob a perspectiva metalingüística privilegiada pelo poeta. De acordo com essa lógica, não é a linearidade dos acontecimentos que interessam ao poeta, ou que ele pretende anunciar nos seus poemas, mas a possibilidade de fixar determinados acontecimentos – mesmo os não visíveis, os não palpáveis – através da produção de um discurso que abre um percurso no tempo, resiste e se impõe como um abrigo simbólico. A esse respeito, o poema em

prosa "O grito" é bem representativo, pois nele torna-se mais explícito o fato de que o acontecimento de alguma rebeldia de outrora persiste no tempo e "irrompe na página", conforme podemos ler a seguir:

> A palavra tem sido o lugar onde levantamos abrigo.
> Na plantação, no garimpo tecemos o grito, origem do que falamos.
> O que foi registro de rebeldia não se aplacou, irrompe na página
> desnorteando os cães de caça. O grito espreita atrás da escrita,
> não confia em setas, escolhe os atalhos. Os cães foram ensinados
> a varar a noite e o tempo. A palavra, no entanto, é um edifício
> e se alarga para as margens da floresta. (PEREIRA, 2003c, p. 211)

Contrariamente às aparências, o ato que ficou no passado da história oficial (alguma atitude de rebeldia), se multiplica no tempo através da palavra, portadora dessa permanência, que "se alarga para as margens da floresta". Atrás da palavra se esconde o grito, anterior a ela, com a sua noção de origem do discurso "desnorteador", questionador e perturbador, sempre em alerta, que se propaga através dos atalhos da memória individual e coletiva.

Ao considerarmos a obra poética de Ruy Duarte de Carvalho, reparamos que ele opera outra modalidade de garimpagem, trazendo à tona mitos e símbolos das diferentes culturas tradicionais africanas recolhidos em campo ou extraídos de livros de pesquisa etnográfica. Trata-se de fazer emergir esses traços culturais não tanto sob uma perspectiva antropológica (ou não apenas), mas, sobretudo, sob a perspectiva de quem lida com a linguagem ciente de que, nestes traços culturais, está depositada uma fonte de renovação poética ou, em outras palavras, uma forma de expressar poeticamente a realidade africana tradicional. Vê-se então que à riqueza da cultura tradicional é dispensado um tratamento literário contemporâneo, e desse movimento (que implica em trazer para um contexto moderno textos relativos ao mundo tradicional) resulta um interessante processo de estranhamento. Isto porque, na elaboração do texto poético, não se tem mais a versão fiel à cultura de origem, mas, do mesmo modo, não se tem um poema totalmente livre das âncoras que o prendem a um certo contexto sociocultural. O "dizer festivo" de Ruy Duarte de Carvalho interfere na decodificação do texto tradicional, que se torna outro, renovado e "reconvertido". De acordo com Laura Padilha, esse fato ocorre no momento em que o poeta reinventa as "velhas imagens" fixadas pela tradição. Em outros termos, pode-se dizer que o poeta "está inventando [estas imagens], delas fazendo a matéria primeira de um dizer inaugural: com isso demarca o espaço habitado pelo signo poético, sempre intratável, no dizer de Roland Barthes (1981)" (PADILHA, 2002, p. 254).

Desse modo, acreditamos que o "dizer inaugural" apontado por Laura Padilha se refira ao trabalho de Ruy Duarte que consiste no ato de inaugurar, revestir, a cada vez, os signos relativos a determinada cultura de um sentido novo, por isso inaugural, porém transitório, sujeito a novas transformações, pois a cada nova elaboração poética de símbolos e aspectos das culturas africanas tradicionais não corresponde a fixação, mas a reinvenção, a reelaboração constante de formas e sentidos, respondendo à natureza "intratável", isto é, escorregadia, do signo poético, relatada por Barthes, mas também respondendo à estrutura do texto poético de Ruy Duarte de Carvalho como sendo um borrão, constantemente em fase de trabalho na oficina literária.

Ruy Duarte de Carvalho faz incursões na cultura popular africana, de extração oral, para dali retirar elementos de uma poética condensada em fórmulas ou provérbios. Esse trabalho de mergulho nas fontes orais da tradição africana, para delas traçar um caminho de releitura

poética (proposto no livro *Ondula, savana branca*), representa uma modalidade de garimpo, pois o material poético sofre, nos textos de Carvalho, uma exposição intencional, sendo apontada, muitas vezes em notas de pé de página, a fonte original que inspirou a reelaboração operada pelo poeta. Conforme assinala Maria Nazareth Soares Fonseca, ao analisar a maneira como o poeta preserva as tradições orais africanas na sua poética, podemos dizer que "nos poemas de *Ondula, savana branca*, os apelos do passado ancestral dialogam com recursos inovadores da escrita e a restauração das tradições enfocadas sujeita-se ao processo determinado pelo uso da escrita" (2002, p. 17).

Contudo, a costura entre a tradição oral e a liberdade de criação não é facilmente observável pois, muitas vezes, é ocultada nas dobras do texto, nas entrelinhas ou, quando não, apenas na intenção do poeta. Há outro detalhe que chama a atenção na arquitetura deste livro, ou seja, na nota ao pé de página da "Introdução", Ruy Duarte de Carvalho indica a fonte consultada para a montagem de cada poema. No entanto, o poeta sinaliza para o leitor a possibilidade de consultar as fontes originais apenas após a leitura do poema, para que não se perca de vista a "fruição poética". Isso revela a prioridade do poeta em focalizar primeiramente o valor estético inerente aos textos e, secundariamente, o seu teor documentarístico, e desse modo sua poética "opera sempre em tensão com uma pluralidade semântica, pois procura inscrever [...] no universo da literatura tradições de gestos e a palavra sábia dos ancestrais" (FONSECA, 2002, p. 17).

Dessa maneira, tal como ocorre com o território africano, que está ocupado por diversas etnias e suas respectivas culturas – situadas, às vezes, a distâncias mínimas umas das outras, independentemente das fronteiras nacionais traçadas pelo padrão geopolítico atual – o livro *Ondula, savana branca* de Ruy Duarte de Carvalho também se apresenta como um mosaico de vozes, cada uma delas relacionada a um fragmento diferenciado de determinadas etnias e grupos sociais africanos, revelando o processo de "negociação de identidades em culturas multifacetadas" (HANCIAU, 2005, p.139): Fulani, Yoruba, Pigmeus, Bantu, Ngoni, Didinga, Akan, Dinkas, Xhosa, Thonga, Somali, Berg-Dâmaras, Mensa, Bosquímanos, Zulu e Kwanyama são apenas algumas das etnias presentes na composição desse microcosmos poético africano.

Em alguns casos, como na seção "Reconversões," Ruy Duarte de Carvalho fez uma livre adaptação da fonte original, um texto da tradição Peul, encontrado em um livro de Hampate Ba, para alcançar o objetivo de uma maior poeticidade, sem sonegar a fonte original. Esse processo se caracteriza pela sua inclinação dialógica, pois a poética resultante não se restringe à apropriação da tradição oral, mas a um intercâmbio de valores e símbolos que interferem na estruturação das textualidades escrita e oral, simultaneamente.

Já no livro *Hábito da terra*, detecta-se o processo de escavação no interior do texto literário, ao estabelecer a "espoliação" do que já foi escrito, no intuito de reduzi-lo ao osso da fala, como é possível observar no poema em prosa intitulado "Casos" (CARVALHO, 2005, p. 233). As "variantes" propostas nesse poema, esboços ou *esquisses* de um hipotético texto final, sempre inacabado, se assemelham às etapas de criação de um escultor ou pintor – que volta inúmeras vezes à obra de arte – cientes de que estes *já são* a obra de arte. Por isso, muitas vezes, tais *esquisses* ou esboços são incorporados à obra apresentada ao público, não para ilustrar, pedagogicamente, o processo criativo do autor, mas para dialogar com as outras faces da referida obra.

Destaca-se aqui o fato de não haver hierarquia entre as versões, nenhuma sendo "relegada" a servir de alicerce para a outra, mas, sim, cada uma gozando de autonomia dentro do texto. Em vista

disso, a busca que o poeta empreende para compor o texto já é a sua realização, pois este se fundamenta a partir de camadas não fixas, que se movem de acordo com a necessidade estética do poeta ou dos receptores. Considerando este dado, é possível insistir em uma aproximação entre esta modalidade de construção textual e a concepção de mundo que subjaz à prática da garimpagem e da mineração, também presente na poética de Edimilson de Almeida Pereira cujo verso "séculos de ouro secos / a busca de pedras não" (2003d, p. 147) é, como já citado, uma referência.

Esse procedimento diferencia Ruy Duarte de outros autores que, conhecendo as fontes da oralidade, graças aos trabalhos antropológicos, utilizam-nas como se elas não tivessem autoria ou, muito menos, como se não se estabelecessem a partir de ordens sociais complexas. Nesse caso, o poeta explicita que o texto "pertence" à cultura Peul, mas se dá a liberdade de, como criador, operar interferências ou "contaminações", de maneira que o poema resultante se apresente como uma textualidade tecida entre a fonte tradicional, oral, dos Peul, e a adaptação "poética" autoral de Ruy Duarte. Esse encontro, entre a tradição oral e a sua versão modificada através do texto criativo do poeta estaria por aquilo que Edward Said define como "contágio benevolente", isto é, uma contaminação entre registros que se influenciam mutuamente. Vejamos o exemplo seguinte, um fragmento da primeira clareira de *Koumen.* "Texto iniciático dos pastores Peul":

> Conheço a temperatura inicial das águas
> a natureza das estrelas
> e a razão de ser de suas longas vidas.
>
> Conheço o segredo da lua
> quando, crescente, ela atravessa as nuvens
> quando, redonda
> ilumina as noites
> e favorece o leite e a manteiga.

(CARVALHO, 2005, p.194)

Se, por um lado, esse texto conserva elementos característicos da tradição popular oral (tais como a estreita relação entre o homem e a natureza, o teor profético dos sinais lançados pela natureza e o forte simbolismo sagrado), por outro lado, conseguimos interpretá-lo abstraindo os traços do seu contexto original, ao mesmo tempo em que passamos a considerá-lo em função dos apelos estéticos e da elaboração lingüística com que se apresenta. Seria possível, inclusive, que um leitor o interpretasse ignorando o contexto ao qual ele pertence, sem sentir que alguma coisa estivesse lhe faltando para o entendimento. Isso se deve, acreditamos, ao fato de que existe uma elaboração poética inerente ao texto oral, que contribui para a universalização do conteúdo estético ali subjacente.

Diante disso, pode-se afirmar que Edimilson Pereira e Ruy Duarte articulam um processo de composição poética que se fundamenta, apesar das diferenças de vozes entre os dois, na aposta de escavar nos labirintos da cultura e da memória, coletiva ou individual, para extrair daí a construção de sentidos desejados, a pedra preciosa ou, usando as palavras de Pereira, "as coisas arcas". Em particular, há uma característica que aproxima o processo criativo de Pereira e Duarte, ou seja, o aproveitamento de provérbios ou ditos populares que entram dialogicamente nas composições poéticas, por um lado, modificando-as, e por outro, sendo modificados pela liberdade criativa dos poetas. Conforme sugere Terezinha Taborda, seguindo as interpretações de Paul Zumthor, esta estratégia constitui um elemento intertextual, que revela a ligação do texto ao contexto. Interessante, a esse respeito e para o propósito do nosso trabalho de tese, é a leitura realizada por Taborda, sempre de acordo com as análises de Zumthor, para quem

> O provérbio [é] um microdiscurso narrativo que se integra [...] ao discurso, constituindo uma estrutura vazia a ser

> preenchida conforme o contexto no qual se insere. Por processar o intercâmbio entre texto \ contexto, o provérbio promoveria, ainda, a ligação entre esses e os elementos internos do discurso. (ZUMTHOR *apud* TABORDA, 2003, p. 171)

Dessa maneira, os provérbios coletados e "resgatados" por Ruy Duarte em sua obra poética desempenham uma função intertextual, ou seja, constituem um "microdiscurso" inserido no cerne do discurso poético, cujas características nem sempre estão afinadas. Em decorrência disso, nota-se uma aproximação ou superposição de discursos, o "oral e o escrito". Às vezes, os dois discursos coincidem, outras vezes negociam entre si a fim de conviverem dentro do mesmo espaço textual. Em muitos casos, assistimos àquilo que Taborda (2003, p.177) aponta como sendo a contribuição do texto proverbial e dos ditos populares à narrativa, ou seja, o fato de representarem "uma voz oracular" nos poemas de Ruy Duarte, como revelam os versos do poema "Vária – Yoruba (Oráculo de Ifá)", nos quais a contribuição relativa à sabedoria oral confere um aspecto profético às enunciações:

> A sabedoria é a primeira das belezas.
> O dinheiro não defende da cegueira.
>
> O dinheiro não impede a loucura
> nem previne o aleijão.
>
> O corpo, todo o corpo, é pasto para a doença.
>
> O melhor é pensar, repensar
> e armazenar saber.
>
> Vem e sacrifica:
> Que o teu corpo encontre a paz
> – por dentro e por fora –.
> (CARVALHO, 2005, p. 159)

Em face do exposto, podemos ressaltar que a poesia de Ruy Duarte está envolvida com as questões relativas à memória coletiva, em função do diálogo que o poeta estabelece com as fontes orais, cuja existência e manutenção dependem da memória coletiva e da oratória. Trata-se de um diálogo que nem sempre implica reproduzir a tradição mas, sobretudo, valorizar a possibilidade de interferir, traduzir, deslocar os significados, ao mesmo tempo em que se aponta a sua ancoragem num solo cultural reconhecido.

Essa observação é propícia para se estabelecer uma aproximação entre as obras de Edimilson Pereira e Ruy Duarte, uma vez que ambos trabalham a partir de uma perspectiva "antropológica" da cultura à qual pertencem. No caso de Ruy Duarte de Carvalho, como frisamos anteriormente, é explícita a sua intenção de retrabalhar a cultura oral angolana, mediante a possibilidade de interferir nela a partir da perspectiva literária. No caso de Edimilson Pereira, várias de suas entrevistas explicitam essa mesma intenção, subjacente em livros como *Árvore dos Arturos* (1988) e *O homem da orelha furada* (1995), inseridos no volume 3 da obra reunida (PEREIRA, 2003c). Na obra de ambos os poetas, encontramos citações, diretas ou não, de pensamentos, provérbios, alegorias e construções simbólicas pertencentes a determinada cultura e a determinado lugar, mas nem sempre correspondendo a uma intenção de expor claramente a origem desses textos, já que não se trata apenas de reproduzi-los a partir de uma perspectiva antropológica. Desse modo, esses textos decorrentes da cultura popular – que valoriza sobremaneira a oralidade como suporte – adquirem novos significados, uma vez que,

> inseridos no conjunto do texto sem uma ligação aparente com o seu todo, mas determinando a ambiguidade que vai caracterizar a enunciação, o provérbio migra para o contexto enunciativo de modo tal que o seu significado resulta da sua reunião com o conjunto de elementos que compõem o todo do texto para o qual são levados. (TABORDA, 2003, p. 181)

Isso indica a liberdade através da qual os autores põem em diálogo repertórios textuais plurais, permitindo que estruturas

lingüísticas e simbólicas próprias da cultura oral definam o tom de um texto escrito, e fazendo com que o texto poético resultante seja intersticial no que diz respeito ao registro, isto é, tenha marcas dos dois universos, o oral e o escrito. É nesse sentido também que podemos ler os textos como sendo polifônicos, na medida em que apresentam características de um mundo que está entre a oralidade e a escrita, se tornam portadores de realidades múltiplas que convivem no poema.

Por outro lado, há nesses poemas um processo de restauração da memória, na medida em que tanto Edimilson de Almeida Pereira quanto Ruy Duarte de Carvalho encenam uma reconstrução de um passado parcialmente preservado na tradição oral, mas progressivamente diluído nas sociedades contemporâneas. Esse fenômeno se torna mais significativo no caso do poeta brasileiro, uma vez que a memória coletiva que remete à cultura da diáspora negra já sofreu um processo de fragmentação ao longo dos séculos, devido à escravidão e à dispersão dos referentes ancestrais. Nesse sentido, se a memória original é fragmentada, aquela que está presente nos textos representa um espaço híbrido, no qual "se misturam celebração e espetacularização, apropriação e perda" (FONSECA, 2002, p. 11), ou seja, vários fenômenos de preservação e de diluição se sobrepõem.

Nos poemas que analisamos neste capítulo, torna-se evidente que não existe uma intenção explícita de preservar a memória, como se fosse uma herança intocada, mas, ao contrário, de fazer com que o discurso sobre a memória seja possível, mesmo em processos nos quais ela está em jogo em termos de recriação. Tanto os textos de Edimilson de Almeida Pereira, que lidam com uma memória desagregada da origem coletiva, e que fazem dessa ausência um estímulo para que o "lugar da memória" seja o "lugar da imaginação", quanto os textos de Carvalho, que têm nas tradições africanas ancestrais um contraponto com a sociedade contemporânea com a qual ele as põe em diálogo, operam incursões poéticas no interior da própria cultura e no interior da língua portuguesa (para realizar a incursão poética), abrindo labirintos de significados e roteiros de procura na imaginação, potencializando os vazios ou as tensões presentes nos lugares da memória.

Notas

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FRANCISCO CALCAGNO AND THE AFRO-CUBAN LITERARY CANON

By Edward Mullen

Although most literary historians consider the period from the late 1920s to the 1940s as constituting Afro-Cubanism proper, the emergence of a genuine Afro-Cuban aesthetic had its origins in a series of mid-nineteenth-century debates concerning Cuba's status as a colony of Spain and the concomitant development of a national literary aesthetic. The incorporation of literary images of blacks by white Creole intellectuals during the 1860s, a critical period in Cuban canon formation, into a body of antislavery fiction and anthological works during this period is essential to an understanding of the evolution of Afro-Cubanism. The purpose of this essay is to examine the role played by Francisco Calcagno (1826-1903) both in the preservation of and dissemination of the earliest tests by Afro-Cubans.

In an important book on literary genres, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (1982), Alastair Fowler delineated three types of literary canon: the potential, the accessible, and the selective. The first, he maintains, consists of all extant literature; the second, of all literature that is readily available in the form of reprints and anthologies; and the third, encompasses those works in the accessible canon that have been selected by authorities as being worthy of special attention. The schema presented by Fowler shows canon formation to be a narrowing process in which readers and critics pass from the potential through the accessible to the selective. It is precisely the second point in Fowler's schema that exemplifies the role played by Calcagno in the construction of a unique sense of Cuban literary heritage.

Calcagno is an important but undervalued writer in Cuban letters whose fame rests largely on his *Diccionario biográfico cubano* (1878, 1886) and *Poetas de color* (1868, 1878, 1879, 1887). The first, a biographical compilation of notable Cubans and non-Cubans that were involved in Cuba prior to 1878, constitutes no doubt his greatest contribution to the Cuban literary and cultural canon. Published after the first wars of independence "[It] was the first work to consolidate the nascent intellectual tradition of male nationalism purportedly encapsulating Cuban national identity." (Davies 1996: 3). Calcagno's decision to include references to Afro-Cuban literary figures is particularly telling given the moralistic mission of the entire project. The *Diccionario* still remains an important source of information about early Cuban literature and was not supplanted until the publication in 1980 of the *Diccionario de la literatura cubana* by the Instituto de Lingüística de la Academia de Ciencias de Cuba.

The life of Calcagno spanned virtually the whole nineteenth century and mirrored as well Cuba's transition into Modernity. He was a study in paradox: while he decried Spanish colonial rule, at times he admired its most despotic Captains-General. He spoke out against slavery yet had strong racist views. In addition to his role as a bibliographer and anthologist, Calcagno was a creative writer whose literary production is virtually coterminous with the end of slavery period. Calcagno wrote in defense of Cuba's marginalized black population, but he, like other Creole intellectuals before him, held to nineteenth-century notions of race a fact reflected in both *Poetas de color* and his novels. In the former, he took great pains to establish Plácido's racial genealogy, noting that his father had been "un mulato peluquero". Juan Francisco Manzano is described as an "esclavo negro", whereas Antonio Medina and Vicente Silvera are "pardos". This

belief in racial differentiation—that is, the localization of persons on a somatic continuum from darker (more African) to lighter (more European), was central to a process of racial inscription that underpinned the ways in which writers of African ancestry would later enter the literary canon. The same attitudes toward race surfaced in Calcagno's novels. In *Los Crímenes de Concha*, 1887, for example, he expressed his fears concerning the consequences of abolition couched in a racialized discourse:

> Delito de esa sociedad es olvidar que la influencia civilizadora del siglo, puede, mal que nos pese, traer la abolición mucho antes de lo que esperábamos; no preparemos desde hoy á los negros para la manumisión, y con ella se verán privados de todo menos de una libertad de que tal vez renieguen. Salvenos á esta sociedad de un cáncer mayor que el esclavismo, ó caerá sobre nosotros la fatal consecuencia de nuestra desidia! ¿Lucharemos entonces contra la barbarie ó estableceremos en Africa otra Liberia que los recoja con alguna injustísima ley de emigración forzosa? Mas católico es tratar de infiltrarles nuestra moral antes que nos inficione su cancerosa llaga: moralicémoslos antes que nos africanicen. (198)

The ideas that Afro-Cubans had strong proclivities for lust, that their bodies were somehow more in touch with nature, and that in general they were more susceptible to crime and indolence would be a central thesis in Fernando Ortiz 's *Los negros brujos* (1906), a foundational text of Afro-Cubanism, and one no doubt informed by Calcagno 's views on race.

He edited the first study/anthology of Afro-Cuban literature only some twenty years before writing a book which espoused racist evolutionism, *En busca del eslabón*: *Historia de monos* (1888), considered by Roberto Friol to be his best novel (Friol 1983: 11). The book, an ironic comment on hominid evolution, is a mélange of scientific racism and social Darwinism. For Calcagno, Africans occupied the lower end of the racial continuum:

> —Sí, es lo que marca el grado de inteligencia. El cerebro que es lo que en nosotros piensa, y es relativamente más grande que en ningún otro viviente. En general cuanto más se eleva un animal más pesa su cerebro; las razas semíticas e indogermánicas, que son las que más han avanzado tienen mejor cráneo: "raro sería —dice Magendie—, un hombre notable por intelecto sin cabeza grande. (Friol, 81)

The years corresponding to Calcagno's birth and early formation represent the timeframe when Cuban's slave population reached its highest levels. For example, by the 1840s over sixty percent of the Cuban population was black. In spite of abolitionist treaties with Spain in 1817 and 1835, the Cuban slave trade continued well into the 1860s. In comparison to the other New World slave societies, the formal abolition of slavery in Cuba—1886 —came very late. The fact that the elimination of slavery took place over a span of some twenty years shows to what extent the question was not only central but also complex (Scott 1984).

Francisco Calcagno was born in March 1827 into a wealthy upper middle class family. His father, Francisco Calcagno y Monti (1791-1854), was a physician who had immigrated to Cuba in 1818 and who had gained recognition in scientific circles for his early work on cholera. His mother, Dolores Monzón de la Bodega, was from Havana. He was educated in Villa Güines until the age of fifteen and later studied Filosofía y Letras at the University of Havana. After graduation, he traveled widely. According to Antonio Rubio (1928: 1) he lived in the United States from 1854 until 1859. Based on Calcagno's entries in his *Diccionario* we know that by 1855 he was in New York where, in collaboration with Cirilo Villaverde he helped to collect money to assist the poet Leopoldo Tula who was in exile in New Orleans. That same year he

published a translation of a play by Victor Hugo, *Angelo, tirano de Padua* in New York with Baker and Goodwin, a favorite publishing outlet for Cuban émigrés. In 1855, in all likelihood he also probably met Francisco Javier Vingut who had published that same year his anthology, *Gems of Spanish Poetry* that included selections by Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (Plácido). Cuesta Jiménez (1916: 10) further specifies that he taught at Yale in 1857. A review of the *Yale Historical Register* that includes all ranks of teaching staff including instructors and tutors as well as the *Yale Catalogs* for 1956-57 and 1858-1859 shows no reference to Calcagno. While it is not clear why he traveled to the United States, such a trip would have been the norm for a person of his social class and intellectual interests. (See Pérez 1999: 24-29). Throughout the nineteenth century there was a substantial Cuban émigré community in the United States. Beginning as early as the first quarter of the century; the earliest advocates for independence from Spain such as Félix Varela (1788-1853) and José María Heredia (1803-1839) lived in political exile in the United States. Not all Cubans who traveled to the United States, however, were political exiles. Máximo Gómez and Calixto García studied at the North Yarmouth Academy in Maine well before their involvement in Cuba's war for Independence (Díaz: 1996). It would be the final half of the nineteenth century, a period corresponding to Calcagno's visit that saw the highest level of political and ideological activity in Cuban émigré communities in New York, New Orleans, Key West, Tampa and other cities in the United States. As Nicolás Kanellos (2000: 10-20) has pointed out, the Cuban and Puerto Rican émigré communities were responsible for the founding of a large number of influential newspapers and periodicals. In addition to Villaverde, Calcagno most definitely knew José Pedro Guiteras who published the earliest notes on Plácido in *El Mundo Nuevo* of New York in 1874 and Néstor Ponce de León, an émigré lexicographer with whom he later collaborated.

Upon the death of his father, he returned to Güines, where he founded *El Album Güinero* (1862). From 1864 to 1869 he lived in Havana where he taught and had an administrative position at the Colegio San Francisco de Assis y Real Cubano. Calcagno married twice, first to Angela Miranda and after her death to Virgina Poey, the daughter of the prominent naturalist Felipe Poey to whom Calcagno dedicated a lengthy entry in his *Diccionario biográfico*. The latter was a member of the Real Academia de Ciencias Médicas, Físicas y Naturales de la Habana (1861-1898), perhaps the most important forum for debates on human evolution and racial issues which characterized the highly segregated character of Cuban society (Pruna 1994: 425). The influence of Poey, and no doubt his own father, are apparent in many of Calcagno's writings, most specifically his *Historia de un muerto: meditaciones sobre las ruinas de un hombre* (1898) and *En busca del eslabón: historia de monos* (1888).

Sometime toward the end of the nineteenth century Calcagno emigrated to Spain where he died in Barcelona on March 23, 1903. Based on a review of his publishing history, it would appear that he was in Barcelona by 1896 when Famades published the third edition of his popular *Mina—La hija del presidario*. While he left no written record of his decision to leave Cuba, it is reasonable to hypothesize that his motivations were both political and economic. The life and works of Francisco Calcagno in many ways may be read as a microcosm of both the political and ideological tensions of the time. After all, the period corresponding to Calcagno's birth and his development as a writer corresponds to one of the most complex and turbulent periods in Cuban history. Since its discovery, Cuba had been a colony of Spain (Provincia de Utramar) and now as the century drew to a close the solution to its ambivalent

status was expressed by varying positions. Some Cubans were *anexionistas*, some were *independentistas*, and others were *autonomístas*. Calcagno was a member of the Partido Liberal Autonomista, which had been established in July 1878 (Pérez 1983: 7). The party, which sought coexistence rather than independence from Spain, represented by and large the interests of the Creole elite, *hacendados*, planters and professionals. In short the members of the social class which had most benefited from the policies of imperial Spain. By the time Calcagno chose to leave Cuba, the privileged position occupied by both Creoles and peninsulares was becoming increasingly tenuous. While on the one hand the *autonomistas* supported the gradual abolition of slavery, they also supported Spanish (white) emigration to Cuba as a solution to the race problem. Calcagno was a strong supporter of autonomy and published his views in a pamphlet entitled *El catecismo autonomía al alcance de todos (1878)*, again in 1881 in a prologue to his novel *Romulado,* and in another political pamphlet published after Independence, *La República*: *Única salvación de la familia cubana* (1898). Here, Calcagno argues against annexation to the United States, and he posits Spanish emigration as a solution to Cuba 's political future, thus reinforcing not only the position of the autonomista party but this deeply held belief that Spain and its people constitute both a racial and spiritual essence.

The Slavery Axis

While Calcagno 's *Novelas de folletín* were probably quite popular as indicated by their publishing history, the works which have received the most attention to date are three novels that deal with the theme of slavery: *Los crímenes de Concha: Escenas cubanas* (1863, 1887), *Romualdo, uno de tantos* (1869, 1881, 1891) and *Aponte* (1901).

William Luis has given the most attention to Calcagno 's antislavery fiction in his *Literary Bondage* (1990) where he only briefly refers to *Los crímenes de Concha,* but offers detailed readings of *Romualdo, uno de tantos* and *Aponte*. Ivan Schulman in an important essay on the Cuban antislavery novel (1977: 364) references only *Los crímenes de Concha*, using it as an example of the final period of antislavery fiction, which produced "(a) franker view of the slave whose free circulation as a freed man acquired the status of general concern." In his classic, *The Black Protagonist in the Cuban Novel* Pedro Barreda (1979) gives only passing mention to *Romualdo*, considering it inferior in scope and execution to the fiction of Antonio Suárez y Romero and Cirilo Villaverde—a critical position shared by Castellanos in *Cultura Afrocubana* (1994: 89-90). The latter offers a brief synopsis of *Los Crímenes de Concha* a work, which the authors correctly view as superior to *Romualdo* and as one of the first texts in which abolitionism and the move for political independence are thematically linked. While these novels (essentially plotless, melodramatic potboilers) are clearly examples of second-rate fiction, they are important for understanding Calcagno's position on both slavery and race: concepts that are central to an understanding of *Poetas de color*.

Literary interest in slavery seems to emerge during periods of political instability in Cuba. The first wave of fiction appeared during the late 1830s and early 1840s. The writers were primarily abolitionists who feared that a slave-based economy would lead to social disintegration. They were aware that during their lifetime, the island had changed from an underpopulated farming community into a major sugar producer that required a heavy influx of African slaves. The dramatic change in the ethnic composition of the island aroused fears that Cuba would end up like the neighboring sugar colony of St.

Domingue (Haiti) and be destroyed by its rebellious slaves. Consequently, the writers' anti-slavery sentiment was not entirely humanitarian. While they believed that the sanctions existing to control a large unfree population de-humanized both masters and slaves, they also thought that the disproportionate number of Africans would impose their alien cultural values on the members of the ruling groups, and thereby undermine the moral order of society.

As Lorna Williams (1994) aptly notes, the relationship of Cuba's Creole intellectuals to the island's black population has always been problematic. Thus, while writers such as Félix Varela, José Antonio Saco, and Francisco Arango y Parreño (all writers influential to Calcagno's intellectual development) argued in various degrees for an end to the slave trade, their attitudes towards the slaves themselves ranged from ambivalence to outright racism. Thus standing midpoint between the work of the nineteenth-century Cuban liberal intellectuals such as Domingo del Monte, José Antonio Saco, Félix Tanco y Bosmeniel, Anselmo Suárez y Romero, Cirilo Villaverde, José Jacinto Milanés, José Antonio Echeverría, and the post-slavery fiction of Martín Morúa Delgado (1857-1910), Calcagno's *obra* represents a curious bridge in Cuban intellectual history. On the one hand, Calcagno was an abolitionist who argued for the elimination of slavery as an institution, but on the other, he held to highly racist notions in believing that the cultural evolution of blacks should be oriented through education toward the higher behavioral patterns of white Spanish descendants.

If the dominant literary vogue of the period during which Calcagno wrote was Romanticism, it was Positivism, which was the controlling philosophy for the production of expository prose. Derived principally from the theories of the mid-nineteenth century writings of Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer, Positivism was based on the reductive methodologies of the emerging natural sciences and sought to explain all phenomena in the light of empirical data. It was soon co-opted by the architects of the emerging social sciences (criminology, sociology, anthropology) who began a systematic inventory of man's behavior in light of the prevailing medical notions of the day.

Within the context of Latin American literary and intellectual thought of the early twentieth century, an important expression of Positivism's empirical approach to society was a strong interest in race and theories of race. The thesis that race was an integral determinant of culture and civilization had been elaborated by Arthur de Gobineau in *Essai sur l'inegalité des races humaines* as early as 1884. The most influential book on late nineteenth-century thought in Latin America, however, appears to have been that of the French social psychologist Gustave Le Bon, whose *Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples* (1894) was widely read in Latin America. Le Bon firmly believed in the concept of racial hierarchies and warned that miscegenation would lead to racial inferiority. While in most cases these books pre-date the publication of *Poetas de color*, the fundamental notions of racial differentiation were discussed at scientific forums. Calcagno, no doubt had access to much of this information through his father-in-law, the naturalist Felipe Poey.

The publication history of *Poetas de Color* is a metaphor for the complex negotiations Calcagno faced both as a writer and editor during the last decades of Spanish domination in Cuba. According to the editorial note, which appears in the 1887 edition there were five editions. The first two chapters (those dedicated to Plácido and Manzano) were published in February 1869 in the short-lived journal *La Revolución* which was edited by the Havana poet Isaac Carrilo y O'Farril (1844-1901) during the brief ease on censorship after the eruption of the

Guerra de los Diez Años in October 1868. The latter was a nodal moment in Cuban history signaling as it did the first challenge both to the Spanish rule and slavery as an institution. It was in many ways a conflict between criollos and peninsulares, which took the form of an uprising, led by planters in the eastern end of the Island. The insurrection, begun by relatively conservative men, rapidly became more radical as its social base expanded to include slaves and free blacks. Calcagno, who was living in Havana at the time of the uprising, was no doubt aware of the implications of such a revolt on the slave-holding mentality of the capital then under the grip of the Capitan-General Francisco Lersundi. Calcagno's decision to write about Afro-Cubans at this historic moment no doubt was related to the confluence of a number of factors political, economic and historical. With the return of censorship Carrillo y O'Farril was briefly jailed and then fled to New York with Antonio Bachiller y Morales (1812-1889).

Calcagno's project is made up primarily of biographical notes on four Afro-Cuban poets with the greatest emphasis given to the canonical black poets of the period: Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés ("Plácido") and Juan Francisco Manzano. While most of the book is devoted to these writers, the brief biographical sketches of Antonio Medina, Augustín Baldomero Rodríguez, Juan Bautista Estrada, Vicente Silvera, José Carmen Díaz and Ambrosio Echemendía are of considerable importance, since they represent virtually the only attempt to preserve and evaluate the writings of lesser-known Afro-Cubans during the nineteenth century. His commentary on Agustín Baldomero Rodriguez serves as a metaphor for his racialized discursive practices:

> En nuestro Diccionario Biográfico este indivíduo aparece con la siguiente nota: -- Natural de Villaclara, pardo ingénuo de alguna instruccion y aficionado al cultivo de la poesía en la que, sin duda, hubiera descollado, á no ser por la falta de principios sólidos, y sobre todo por la abyecta ignorancia de sus ascendientes. (85)

Poetas de color strikes the modern reader as a decidedly unusual book: haphazard in its organization and balance, it is also a veritable bibliographic treasure chest, replete with citations to North American and European sources. Neither anthology proper nor a work of literary criticism, it may be best described as a combination of antislavery rhetoric, quotations from the authors discussed above, and reprints of translations of and commentary on their works, together with a lengthy appendix of supporting material. Calcagno even included some of his own poetry written under the pseudonym, "Moreno esclavo Narciso Blanco."

The most substantial portions of the book are the chapters dedicated to Plácido and Manzano. When the fifth edition of *Poetas de color* appeared, Plácido was already well-known outside of Cuba but less well recognized on the Island. Calcagno's project may be best described as a literary/cultural bricolage that contributed to the consolidation of Plácido's image as a romantic icon. It provided a historiographic frame for the intense debates that would take place in Cuba during the early years of the Republic.

Although Calcagno was the first to offer a detailed commentary on Cuba 's black poets he, in turn, was drawing on critical commentary that both predated his own work and was in some cases coterminous with it. Among the many sources Calcagno used were early poetry anthologies. Of particular importance, I maintain, are not only the texts anthologized but also the commentaries that preceded them, which are read now, as they were then, as paratexts that promoted or prevented future canonization. His principal sources were the *Aureola poética al Señor Francisco Martínez de la Rosa* (1834), an important

coterie collection prepared to honor Francisco Martínez de la Rosa (1789-1852) upon his appointment as a Spanish Prime Minister by María Cristina, Queen Regent, and *Cuba poética* (1861), a collaborative project by José Socorro de León, Jose Fornaris and Joaquín Lorenzo Luaces.

Quite apart from standard sources upon which he relied such as Jacinto de Salas y Quiroga's *Viajes* (1840) and the massive *Diccionario geográfico, estadístico e histórico de la isla de Cuba* (1863-1866) complied by Jacobo de la Pezuela, he often cited French and Anglo-American sources. In fact, Calcagno referenced, among others, Thales Bernard (1820-1873), André Chenier (1762-1794), Louis Jourdan (1810-1881), Charles H. Millevoye (1782-1816), Richard Robert Madden (1798-1886), William Hurlbert (1827-1895), Victor Schoelcher (1804-1893), and John George Wurdemann (1810-1849). Of the aforementioned at least four (Jourdan, Madden, Schoelcher, and Wurdemann) had actually been to Cuba.

Calcagno's use of sources shows to what extent race affects the consciousness and the interpretive practices of the critic. Thus citing Salas y Quiroga, Plácido is described in terms of race:

> ...es un hombre de genio por cuyas venas corre sangre europea y sangre Africana, un hombre humillado que en sus cantos medio salvajes tiene los destellos más sublimes y generosos que hombre ninguno puede comprender; al través de su inspiración hay chispas que deslumbran y no conozco poeta ninguno Americano que le aventaje en ingenio, en inspiración en hidalguía y en dignidad. (18)

Calcagno was particularly attracted to the slave-poet Manzano, and to his "ingenio inculto" (49). He intercalated fragments of the latter's *Autobiografía* (1835, 1839) within his own commentary. Juan Francisco Manzano's autobiography was the first and only slave narrative written in Spanish America and Calcagno's decision to anthologize key portions of the text was responsible for the first printed version of the text in Spanish, an extraordinary accomplishment that in itself makes *Poetas de color* a primary source book for Manzano scholarship. Calcagno's decision to include those episodes of the *Autobiografía* specifically relating to physical abuse and mistreatment of slaves is not surprising given his position on slavery, but they are often textually neutralized by a strong interest in defending the interests of the plantation class. Calcagno's defense of the actions of his cruel mistress are telling:

> Mas aún, era una cubana, probablemente sensible y compasiva, que daria limosna al necesitado, que cumpliría sus deberes religiosos y poesía todas las virtudes cristianas, pero cuyo corazon estaba maleado por el hálito impuro que se respira en todo país esclavista. ¿Podemos arrojar el más mínimo baldon sobre su memoria? No! Los delitos sociales no son de los individuos, sino de le época y todos saben que en asuntos de esclavitud, pocos entre nosotros pueden, impecables, tirar la primera piedra. (64)

With the exception of the members of the Del Monte group, it was virtually unknown in the nineteenth century and the full text was not available in printed form in Spanish until 1937; further, it was not until the 1960s that either the *Autobiography* or other works of Manzano were the object of any broad-based critical debate. Calcagno worked both as an editor and as a literary historian since he was familiar with an early translation of Manzano's book done by the British abolitionist Richard Robert Madden, which had been published in London in 1840. The Madden translation was shown to Calcagno by the poet and political activist José Antonio Echevarría (1815-1885).

The curious philological odyssey of Manzano's autobiography shows to what a large extent the voices of others (patrons, editors, translators, and critics)

have played in the construction of various versions of the same slave's story. Using as corroborating evidence two letters that Manzano wrote to Domingo del Monte on June 25 and September 25, 1835, one can hypothesize that the first draft was written before Manzano was manumitted in 1836. In 1839, Suárez y Romano copied and corrected the Manzano original before giving it to Madden, who translated and published part of the text in 1840. In 1841, selections of the Madden translation were published in London in the *Christian Observer*, in what was putatively a review of *Poems by a Slave*. The editors, however, had created yet another version of the autobiography, one specifically designed to support the journal's abolitionist agenda. Not only did the editors reprint sizable portions of the Madden original, but also it is what they elected to reproduce (virtually every scene involving physical or emotional trauma) that is significant. Nicolás Azcárate, another member of the Del Monte coterie, prepared a notebook on the life of Manzano, which in turn contains other editorial changes. Azcárate's copy of the Suárez y Romero version was used by Calcagno to construct his own version of the autobiography (Luis 1989: 260). As the editor of the first anthology of ethnic literature in Cuba, Calcagno's work exercised considerable influence on later studies of Afro-Cuban writers. His work constitutes the first effort to both preserve and comment on the life and works of black and mulatto poets; it was continuously cited well into the twentieth century and was one of the primary sources for such influential studies as Ramón Guirao's *Orbita de la poesía afro-cubana* (1938).

I would argue that *Poetas de color* is a text that should be read as one of a larger dialogue about race and class and one that clearly transcends national borders. While Francisco Calcagno never lived in political exile in the United States, his travels and his contacts with U.S. culture were to have a profound shaping effect both on the genesis and the content of one of the most remarkable yet often forgotten studies of nineteenth-century ethnic literature. In some ways Calcagno's preservationist project was analogous to the scholarship on Native Americans in the United States. In particular I am thinking of the early work of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, an Indian agent in the mid-nineteenth century who was fascinated by "the savage mentality" of Native Americans and collected considerable data on tribal life. There has been a cultural dialogue between the United States and Cuba for centuries. A significant part of this interchange has related to questions of racial identity rooted in a long-standing tradition of cultural exchange, specifically focusing on African-based traditions. In contrast to Latin American debates on race, which have been profoundly influenced by conceptual paradigms of cultural identity anchored in myths of racial harmony and syncretism, polemics in the more racially polarized United States have produced a more forceful and open discussion of race.

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MEMORY, IMAGES, AND REPRESENTATIONS OF "HOME" IN THE WORKS OF SELECTED WOMEN WRITERS OF THE HAITIAN DIASPORA

By Flore Zéphir

Haitian immigrants have been living on foreign shores for several decades, since the late 1950s/early 1960s, soon after François Duvalier, "Papa Doc," became president of Haiti. Many settled in the United States and Canada, while others relocated to other Caribbean islands, Latin America, and Europe. In time, exiled sons and daughters of Haiti formed a sizeable Haitian Diaspora, which had to come to terms with the realities of life in foreign countries. These realities are captured poignantly in the Haitian diasporic literature that has emerged in the past ten to fifteen years. Indeed, many prominent writers of the Haitian Diaspora talk about the "connections and disconnections" that are associated with the condition of being dispersed, displaced, and uprooted (Hyppolite 2001:11). Although they have learned to straddle many borders, the concept of "home" or "homeland" remains a constant theme in their works. Yet, many struggle with the very meaning and location of the place they call "home."

This article centers memory, images, and representations of "home" in the works of selected women writers of the Haitian Diaspora, in particular Edwidge Danticat's *The Butterfly's Way* and *The Dew Breaker*; Myriam Chancy's *The Scorpion's Claw*; and Marie Hélène Laforest's *Foreign Shores*. These three female authors are chosen since they are the most prominent, contemporary female writers of the Haitian diaspora, who may have already achieved—or are on their way to achieving—the same stature and notoriety as their fellow male counterparts, namely Dany Laferrière, Joël Desrosiers, and Emile Ollivier. *The Butterfly Way*, a collection of essays edited by Danticat, is also included among the selected works because it "voices" other Haitian writers (male and female) who are not as well known, but nevertheless poignantly capture in their essays the notion of home that this article endeavors to underscore. Is "home" the violent Haiti that forced so many Haitians into exile? Is home a place to which one can no longer return, because one is "made outside" (Latour 2001:125)? Is home "a distant, mythical place," (Cantave 2001:167), and/or a "paradise lost" (Phipps 2001: 116)? An analysis of these works reveals that the definition of home is a very elusive concept, one that is molded constantly by the multiple facets of living on the outside. In some cases, the concept of home can only reside in the imagination, a creation that the Indian-born writer Salman Rushdie (1992) called "imaginary homelands," which is an attempt to reconstruct the past from memory, an effort to reclaim something lost. Indeed, it has been argued that home can be a place that immigrants visit through the imagination, or that can be "built, rebuilt, and carried in memory and by acts of imagination."[1] Similarly, in her discussion of transnational identities, Avtar Brah—who was born in the Punjab region of India, grew up in Uganda, and subsequently lived in the United States and Europe—refers to home as a "mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination" (1996: 192). However, in other cases, she notes that displaced and uprooted individuals can also engage in the process of "diasporising" their visions of home, which are forged by both the realities of the homeland as well those of the place or places of resettlement. In a similar fashion, Georges Fouron argues that for Haitian transmigrants, home is not "a bounded and framed territorial unit" (2003: 238) composed of similar

perspectives on life and similar ways of conceptualizing one's reality. He contends that transmigrants are both "home bound and homeless," in the sense that the motherland remains constant in their memory while at the same time no longer being the place that they inhabit. Thus, their notion of home is constructed by a variety of factors ranging from the realities of the host society that may or may not afford them with equal opportunity to the memories of what they left behind in the land of origin. Yet for other Haitian immigrants, as Danticat's works suggest, home can be synonymous with sheer horror, the spectre of *the dew breaker*, who takes away human decency, human dignity, and human life, but who eventually embarks on a quest for redemption.[2]

A Scent of Memory[3]

In *The Butterfly's Way*, acclaimed novelist Edwidge Danticat sought the contributions of thirty-three writers of the Haitian Diaspora to produce a volume that movingly describes the various facets of the Haitian migration experience. Collectively, these voices tell the story of the uprooted, and the pains associated with dislocation and relocation. The multiple realities, connections, and disconnections resulting from people's movement and displacement, yield different paths. "Between languages and borders, identities and colors" (Laforest 2001: 30), different voices emerge, each with a distinct timbre. Some demonstrate a solid anchoring in Haitian cultural traditions while others reflect a feeling of estrangement and isolation, of standing in "a barren no-man's land" (Chancy: 229). *The Butterfly's Way* is the story of a people in transition, struggling to find a comfort zone between their land of origin and their land(s) of resettlement. It provides powerful images of the inner souls of displaced persons, living between two worlds and carrying a heavy baggage of things past. These images, seen from a variety of angles, paint a heart-rending portrait of *dyaspora* children and deepen our understanding of the conditions of the "exiled" writer: the writer who physically, psychologically, and emotionally writes from foreign shores, and whose writings emit a scent of memory for the things he or she never really had the chance to fully enjoy, as life in the native land was cut short. Indeed, the "exiled" writer composes poetry that describes "the waterfalls flowing with freshness; the fragrance of molasses-filled coffee in the courtyards" (Christophe 2001: 3). Or as Phipps suggests, she paints the water at the river "where women came to wash themselves, their children, their clothes," the water that has become part of her "vocabulary of exile and of longing" (2001: 116-17).

Joanne Hyppolite, one of the contributors to Danticat's collection, *The Butterfly's Way*, begins her essay titled "Dyaspora" by saying:

> When you are in Haiti, they call you *Dyaspora.* This word, which connotes both connection and disconnection, accurately describes your condition as a Haitian American. Disconnected from the physical landscape of the homeland, you don't grow up with a mango tree in your yard, you don't suck *kenèps* in the summer, or sit in the dark listening to stories of *Konpè* Bouki and Malis. . . The beating of a *Yanvalou* on Rada drums are neither in the background or the foreground of your life. Your French is non-existent. Haiti is not where you live. (7)

She goes on to say, "through your writing they will see you, dyaspora child, the connections and disconnections that have made you the mosaic that you are. They will see where you are from and the worlds that have made you. They will see you" (p. 11). In a similar fashion, Gina Ulysse in her discussion of "dyasporic dilemmas and dreams" outlines very clearly the negative connotations attached

to the word *dyaspora* or *dyas,* when she writes: "In Haiti, the term *dyas* has some negative connotations as it is used to establish distinction between those who live on the island and those who make their lives elsewhere. . . Indeed, in too many instances, *dyaspora* was used as capital not only to demarcate distance but also to qualify those on the island as more authentic" (2006: 38). Yet, in spite of the presumed distance that may exist between so-called "authentic" Haitians and diasporic Haitians, the *dyas* never ceases to seek to reconnect with the past. In her earlier contribution to *The Butterfly's Way*, Ulysse, herself a *dyas,* is "desperate to refill all the gaps in [her] past," stealing back memories at night to retrace her childhood (2001: 210). She is not alone in her quest; filling the gaps is a constant preoccupation for the immigrant writer, who knows too well that "anything that is not reified, cannot be counted and measured, ceases to exist."[4]

Many Haitian writers of the diaspora, who raised their voices in *The Butterfly's Way*, were born in the United States (or left Haiti at a very young age); as such they are made outside and have no firsthand knowledge of Haiti. Jean-Pierre Benoît, a contributor to that collection very explicitly writes:

> I have no memory of Haiti. No memory of my crib in Port-au-Prince, no memory of the neighbors' children or the house in which we lived. My friends are in New York. My teachers are in New York. The Mets are in New York. I do not know Papa Doc, but our destinies are linked. (31)

However, he knows very well that Duvalier is an "evil man. A thief and a murderer. A monster who holds a nation prisoner. A man who tried to have [his] father killed" (32). He also knows that his family is waiting for the fall of Duvalier to go back home. However, he confesses that although he has "no special love for this country" [the United States], neither does he "desire a return to a birthplace that will, in fact, be no real return at all" (33). As his essay unfolds, Benoît returns to Haiti in July of 1986, "on an American passport, for a two-week visit,'' thus fulfilling his "destiny, more or less" (35), and perhaps experiencing "a scent of memory." Benoît's experiences as an exiled writer seem to give validity to Brah's assertion that home "is a place of no return even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of origin" (1996: 192). Because he did not grow up in Haiti, he feels like a stranger, an alien to this habitat or space that he no longer inhabits. The tension between no lived experience of Haiti and an imagined or fictitious Haiti is real. In the end, this experience seems to produce a diasporic individual for whom home is "neither here nor there." Benoît captures the dilemma of Haitian immigrants, who have "homes" in more than one place, constantly struggling to understand what each of these "homes" means for them.

Other writers of *The Butterfly's Way* talk about their dilemma of being out of place; they tell us that although they were born in the United States and have never been out of this country, no one accepts them as "American" (Calypso: 2001: 140). Therefore, several of these unaccepted "*ti ameriken*" have "professed a committed interest in Haiti" (Casimir 2001: 153), and made the trip "home," "in search of a name," perhaps also of a family (Neptune 2001: 147-51) and of a language (Cantave 2001: 164-170). They attempt to find their "home," invent their identities, construct their "diasporic selves," and try to be less "out of place."[5] However, as the reader learns from other voices in *The Butterfly's Way*, going home again has never been easy. Many Haitians living abroad feel they do not belong in Haiti, the land of their ancestors because they "are made outside." Surprisingly perhaps, although not incomprehensibly, Haitians in Haiti do not always recognize them as one of their own. Francie Latour, a Haitian-American journalist and another contributor to Danticat's *The Butterfly's*

Way, describes her trip to Haiti in the following manner:

> It was like a reunion with a stranger. Like many children of immigrants born and raised in the United States, I have skated precariously along the hyphen of my Haitian-American identity. . . But I knew that my return to Haiti wouldn't allow me to pick and choose as I pleased. My identity would no longer be defined by me; it would be defined by the Haitians around me. (125)

She goes on to poignantly explain her experiences of being a stranger in the land of her ancestors:

> "You are made outside." This is the way many Haitians speak of us who were born or grew up in the United States. It is as much a badge of pride as it is a stinging resentment. The ones made outside have proven how well Haitians can flourish in the land of opportunity. But in all our successes, we have also abandoned them. For Haitians who have struggled through the poverty and terror of daily life, there is no room for hyphen in a person's identity. Because I have not suffered with them, I can never be of them. (131)

The citation above encapsulates very well the feeling of alienation that is part of the diasporic experience. The exiled writer longs for a place where she does not belong, that no longer exists; she longs "to store up new, vivid memories to replace the ones time had turned up into faded snapshots" (125). Fouron is absolutely correct when he observes that for Haitian immigrants "home is not a fixed and anchored locality" (2003: 238). "Home" emerges as an amalgam of a variety of cultural experiences composed of their memories of the homeland and their efforts to reconstruct new selves in new localities. Many stories in *The Butterfly's Way* are sad, laced with painful memories of unhappy chapters of their authors' lives. Yet in spite of the melancholy tone, they are tales of strength, as their authors have been able to find the courage to tell them, thus making the emotional and psychological baggage of things past perhaps a little lighter. Indeed, the reader shares their pain and carries with him/or her part of the load.

Writing as a Place to Live

The situation of many Haitian writers of the diaspora is painfully reminiscent of the statement made by German-Jewish philosopher and critical theorist Theodor Adorno, a statement that the Palestinian-born writer Edward Said quoted over and over throughout most of his writings: "For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live" (as quoted in Said 2000: 568). Indeed, writing seems to have become the place where writers like Edwidge Danticat (and others in *The Butterfly's Way*), Myriam Chancy, and Marie-Hélène Laforest live. As writers and artists, they search for a location for negotiation and reconciliation, a place connecting different landscapes, a space that so to speak may be analogous to what Homi Bhaba calls the "Third Space" (1994: 36-39). It is from this location "in-between" that Haitian diasporic writers talk about their many "homelands," and their lives "between worlds" and "borders, physical and otherwise," as Bhabha purports. In most Haitian diasporic writing, the sense of dislocation, instability, dissonance, regret, strangeness, and grief is unmistakable.

This referenced sense of grief permeates Marie-Hélène Laforest's collection of short stories, *Foreign Shores*, where she depicts the wounds of Haitian lives lived on the island and abroad. Some of the stories (such as the "Wish Book") are a recollection of bourgeois life in Haiti, a life that was once pampered with the commodities of U.S. culture that could be purchased through a Sears Roebuck catalogue. Others, as Valerie Kaussen notes, "carry a tone of nostalgia for the gingerbread houses, the Kreyol songs of a lost innocence" (2005: 184), and the fish and plantains served in Ma's courtyard.

Others stories take the reader to the land of exile, New York City, where families have sought refuge to escape the terror of the *tontons macoutes*, but could never belong and quite fit in. *Foreign Shores* truly captures in the words of Kaussen "the trauma of lives lived between Brooklyn and Port-au-Prince, lives that have known treacherous sea crossings, armed militias arriving in the middle of the night, and wanderings through foreign landscapes where dreams are made and shattered" (2005: 186), lives that grieve for an end to exile, but perhaps will never make the final journey home. As Laforest herself, who has relocated to the distant shores of Italy, writes in another essay titled, "Homelands":

> in recent years I have been to Grenada, Antigua, Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo, coming always closer to the island of my birth, but never actually going back to it, never making the final journey, the dream of our years of exile. Between languages and borders, identities and colors, however, I have grieved for this. I am still grieving for it. (30)

In this passage, Laforest seems to provide validity to Said's assertion that "no return to the past is without irony, or without a sense that a full return, or repatriation, is impossible" (2000: introduction, xxxv). The return home seems impossible for the exiled writer. Laforest grieves for the country that she once knew, but that no longer is. She grieves for a place that now belongs to memory. From this space in-between that she has come to inhabit, a space located between a melancholic past, a harsh present in exile, and an uncertain future where nothing is secure, she turns to writing for comfort, for a gentler embrace, for relief from the fear of the constant struggle of those who are displaced and uprooted permanently.

Memory as Homeland

Edward Said confesses in *Out of Place: A Memoir*, that "all families invent their parents and children, give them a story, character, fate, and even a language" (1999: 3). This statement could not have been truer for Haitian diasporic and exiled writers. Perhaps nowhere is the need to "invent" or to record the memory of one's family story so salient than in Myriam Chancy's writings. In her essay, "Lazarus Rising: An Open Letter to my Daughter," (which by the way closes Danticat's collection, *The Butterfly's Way*), Chancy sets out to transmit to her daughter, Aimée, a part of her Haitian heritage, and to teach her of people and events "already come to pass" that she will not have the opportunity to experience, but which are nonetheless hers to hold and have (223). Chancy writes,

> I want to try and set down some details of what life has been for me as a displaced Haitian woman, growing up in lands not my own, in places that have demanded my integration and assimilation, a betrayal of my Haitianness and the various heritages that make up that identity.
>
> I stand not between two cultures, one Haitian, the other American, but between generations, one belonging to the pre-Duvalier era and the other belonging to the post-Duvalier era. Sometimes it is like standing in a barren no-man's land, but I know that some of us need to be the in-betweens so the gaps will not bleed, so that the discarded will be remembered and the wounds of forgetfulness staunched. (229)

A significant part of this letter is devoted to the memory of Chancy's maternal and paternal grandmothers, who constitute the images of Haiti most vividly engraved in the immigrant writer's memory. These are the memories that have helped her withstand the isolation of living somewhere that is not home. In this instance, this somewhere is Winnipeg, Canada, where Chancy's parents had relocated. As she writes to her daughter, "this familial memory has given me a safety net when I fear being overwhelmed

by an isolation too unfamiliar to be shared by those around me" (228). Chancy hopes that her daughter will keep these memories alive and that she will remember those who belonged to different eras, different generations, to a world that has ceased to be: "I know that my grandmother lives on in me and so shall she in you. As long as our memories are alive, so is she and all of the ancestors who preceded her own life" (237).

The same theme of memory infiltrates Chancy's 2005 novel, *The Scorpion's Claw*, which is in essence a collection of recollections, memories, and reveries written from the perspectives of the main narrator, Josèphe, and several other narrators, all of whom are somewhat related and connected to the primary narrator. Josèphe's maternal grandmother, Carmel, is the "tie that binds" all these narratives together. Incidentally, it is the grandmother's story that opens the book. Grandmother Carmel is a central figure in the lives of all three of the principal protagonists of the story—Josèphe, Josèphe's best friend Désirée, and Alphonse, who happens to be the illegitimate son of Grandmother Carmel's son Leo. These children have indeed spent a lot of their childhood at the grandmother's house. Her role is to pass on to the younger members of her family their cultural past, to instill in them a sense of pride in their heritage. In the novel, the grandmother plays a pivotal role in holding together her offspring; in her previous essay, the grandmother is also a central figure of the entire letter. One can argue that for Chancy, the grandmother is a symbolic metaphor for Haiti. She represents the image of the motherland, which holds together all her dispersed children struggling to fulfill their destinies in new habitats. Haiti is, indeed, the *poto mitan* (center pole) that—like a magnet—grabs all uprooted Haitians, and gives them a sense of belonging to a common space and having common roots, regardless of the different routes traveled.

Josèphe, now living in Winnepeg, Canada, painfully finds out that "one can't rush into the future without having looked the past in the face" (31). She obsessively asks herself over and over again: "How did I get here? How do I find my way home again?" (23). Her home is her memories, which she realizes, "cling to [her] brain like moss to the bark of aged trees" (33). In the despair of isolation and estrangement, resulting from her parents' move from Haiti to Canada to escape the escalating political violence of the Duvalier regime, she reaches for the memory of her childhood, and of her childhood's companions, Désirée and Alphonse. She carries with her a picture of them, a vestige of the past that the present has shattered, and that the future will be unable to bring back. The picture is present at the beginning of Josèphe's journey into her past, as she desperately sobs over all that has been lost:

> I pick up the picture of Alphonse, Désirée and I sitting on my grandmother's porch that last time. I was eight, Désirée and Alphonse, both fourteen. We were not smiling. We were so grown up. So knowing that we would not stand together like this again. (59)

The same picture emerges at the end of the story, accompanying Josèphe on her way home as she makes the journey to try to find what she lost:

> When I am seated in the plane and feel the jolt of the wheels leaving the tarmac, ... I finally understand why I have held so long to that picture of the three of us, young and afraid. It was to find out what we did not know then: the measure of our loss. (188)

As Mary Jo Muratore keenly observes, *The Scorpion's Claw* "resists closure" (2005: 162), as the reader never learns the outcome of Josèphe's quest. Will she ever find Alphonse? Will she ever find Désirée? Will she ever be able to look at the past in the face? In the final analysis, it does not really matter. Their memory is

forever inscribed in hers. As long as her memories are alive, as long as the picture of the three of them remains intact, they will always be together. And maybe her loss will be healable, and the future not as bleak.

In many ways, Chancy's memories are her homeland; they become her "third space," the only space that she occupies. Faced with sheer emptiness and a devastating sense of loss, she has nowhere to turn, but inwards. Memory becomes the secret place where all wounds are soothed; it is the space where one buries oneself to escape the nightmares of the present. Memory is a permanent fixture and a great consolation. Indeed, for this exiled writer who no longer has a homeland, memory becomes her homeland. Moreover, memory resists closure, just like the novel; it has the ability to resurrect the past, as both Laforest and Chancy demonstrate. Edward Said once said, "by definition, exile and memory go together, it is what one remembers of the past and how one remembers it that determines how one sees the future" (2000: introduction, xxxv). Haitian exiled writers show us how to hold on to our memories of the past; and, in so doing, they paint for us a vision of the future where one can be hopeful, and where the human soul can be redeemed.

Memory as a Quest for Redemption

The quest for redemption is perhaps the underlying theme of Edwidge Danticat's powerful novel, *The Dew Breaker*. Through a series of stories, the novel depicts the lives and recollections of both perpetrators and victims of political violence in Haiti under the "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc" Duvalier regimes. The main character of the story, whose name is never revealed, is a former *tonton macoute*, a *dew breaker*, who would come to people's homes "before dawn as the dew was settling on the leaves" (131) to take them away to prison. This protagonist tortured and killed many people in Haiti for a living. The reader finds out that this torturer is wounded by a prisoner who had managed to get hold of a piece of a broken chair, and to land and "sink it an inch or so" in the right cheek of his executioner, "tearing the skin down to his jawline" (226). The *dew breaker* shoots the prisoner to death, and walks out of the barracks. Outside, he runs into a "woman, a madwoman it seemed" (231), who is rushing to the prison to find out the fate of her stepbrother, a preacher, who happens to be the same victim who had scarred him and whom he had shot moments earlier. "I'm free," he said. "I finally escaped" (237). The woman, believing that the *dew breaker* was a prisoner who had just escaped from the death chamber, takes care of him. Subsequently, he changes his identity and moves with her to New York, hoping to leave behind the memory of the dead, of those he killed so brutally, and perhaps to be redeemed through confession and self-effacement. "One day, he would try to make her [the woman] understand why he'd put it like that. In many ways, it was true. He had escaped from his life. He could no longer return to it, no longer wanted to" (237). However, the permanent scar that he carries on his cheek is a constant reminder of the very life he wants to forget. "Every time he looked in the mirror, he would have to confront this mark and remember him [the preacher]. Whenever people asked what happened to his face, he would have to tell a lie, a lie that would remind him further of the truth" (227-28). Therefore, it is not ironic that this man, the *dew breaker*, once he relocates to New York comes to develop a real love for the Ancient Egyptian exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum, and for the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. Furthermore, it is also not ironic that he happens to name his daughter *Ka*—the child he has with the woman—because, as he explains:

> in Egyptian world, a Ka is the double of the body. . . The body's companion

> through life and afterlife. It guides the body through the kingdom of the dead. You see ka is like soul. . . In Haiti is what we call good angel, ti bon anj. When you were born, I look at your face, I think, here is my ka my good angel. (17)

The *dew breaker* hopes that his good angel, Ka, can lighten his heart, as with ancient Egyptian tradition regarding the judgment of the dead, "when the heart of a person is put on a scale, if it's heavy, the heart, then this person cannot enter the other world" (19). The dew breaker is tormented by the memories of those whose lives he ruined and transformed into a living hell. He wants to redeem himself and ask for forgiveness through confession. He must confess to Ka, his daughter, who by now is a grown woman and an artist, that her father was never the victim she thought he was, as "the scar furrowed into his face" (32), and his recurrent nightmares had led her to believe. But confessing to her daughter is the hardest thing he has to do, because he "must have already understood that confessions do not lighten living hearts" (33). All her life, Ka believed that "her father's ordeal was that he had left his country and moved to a place where everything from the climate to the language was unlike his own, a place where he never quite seemed to fit in, never appeared to belong" (33). This is why she wanted to tell her father's story, the one he had fabricated, the one he had told her all along, through a sculpture of him that she had carved lovingly:

> a three-foot mahogany figure of my father, naked, kneeling on a half-foot-square base, his back arched like the curve of a crescent moon, his downcast eyes fixed on his very long fingers and the large palms of his hands. It was hardly revolutionary, rough and not too detailed, minimalist at best, but it was my favorite of all my attempted representations of my father. It was the way I imagined him in prison. (6)

Ka has even found a buyer for her "famous" artwork. The sculpture is going to be purchased by Gabrielle Fonteneau, "a Haitian American woman, about [Ka's] age, the star of a popular television series and an avid art collector" (7). Ka and her father drive to Tampa, Florida, to deliver the sculpture to Madame Fonteneau. However, after arriving in Florida, the father steps out of the hotel while the daughter is asleep, intending to get rid of the sculpture. When he finally returns to the hotel, where the panicky daughter had already notified the manager and the police of his disappearance, he feels the pressing need to finally tell her the truth and to put an end to years and years of monstrous lies:

> Ka, let your father talk to you. . . I'd prefer you not sell that statue. . . (13-14)
>
> "Ka, I don't deserve a statue," he says again this time more slowly, "not a whole one, at least. You see, Ka, your father was the hunter, he was not the prey." (20)

> "Ka, I was never in prison, he says. "I was working in the prison. . . It was one of the prisoners inside the prison who cut my face in this way". . . "The man who cut my face," he continues, "I shot and killed him, like I killed many people." (21-22)

Now and only now, after his confession, can she imagine the real cause of her father's nightmares. "Maybe he dreams of dipping his hands in the sand on a beach in his own country and finding that what he comes up with is a fistful of blood" (30). She begins to realize that after all the unfamiliar, the foreign landscape might have been "comforting, rather than distressing," to her father, and why he had never wanted "the person he was, is, permanently documented in any way" (34). Could confession bring about healing? Could a lifetime of concealment erase the horrors of his past? Could he fulfill his quest for redemption? Danticat does not tell us. *The Dew Breaker* just like *The Scorpion's Claw* resists closure. We, the readers, are disturbed profoundly.

Could we, like the madwoman, "usher him back home and heal him?" (237). We are in spite of ourselves participating in the *dew breaker*'s search for redemption. Marie-Agnès Sourieau is absolutely corrects when she writes: "*The Dew Breaker plonge dans les tréfonds de l'âme humaine en des lieux que nous préférerions ignorer parce que, d'une part, nous avons peine à en pénétrer l'opacité, et d'autre part, nous savons que d'une certaine façon nous participons à cette tragédie*" (96-97). There is no doubt that we are enthralled by this human tragedy; we are plunged into the darkness of its memory.

The Dew Breaker is about the lives of "men and women whose tremendous agonies filled every blank space in their lives"; it is the individual stories of men and women, "chasing fragments of themselves long lost to others" (137-38). All of these individuals, whether they were hunters or prey, have an urgent need to reinvent their lives. However, their search for a new identity, a new character, a new fate, a new story is tragically painful. Indeed, for the *dew breaker*, Ka's father, the habit of dissimulation has proven both wearying and nerve-racking. To quote Said, "exile is never the place of being satisfied, placid, or secure" (2000: 186).

The Universality of Danticat, Chancy and Laforest's Works

Danticat, Chancy and Laforest are undoubtedly part of a diasporic literary tradition that did not exist thirty years ago, as it was not customary for immigrant women to write about their personal experiences. They are the beneficiaries of the Black and Ethnic feminist mobilizations that developed in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, and of the structural changes in opportunities that facilitated women's participation in public life.[6] These movements were not confined to the United States; they did emerge in Great Britain as well, for example, owing to its large Afro-Caribbean and South Asian populations.[7] Lived experience has always been a key concept within Black and Ethnic feminism, which has sought to give a voice to women's personal experiences, perspectives, and ideas. This movement, which has transcended U.S. borders, from the very beginning was intended to empower women of color and foster conditions for social justice (Collins 2000; James and Sharpley-Whiting 2000). To quote Audre Lorde, the objective of Black feminism is to make available to Black women their "fullest concentration of energy . . . openly allowing power from particular sources of [their] living to flow back and forth through all [their] different selves" (120-21). This is the legacy of that movement for Haitian diasporic writers, such as Danticat, Chancy, and Laforest. They are not confined to burying "their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles."[8] Indeed, the path to self-affirmation and self-expression was already paved for them years earlier by such giant sisters as Tony Morrison, Alice Walker, Barbara Christian, Angela Davis, Paule Marshall, Audre Lorde, Jamaica Kincaid, and Maryse Condé, among others. These Haitian women writers are truly part of the Black feminist tradition that is committed to advancing the fundamental theme of the "oneness of all human life" (Collins 2000: 42), which is embedded in the finest humanist traditions. It is to the humanist orientation of their works that I now turn my attention.

Danticat, Chancy and Laforest's novels are engaged in a struggle over the past, a struggle over remembering, which takes "the form of individual testimony, in which personal memory resists 'history' as a privileged way of knowing" (Kaussen 2008: 187). Because of their focus on themes such as migration, uprootedness, dislocation, memory of things past, and healing, they are part of the greater post-colonial "fictional" enterprise, which places a great deal of weight on individual subjects' memories. Moreover, as it has

been argued strongly in the case of Danticat's fiction (Nesbit 2003, Meecham 2005, and Marxsen 2005), these works can also be analyzed through the lenses of trauma theory, which explains how "subjects" feel the historical past through a variety of feelings, ranging from guilt, melancholia, repression, anger, and reconciliation. Indeed, their works are a mélange of confessions, testimonies, and recollections that together combine to produce "literatures of memory" to use Kaussen's expression (2008: 191). In this perspective, Haitian diasporic literature is universal; it speaks to the totality of the human existence, the constant longing for an end to inequality and violence, and a resounding cry for healing, renewal, and collective solidarity.

Haitian diasporic literature reveals that migration, which undoubtedly is a form of exile, is a place where one suffers, remembers, reflects, dreams, hopes, and tries to reinvent oneself by reassembling one's broken life and history into a new whole. This is precisely what happens to all the writers of *The Butterfly's Way*, and to all the protagonists of *Foreign Shores*, *The Scorpion's Claw*, and *The Dew Breaker*. They embark on a quest to find things past. However, their search resists closure; it remains an unfinished journey, which mirrors human existence. To borrow the expression from the title of Nesbitt's 2003 book, Haitian diasporic literature is quintessentially the art of "voicing memory" through all its vicissitudes. Edwidge Danticat, Myriam Chancy and Mary-Hélène Laforest, and other Haitian diasporic writers capture through their writings the full dimension of *la condition humaine* and transform it into art. In the words of Marc Robinson in *Altogether Elsewhere* (1994), they remind readers, and perhaps themselves "that their imagination and craft haven't been mortally damaged by the uprooting; each new piece is a gesture of defiance, a spiting of the odds" (introduction, xx). By being able to voice their memories, they join the ranks of any other great writer who has produced great works of literature: André Malraux, Joseph Conrad, Ernest Hemingway, or James Baldwin. Perhaps most important, Haitian immigrant writers have begun to unravel the "coloniality of one-sided, hedonistic-centered readings of traditional, white-Anglo-Saxon texts" and to move us toward the "connected triangles that are the works of the multi-faceted Other" (Orlando 2006:7). In so doing, truly they have fertilized the field of literature with new meaning, new humanity, and new beauty.

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Notes

[1]For more on the concept of 'home' and the immigrant experience, see Espiritu (2003), in particular Chapter 1, "Home Making."

[2]The *dew breaker* is a literal translation of the Creole expression "choukèt lawouze," that refers to members of the *tonton macoutes* or armed militias under the Duvalier regime, who arrive in the middle of the night or before daybreak in people's homes to arrest them.

[3]This expression is borrowed from Brah's 2003 chapter "The Scent of Memory: Strangers, Our Own and Others."

[4]Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, as quoted in Said (2000: 562).

[5]The expression "constructing diasporic selves" is modeled after McGill's (2005) "constructing black selves." The expression "out of place" is taken from Said (1999).

[6]For more on feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, see Roth (2004).

[7]For a discussion of feminism with South Asian women in Great Britain, see Brah (1995, chapter 5 in particular).

[8]Maria W. Stewart (1831), as quoted in Collins (2000: 290).

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THE DANCE OF THE DEVILS OF THE COSTA CHICA: AFRO-MEXICAN PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE

By Manuel Apodaca

This paper explores cultural characteristics of the Afro-Mexican population of the Costa Chica region located on the Pacific Coast of the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero, Mexico. Taking advantage of both cultural and performance studies, I introduce here a description and interpretation of the Afro-Mexican Dance of the Devils, as it is performed in two rural communities, Collantes and La Boquilla, in the state of Oaxaca. Various features of the African legacy come together in the content and performance of the Dance of the Devils, one of the most important cultural expressions of this African descendant ethnic group, whose current form also includes Amerindian and European elements.[1]

In Search of the Origins

Although the Dance of the Devils is popular among most Afro-Mexican communities in the Costa Chica region, there is also evidence of this performance by local Amerindian groups, especially among the Amuzgos (Moedano et al. *Festival Costeño*; Guzmán Calvo 66). Yet, it is in various Afro-Mexican communities of the Costa Chica where this dance is most deeply rooted. Such is the case of Cuajinicuilapa, San Nicolas, Lo de Soto in the state of Guerrero, and El Ciruelo, Morelos, Collantes and La Boquilla, in the state of Oaxaca. This study of the Dance is based on the present-day performance as it was observed in the last two communities mentioned.

The Dance of the Devils and other popular Afro-Mexican expressions, such as *corridos* (folk ballads), *Sones de artesa*[2] (Artesa *son*), oral tradition, cuisine, and popular medicine, have been an important part of the local culture for centuries. Historians and anthropologists assume that Spanish colonizers settled the Costa Chica region since the 16th century. They brought slaves to the current municipalities of Jamiltepec and Pinotepa Nacional in Oaxaca, and to Cuajinicuilapa in Guerrero to work in their haciendas and cotton plantations where blacks worked as ranchers and cowboys.[3] At the time of slavery in Mexico, black men were consigned to work in mines and plantations, whereas women were destined to carry out domestic labor in the masters' houses. On Costa Chica's cotton plantations and cattle ranches, the situation was not different. Oral and written testimonies[4] collected during my field work at different stages from 2004 to 2007, reveal that the origin of the Devils Dance may be found in the segregation of blacks from festivities and pulbic celebrations organized by the masters of te haciendas. As in many other countries, blacks contested segregation by performing their own festivities. Beyond the hacienda's walls, they would perform rituals to their African gods, play drums and dance till exhaustion. Then, the master would come out and shout at them to stop; otherwise, they would be accused before the Inquisition of adoring the devil. Similar stories have been attested in Cuba, Venezuela, and in different countries of the Caribbean. In these countries, scholars have reported different versions of Dances of devils, such as the Cuban *diablitos* performed by Afro-Cubans during the Epiphany (Fernando Ortiz 1992:46-64; 1998:171-177). In the same manner, Venezuela's Devils of Corpus Christi, although more related to religious conversion have been also reported in the literature (Pollak-Eltz, 48-53; Rosenberg; González et al.).

One of the most difficult tasks for scholars to studying the African diaspora has been to locate the precise origin of enslaved Africans who were brought to

the Costa Chica. As one of the pioneers of African studies in Mexico, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán started archive investigation in the *Archivo General de La Nación* (AGN) in Mexico City in the 1940s. He left an important route for further Afro-Mexican studies. In his work, *La población negra de México* [1949] (1989), he emphasizes that many African sources can be traced during the slave trade; however, not all of them were easily obtained because several factors obstructed his search. Among other difficulties, Aguirre Beltrán points out, "most slaves entered the New World under a generic name, such as blacks from Guinea, Angola, Cabo Verde, Congo and São Tomé" (*La población* 102); yet, the most recurrent name he founded in historical archives was that of the group *Mandé*. According to Aguirre Beltrán, this ethnic group was the most influential for Mexican culture during the 16th century. He writes, "They entered under the general denomination of *Mandingos*, and left as a testimony of their presence, numerous geographical places in the New Spain that hold their name as well as the persistence of the word '*mandinga*' as a popular designation of the devil" (*La población* 107).[5] Why this association of blacks with the devil? Obviously, there are religious implications here, as much as stigmatization on the part of the colonizer trying to break the will and culture of the colonized. I return to this issue below.

In regards to blacks introduced into Mexico during the three centuries of Spanish colonization, Aguirre Beltrán writes:

> Blacks were in Mexico a minority representing 0.1% to 2.0% of the Colonial population; the number introduced by the slave trade was no bigger than 250,000 individuals in the course of three centuries. However, the number of Spaniards were small, and certainly, in New Spain they represented a smaller number than the blacks (*Cuijla* 8).

Having lost their freedom and being sold as slaves, Africans were disseminated throughout the entire territory of Mexico. Gradually, they blended with the rest of the population, giving as a result the profound mestizaje which currently characterizes modern Mexico. Hernández Cuevas asserts that the present reality of modern Mexico's mestizaje cannot be accounted for without the blacks' contribution. In his work *África en México*, he has pointed out:

> In Mexico, dark and pale blacks, from the point of view of *positive mestizaje*, are not in a process of assimilation. Black men and women of yesterday and today, together with other no less important components, form the ethnicity and nationality. Blacks exist in Mexico. Black people are in the mestizos with the rainbow of their cultural contributions; blacks formed the nation and nationality. Blacks' capacity of resistance has allowed them to persist by means of survival strategies such as mestizaje. As such, the African cultural contributions are fundamental parts of the Mexican and Mexicanity. This is verified by popular culture: oraliture, food, music, dance, sense of humor and religious symbols. In other words, Africa is medullar energy of the Mexican spirit, or African-Mexican from the Afrocentric point of view. This is ratified by the carnival and the Mexican fiestas. (17)

Hernández Cuevas' deconstruction of traditional Mexican discourse in regards to mestizaje, from José Vasconcelos to Agustín Basave Benítez,[6] is a new claim that overtly challenges both past and new narratives about Mexican mestizaje. By overlooking the historical presence of blacks, Mexican post-revolutionary mestizaje's ideology erroneously assumed that mixed people are the product of Amerindians and Europeans only. In the same manner, Mexican scholars in the last two decades doing investigation about the so-called "third root" of Mexico have unanimously taken for granted the concept *afromestizos* as a general term for

Afro-Mexicans. It seems that the concept was taken from Aguirre Beltrán who originally proposed in *La Población* a variety of terms to classify the different types of racial blending; thus, *afromestizo* -together with *indomestizo* and *euromestizo*-, are no different than hypothetical racial categories derived from a more general concept that justifies the prevalence of mestizo as dominant in Mexico. Indeed, the term afromestizo taken up by the Mexican academy has not been used by most of the population of African descendants in Mexico because they do not identify themselves as such. In this regard, Vinson III has declared:

> Mexico is the only Latin American country where some scholars still refer to black people as afromestizo. Although this term would seem to identify a special characteristic of the Mexican "mixing" in the Costa Chica, individuals recognized today as blacks do not show more particularities of "mixing" than the rest of the blacks of the African diaspora. In fact, the tonalities of the skin color as well as a wide range of phenotypes are the norm amongst African descendants. Therefore, Mexico is not the exception. (57)

The presence of black culture in Mexico has been systematically ignored, due to political segregation and cultural Mestizaje. Currently, there is more investigation to support its importance, and also to account for the existence of black nucleuses perfectly distinguished but still marginalized and living sometimes in worse conditions than native Amerindians.[7] The reality of the contemporary black population on both coastal sides of the country as well as in various cities of the central plateau reflects not only the abundance of the African phenotype but also a visible African influence. Various cultural characteristics including behavior, language, music, dance, popular medicine, and oral tradition are notable African features inherited by the current population of these coastal regions of modern Mexico. In the same manner, the manifest Mexican pleasure for dancing, equally attributed to all Latin American nations as a sign of strong African influence (Chasteen 112-113); signifying[8] and double meanings in language used to provoke fun (*picardía, cabuleo*), are tokens of African heritage imbedded in current Mexican mestizaje.

From Runaway Slaves to Undocumented Immigrants

In regards to Costa Chica's Afro-Mexican roots, Aguirre Beltran (*Cuijla* 13) declares that many Africans were brought to this region during early colonial times to work in the area of Cuajinicuilapa, Guerrero. Other blacks arrived to the area as "*cimarrones*"[9] or maroons escaping from sugar plantations located at the former bishop's territory of Puebla and Veracruz.

Costa Chica's oral tradition somehow disguises the *cimarrón* origin of blacks with mythical shipwreck stories. The most common of these says that a Spanish or Portuguese ship, full of black slaves, was wrecked somewhere on the coast of Oaxaca; as a result, all the blacks escaped and populated the region. Based on ethnographic data collected in the area of Collantes, Bobbie Vaughn's "Mexico in the Context of the Slave Trade" suggests that, depending on the village they are from, these stories vary the point where the ship could have been wrecked; thus, his informants situate El Faro, Puerto Minizo or Playa Blanca as the shipwreck's original place. Vaughn also proposes that stories of this kind work as a veil to disguise the runaway origin of regional blacks who have endured discrimination for centuries. Vaughn, who has studied race and nation in the Costa Chica's culture, notices that unlike Afro-descendants from Veracruz who have acquired a clearer consciousness of being blacks, the Afro-Mexicans of the Costa Chica until recently started to identify themselves with the diaspora.[10] Attempts to develop black consciousness in the

region during the last ten years include *México negro* (Black Mexico), a nongovernmental organization initiated by Fr. Glyn Jemmott, who came from Trinidad and Tobago to work as parish priest in El Ciruelo, Oaxaca. However, much work needs to be done in the area. The degree of marginalization and stigmatization is still high. As an example, I wish to refer to the story of one of my informants from Collantes, a black woman who in September 2005 tried to cross the US-Mexico border. After trespassing the borderline and the desert, the *coyote* split the whole group of approximately twenty persons into two groups. Men were placed in one vehicle, and women and children in the other. Later on, the Border Patrol stopped only the vehicle occupied by women and children and allowed the other vehicle to pass across. The group of women and children was deported to Mexican territory where the Mexican immigration police mistreated them as criminals. Once there, my informant from Collantes and another girlfriend of her were treated poorly because of their darker color. She said that even though they both showed the '*credencial de elector*' (Mexican ID with her picture on it), the Mexican police did not believe they were Mexicans. The Mexican police wanted to make them confess they were from Cuba because of their evident African phenotype, they asked more questions, and made them sing the Mexican national anthem. As a consequence, the two women were released long after the rest of the group.

Since emigration to the North is abundant due to lack of jobs and privatization of land property, stories of this kind are frequently heard in the region. Traditional life and customs typical of these small rural communities have been drastically altered under the impact of globalization in developing countries like Mexico. Despite unavoidable transitions, many aspects of the local culture still persist as remnants of the African heritage. Sometimes even the same holders of the culture tend to forget their origin, but for the investigator those remnants are indexes enlightening the path that one should follow in order to return such eroded features to the community as tokens of its lost memory. Such is the importance of studying the origin and evolution of the Dance of the Devils.

Symbolism and Performance

In the Costa Chica region, the act of belonging to the group of the Dance of the Devils is assumed by each member as a social undertaking, as well as a form of communal integration into tradition and society. Both communities studied here, Collantes and La Boquilla, are in close proximity to one another and keep in common many cultural features, including traditions, ethnicity, and socio-economic characteristics. Notwithstanding these similarities, their respective Devils groups reflect notable differences in music, choreography and costume. Proximity also brings rivalry between these two communities despite the exchange of familial kinship. Because La Boquilla is smaller in size and population than Collantes, some Afro-cultural expressions become more visible, and the rural way of living is visible yet in various familial practices, in housing, and in livelihood.

All elements concerning the spectacle have evident meaning, though sometimes are not overtly expressed. For all the show of energy and personal skills in dancing and playing, it seems that dancers somehow want to hide the real origin and purpose of the performance. The internal composition of the Devils' ritual contrives a mysterious ambiguity. On the one hand, this dance is linked to the origins of the Afro-descendants of the Costa Chica. Each dancer assumes the act of belonging to the group as a sign of ethnic identity. On the other hand, the apparent purpose of the Dance of the Devils seems only to be that of play, and it therefore works as a ludicrous entertainment.

Although it would be difficult to place Costa Chica's Afro-Mexican culture within what Édouard Glissant calls Creole cultures of the Caribbean, some characteristics do permit the speculation that this regional culture of Mexico underwent creolization in earlier times. Glissant suggests that unlike Western societies, Creole cultures adopt a different point of view towards history. He calls this phenomenon "*prophetic vision of the past.*" In Glissant's words, this means: "The past has not to be reconstructed by the historian in an objective way (or subjective), but rather it has to be imagined too, in a prophetic manner, by the peoples, the communities, and the cultures that have been deprived of such a past" (86). Thus, it is common to hear made up stories about the origins of Creole cultures, like the Costa Chica's shipwreck tales. Little interest in the past, in terms of 'official history,' may express a group whose main obstacle to development is the opprobrious colonizer's imaginary[11] that has made it to feel ashamed of its own ancestry. In fact, the diminishing of the black self started in the *negrero* ships. Since then, racist policies and stereotyped cultural practices have customarily persisted until the present day in most Latin American countries.[12]

In this manner, the Dance of the Devils can be seen as living representation of what Glissant calls "trace thinking," the inherited power of memory and tradition of the African community in the Americas, which made possible the preservation of its funeral, wedding, baptismal and sorrow songs. "Trace thinking" generated artistic universals such as jazz music and contemporary dance (Glissant 19). In its covert significance, rather than in its overt performance, the Devils' ritual dance provides essential clues to find traces of the origin. Every constituent of the dance has meaning. Masks, clothing, musical instruments, theatrical performance, ritual, and play are symbols connected to history, identity, resistance, idiosyncrasy, and so on. Certainly, masks have a long tradition in both African and Amerindian ritual-dances. A mask may hide the individual's identity, but it will also show the *imago* of the self. Why a devil, and not a tiger, or monkey, or any other creature? No doubt, "devil" is connected with the dark side, the evil, the mundane, but also with the outcast, and the 'other.' In the colonial period, blacks were constantly associated with the devil. The Inquisition condemned the practices of African religions. This unremitting intolerance towards blacks made them either interiorize or appropriate the term 'devil.' African performances were represented in different ways during the few festivities in which blacks were allowed to perform their songs and dances, namely the carnival, the epiphany on January 6, and during the days of the Corpus Christi in the months of May and June, 60 days after Easter.

Despite other terms occasionally assumed by *Costeño* dancers and musicians, such as *'tenangos',*[13] meaning 'wandering people,' the persistence of the word *diablos* (devils) to name this dance is an example of linguistic appropriation. By appropriating the term, this ethnic group lends it a different semantic connotation. Across cultures, linguistic appropriation is a social form of resistance. In other words, it occurs when a certain group, historically downtrodden in the fight for freedom, either actively or passively adopts a term of dubious good connotation as the normal mode in which to describe itself. Thus, a word initially stigmatized by the dominant elite acquires a new meaning, overtly dispossessed of such a connotation, among the disenfranchised people. Such is the case of the word "Chicano," for instance, and many other words like it.

In this context, the term *diablos* or *diablitos*, used by Portuguese and Spanish colonizers to describe artistic and religious representatives of most Afro-Latin American diasporas, had the

common reference of Legba, Exu, Papa LaBas, multiple names for the same Orisha, the divine Trickster among Yoruba religions. However, as Floyd Merrell has observed, in Brazilian Candomblé Exu is beyond the categorization of the Devil as it is understood in Christian tradition: "Exu satanized as evil in contrast to good is Exu transformed into what he is not. Exu is no Satan. There is no Evil One in the Candomblé cosmology" (147). Also, while analyzing the African spirit imbedded in the Trinidadian carnival "in its aspect as a Creole bacchanal, where everything is permitted" (48), Ian Isidore Smart has declared:

> African theology confronts contradiction by accepting with equanimity the existence of an Orisha such as Legba, the master of the crossroads, the master of in-betweenity, the medium through which the transcendent and the mundane, the sacred and the profane, the material and the spiritual, the divine and the human make contact. Legba is a very important divinity, god, *ntr*, but it is easy for many to see him as the Devil. (47)

Various African American scholars in the United States have studied the transcendental meaning of Legba, either for black culture analysis in relation to the trickster in folk, art, and oral tradition as in Henry Louis Gates' "The Blackness of the Blackness" (687). Also, Ishmael Reed's *Mambo Jumbo*, parodies this African god as the character PaPa LaBas in his postmodern novel. In the same manner, the figure of the '*chamuco*' in Latin American narrative has much to do with Exu, "the master of the crossroads" in Brazilian Candomblé, as João Guimarães Rosa's epitomizes in *Graõ Sertaõ Veredas*.

Hence, the devils' masks and the entire devils' performance become just other signifiers of the linguistic signifier. For the *Costeño's* devil dancer, the word "devils" does not mean evil; it expresses something associated rather with rebelliousness, trickery, but also with fraternity. Occupied in different activities to acquire a livelihood, mainly farming, livestock and fishing, the Devils' dancer as well as the musician, normally assumes his role in the performance as leisure. The entire group becomes a kind of brotherhood, a tacit group of friends and relatives identified with their ethnic and cultural environment. Participation in the Dance is assumed externally as play, but everyone knows it is also a group undertaking that each member voluntarily decides to be part of, and is never obliged to do so by religious or lineage duty. Nevertheless, it does not mean they have no responsibilities. In fact, to make a fault is penalized by the group. In the same manner, they may ignore the origins of the dance but feel it deeply in their blood. When I asked some dancers and musicians about the history of the dance, no one, including the current leaders from both communities, was able to say precisely why and when the Dance of the Devils begun. Although some of the elders in both groups studied belong to ancient families who for generations have performed the dance, all the information they know is vague and mostly acquired by oral tradition and practice. Nevertheless, political implications for the performance obviously exist. Due to the awakening of black consciousness in the Costa Chica, and the economic stimulation derived from state policies to promote local culture, the formation of more Devils' groups in the region is understandable. Although people may ignore historical events, their ability to perform derived from oral tradition and performance is yet solid. Forced by globalization, the Devil's dancer has to adapt his ritual to current times. Here, the dyad of the performance, described by Richard Schechner as ritual and aesthetic entertainment, is pertinent:

> The shift from ritual to aesthetic performance occurs when a participating community fragments into occasional,

> paying customers. The move from aesthetic performance to ritual happens when an audience of individuals is transformed into a community. The tendencies to move in both these directions are present in all performances. (72)

Taking these arguments for granted, the Dance of the Devils as a spectacle moving from ritual to aesthetic performance, corresponds directly to Schechner's dyad. One of the leaders of the troupe, who is also a musician and composer from Collantes, told me that the group participates in as many festivities and cultural events as they are invited to. Sometimes they receive money for their participation, at other times sponsors cover transportation and food only. He added that by performing in the region and beyond at different venues, the group promotes the Dance and the traditions of the community. Within the framework of Schechner's dyad as back and forth movement for all performances, the ethnic and political implications of the Dance of the Devils in the social context of the Afro-Mexican population of the Costa Chica become positive tokens of identity and resistance.

Days of the Dead

During November 1st and 2nd, the official days for the ritual celebration, the Dance of the Devils becomes practically a carnivalesque performance. However, the initial phase of the ritual at the local cemetery requires more respect because it is dedicated to pay tribute to dead ancestors. The group dances the five *sones*, and the leader, "*El Terron*," touched by the emotional circumstances of the event, cries out the names of friends and former dancers and musicians who passed away. Then, followed by the crowd, who are the other spontaneous but relevant characters in this performance, the devils wander about the main streets of the village dancing, drinking and playing. Eventually, they stop at the houses where the owner gives them money or food for dancing. During the whole Day of the Dead, the Devils' festival is an opportunity for everybody to have fun.

Celebrating this dance during one of Mexico's most traditional festivities known as "Day of the Dead," is significant for many reasons. First, it brings to mind a direct relation to the underworld. Elements like devil, god, death, and creation, typically position the search for origins in a mythical context. On the other hand, this celebration in the Costa Chica of Mexico somehow has reminiscences of the traditional Yoruba ritual known as Egungun (translated as Masquerade). The Egungun are masked men who represent the spirits of the living-dead.[14] According to Laura Strong, Yoruba people believe that "the ancestors are much more than just dead relatives, they play an active role in the daily life of the living. They are sought out for protection and guidance, and are believed to possess the ability to punish those who have forgotten their family ties [...]. The meaning of the Egungun is to provide a certain amount of stability to Yoruba society." In the same manner, Mexican tradition from pre-Columbian times believes in wandering spirits after death. There is a common belief about the constant interaction between the living and the dead so, the Day of the Dead is thus a time to pay tribute and to celebrate one's ancestors. On the days of celebration, altars with fruits, drinks and food for the souls who return to earth must be created. As in the Yoruba tradition, Mexican people believe that forgetting to pay homage to dead relatives may bring bad luck, manifested as punishment.

The pre-Columbian Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead is still observed throughout the country as one of the most important holly days. This celebration remarkably combines European and Amerindian traditions and, in areas with strong African influence as in the Costa Chica of Oaxaca and Guerrero,

African features are also present. As it happened with many other Amerindian cults, Spanish missionaries readapted the Christian calendar to the ancient Mexican cult of death, originally performed at the end of the harvest in Mesoamerica. With the passing of time, the blending of Amerindians, mestizos and Africans became more common in the whole country. Perhaps it may happen as strategy of blacks trying to assimilate to mainstream culture. Certainly, most oral testimonies in the region agree that it was in the earlier years of the 20th century, after Mixtecan tradition, when Costa Chica's Afro-Mexicans adopted the Days of the Dead as the official days for the performance of the Dance of the Devils. Nevertheless, there are reasons to believe, as Aguirre Beltrán has indicated whit reference to the concept of *sombra* (shadow) and wandering spirits (*Cuijla* 178-184) that many African tokens have permeated the memory of *Costeños* and are still present in their current cosmogony. In the same manner, the music of the Dance of the Devils, as we shall see, equally reflects the fusion of the three already mentioned ethnic roots.

Music

Five songs in particular compose the music of the Devils' dance; although there are variations in style, names and rhythm, the music is almost the same for all performing groups. These five songs are the following:

1. *Son de entrada* (Beginning *Son*) or *Llegaron los diablos* (The Devils Arrive)
2. *Son de los Periquitos* (*Son* of the Little Parrots)
3. *Son de los pañuelos* (*Son* of the Handkerchiefs)
4. *Son de los versos* (*Son* of the Verses)
5. *El jarabe* (The Jarabe)

The order listed does not reflect the order of performance. There are significant variations in the sequence of songs from one group to another. At least four out of five songs are very similar each other. The musical structure of these ancient songs is similar to that of the traditional Mexican *son*, which has its roots in a mixture of European, Amerindian and African music. The Mexican *son*, as E. Thomas Stanford rightly states is more elaborate than one might suppose, as compared with the Cuban *son*. Stanford points out:

> The word [*son*] connotes a form with three distinct aspects: musical, literary and choreographic [...]. As to overall musical form, it is strophic with a refrain and an instrumental ensemble involving a violin (one or more), a number of instruments of the guitar family, and a harp. Although there are exceptions to this generality [...]. The voices involved should be male.
>
> As to its literary form, this is the *copla*, or couple, normally sung with repetitions of lines so as to permit its expansion from a usual four lines of eight syllables each, with rhyme or assonance falling at the last syllable of the second and fourth lines, to five-, six-, and even eight-line variants. The literary content of these couplets deals almost universally with women and love-making [...]. This content is almost invariably present, though frequently it is rather obscured in double meaning which the audience is predisposed to expect.
>
> As a dance type, the *son* is *zapateado*, at least in sections; it is a couple dance – commonly only males dance *zapateado*; and when danced as an exhibition form it is normally performed on a raised wooden platform called *tarima* –which in itself acts as a kind of musical instrument... (68).

Although similarities with the Cuban *son* exist, especially in the area of Veracruz, the Mexican *son* presents a variety of forms and names according to region, such as, *son jarocho*, *son jaliciense*, *son istmeño*, et cetera. Occasionally, the Mexican *son* may be identified with *chilena*, and *huapango*, the latter a typical rhythm from the Huasteca region and the former another mestizo

rhythm from the Costa Chica originated during the 19th century. *Chilena* owes its name to a Chilean group who, during the California Gold Rush,[15] happened to stop by the Municipality of Pionotepa Nacional for a few months. This group composed of South American men and women disembarked in Puerto Minizo in Oaxaca. Circumstantially, unable to continue their trip, the Chilean group would perform their traditional music (the *cueca*) and dances; later on, the natives would adapt this melody to their own. The result was a variety of songs called *chilenas*. Currently, *chilenas* are the most representative music and dance from the region of both Pinotepa and Pochutla, in Oaxaca's Costa Chica. In the same manner, musicians and composers of the state of Guerrero have adopted the word *chilena* to name various traditional rhythms.

As Elizabeth Romero Pérez (2004) suggests, it is likely that within this hybrid cultural environment, the Devils' ancient music underwent modifications through time by borrowing mestizo and Amerindian rhythms;[16] likewise, they have influenced later Costa Chica music, such as, *chilena* and contemporary *cumbia costeña*.

Personal references collected during my research among members of the Dance of the Devils in Collantes reveal that some *sones* of the dance had lyrics; however, only one, 'The Little Parrots' *Son'* is occasionally sung. The Collantes' version of this song is as follows:

Señora, su periquito
me quiere llevar al pozo
y yo le digo que no,
porque su amigo es el oso.

Pica, pica perica,
pica la rana

como quieres que la pique
si no me llega la gana
como quieres que la pique
si no me llega la gana.

¡Ruja!

(My lady, your little parrot
wants me to go to the well
but I said to him, I can't
Because the bear is his friend

Pick, pick, little parrot,
pick the frog

How do you want me to pick her
if I'm not in the mood
How do you want me to pick her
If I'm not in the mood

Ruha!)

In La Boquilla, this song shows a slight variation:

Señora su periquito
me quiere llevar al río

y yo le digo que no
porque me muero de frío.

Señora su periquito
me quiere llevar al pozo
y yo le digo que no
porque me muerde el endoco.

(My lady, your little parrot
wants me to go to the river

but I said to him, I can't
because I'm dying of cold

My lady, your little parrot
wants me to go to the well
but I said him, I can't
because the *endoco*[17] bites me[18])

In the verses of Collantes the word "*pica*" has implicit sexual connotations as it is understood in many regions of Mexico. Double meaning in language is also typical of the Cuban *son*. In La Boquilla, regional terms such as '*endoco*' (river shrimp), occasionally appear. At the end, the devils group of Collantes yells the name of the "god" Ruja. Moedano suggests that the *son* of the parrots "has the melody of an old *son* of the same

name known throughout Mexico since the earlier years of the 19th century" (24). However, the people of Collantes are convinced that the Dance of the Devils originated in the Colonial period. This seems to be true, although it should be significantly different than it is today. There is evidence of musical creativity among the Afro-Mexicans of this region since the last decade of the 19th century.[19] Later on *corridos* and *sones* of the Costa Chica became incorporated to the anonymous corpus of Mexican popular ballades and songs. An example is the well-known song "*La Cucaracha*" that was famous during the years of the Mexican Revolution at the beginning of the 20th century. Although with certain variation in lyrics and rhythm "*La Cucaracha*" is one of the *sones de artesa* still played by the artesa group of San Nicolas Tolentino, Guerrero.[20] The anonymity of songs like *Los Periquitos* and *La Cucaracha* may lead some scholars to believe they are products of general Mexican creation. Nevertheless, the Veracruzano *son, La Bamba,*[21] or the lyrics of the *Son de la Negra* from the state of Jalisco, and perhaps the very origin of the *jarabe* at fandangos and popular barrio gatherings during the 19th century show in both lyrics and rhythms strong black influence.[22] Despite the customary lack of recognition by Mexican scholars to blacks in regards to the origins of these songs and rhythms, all pillars of national Mexican music, it is evident they owe very much to black musicians, dancers and composers. In fact, they have been part of the Afro-Mexican tradition for longer than their supposed historical origins would suggest.

Something common to all Devils groups from both states of the Costa Chica are the instruments used to play the music. These instruments are harmonica, *charrasca* and *tigrera*. The harmonica, which *Costeño*[23] people commonly call "*flauta*" (flute) for its association with this instrument of air, leads the melody of all songs. The second instrument is *charrasca* or *quijada*. This is a cow's jaw with the molars purposely loosed to produce a strident sound stronger than that of the Cuban guiro. The player rhythmically rubs the teeth with an ice pick, and eventually hits the base of the jaw with the holder. This is a sign for the dancers to cry, Ruja! The third instrument is locally known as *bote, tigrera* or *arcuza*. This is a friction drum made of a dry hollow gourd covered on top with animal's skin. A thin wood stick greased with beeswax, no longer than two feet is tied uprightly at the center of the upper skin circle. The player holds the *tigrera* with one arm when he stands up, and on his lap when seated; then, he rubs the stick with the other hand.

Undoubtedly, *charrasca* and *arcuza*, are tokens of natives' and blacks' creation. In *Festival Costeño*, Moedano et al. report that *charrasca* is called *teconte* among the Amuzgo[24] people, suggesting that Amerindians use this instrument too. Among various Afro-Latin American groups from Peru, Venezuela and Colombia *charrasca* is also found. They call it *guacharaca,* although the material with which it is made varies from metal to wood.

The term *arcuza*, another name used in the Costa Chica for the friction drum, is of Arabic origin. According to Paco Robles' "Vocabulario Motrileño" the word *arcuza* comes from Arab '*alcuza*,' meaning a tin-plated vessel for the current population of the Southern city of Motril, Spain, located 43 miles from Granada. This word, like many others in the Costa Chica, recalls the Andalusian influence introduced by Spanish colonizers in the 17th century. Musicologists have reported the existence of the friction drum in different ancient societies of Africa, Europe, Mesoamerica and Asia.[25] Most probably the Spanish *zambomba*, a traditional instrument in Extremadura played during Christmas to accompany *villancicos* has its antecedent in Africa. An excellent work by John A. Donahue from the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, emphasizes the use of the

friction drum known as *ngoma* by the Venda, a Bantú-speaking group of Africa. He asserts:

> The friction drum is spread all throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. In Southern Africa, and South Africa, the *ngoma* drum of the Venda, a kind of all-purpose drum among the Bantu-speaking peoples, has been incorporated into many different types of drum, including the friction drum. Here too, the *ngoma* is likened to a lion, because of the "roar" that it produces when the fingers are wetted and rubbed up and down the internal stick, in this case a reed. (6)

Similar use has the *tigrera* among *costeños*. There are stories of regional healers, locally called "*brujos*" or "*curanderos*," who use the *tigrera* for medical purposes. *Costeños* believe in bad witches who transform themselves into "lions" or "tigers" (local names for the "jaguar" or American puma). Walking into the forest, the healer rubs the stick of the instrument in order to produce the typical sound that scares the "lion." For Costa Chica's healers, as well as for many people in the region, a person who has been sick for a while, most probably is a victim of witchcraft. Because *brujos* come disguised to bring evil to the victim, and then hide back in the forest, the *tigrera* helps to keep them away.

In the next passage, Donahue mentions the friction drum among the Zulu; they call this instrument *ingungu* and utilize it in girls' rituals of passage: "Like the *ngoma*, the Zulu *ingungu* is also a girl's initiation drum, played as part of the ceremony introducing her into the community after the onset of menarche" (7). It is the West Coast of Africa's drum of friction, however, which had a greater influence on the various similar instruments found throughout the Americas. Donahue has addressed the issue substantially, affirming:

> More important to the development of the American friction drum were those from Western Africa. Of all those, the *kwita* and *ekpe* gave rise to the ceremonial friction drums of Cuba and Brazil, and much of Latin America in general. The *kwita*, for one, is utilized by various populations in central Africa such as the Chokwe and Pende of Zaire, and other peoples of Zaire and Angola. Gourlay, the writer of the "kwita" entry for the Grove's Dictionary, notes that the Pende use the *kwita* in ritual and warfare (...). We find similar instruments in Gabon, Congo and Equatorial Guinea. One such instrument is the osomba of Gabon. This instrument, known to the Nkomi and Mpongwè, also features an internal stick, although this stick hangs from a string that is tied to a piece of wood on the outside of the membrane. The instrumentalist plays the *osomba* in a ritual context, either with it laying on the ground or resting in his lap (7).

In Brazil, the *cuita* or *cuica* is a friction drum played during carnival and other festivities. The *juque* in Costa Rica, like the *furruco* or *furro* in Venezuela, very much resembles the Mexican *tigrera*, Both show a stick greased with beeswax attached to the gourd and, unlike the *cuica,* it is rubbed with the fingers producing the typical sound used as a bass rhythm.

In Costa Chica's Afro-Mexican music, the *tigrera* supplies the hoarse sound of bass, and the *charrasca*, the rhythmic sound of guiro. Indeed, both may be recurrences of the Africans' inspiration in response to the torments of slavery in the Americas. These two instruments, plus the drum, used in other Afro Mexican dances of the region such as in the series of *Danzas del Toro* (Bull dances), alternate with other instruments, such as harmonica, violin and guitar that were introduced by the Europeans.

Costume

As with many other *diablitos* dancers of the African diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean, elaborate masks are the most visible elements of the Devils dancers' costume. The masks are made

with the skin of animals, cardboard, or rubber. Every dancer varies and decorates his own mask accordingly, though the community in Collantes has an excellent mask maker in Mr. Alejandro Rojas, who has made most of the masks for the dancers. All these masks are stored in the *Casa del pueblo,* which in Collantes is a beautiful *redondo*, a building resembling the typical house of blacks in the past. As a rule, all masks have to show deer hooves on the forehead, sometimes painted in red like those of La Boquilla that resemble the devil's hooves. In addition, all masks show a long horse hair-beard and moustache. The decoration of these masks is also unique. Sometimes they show large ears and fantastic hooves. Such elaboration undoubtedly expresses creativity and African heritage. According to the oral tradition of Collantes, the use of deer hooves in the devils' masks, was introduced after Yaqui influence during the diaspora of this northern Amerindian group. This is confirmed by George Castile's essay, "Yaquis, Edward H. Spicer and Federal Indian Policy," He observes that the Yaqui struggle lasted from 1887 to 1910. The diaspora of this Amerindian group extends as far as Yuma and Los Angeles to the northwest, Baja California to the west and the southwest, and Oaxaca and Yucatán to the southeast.

Victor Turner argues that rites with masks endow functions of status reversal. Certainly, wearing a mask hides anonymity, assumed unconsciously "for the purpose of aggression" (172), rather than for humility. If a mask provides the performer with the powers of feral or supernatural beings, it is because there is a sort of psychological identification with the represented figure. Turner adds, "To draw off power from a strong being is to weaken that being" (174). In other words, wearing the masks of devils and acting as devils invest the dancers with untamed attributes given to blacks since the segregation of the Colonial period. Perhaps in this manner they can tame both the internal fear and the external stereotype.

A complementary part of the devils' costume is the use of two red bandanas held in both hands and wave around when dancing the '*Son* of the Handkerchiefs.' One or two more bandanas are used as head protectors against rashes that develop as a result of the mask. Devils may wear any type of clothing and shoes; preferably, old ragged pants, sometimes purposely tattered as if resembling the slaves' poor attire.

Terrón, the leader of the group, wears *chaparreras* (cowboy work chaps), mask and whip. This attire gives him a distinctive rank, as the *caporal* is among ranchers. *La Minga*, the second most important character, also wears a mask with a wig, a woman's long dress, and *rebozo* (shawl). She also holds a whip and a doll in her arms. The three musicians have no specific attire and may weare any kind of working clothing.

Choreography

There are variations in choreography among different groups of Devils; however, it can be said that the Dance of the Devils maintains an identifiable monolithic structure in both Collantes and La Boquilla. In the two groups observed, there are up to 16 to 18 dancers or '*bailantes*' (as they call themselves) formed in two lines in front of the musicians. *Terrón*, the leader, dances between the two lines and watches them to control the lines and the stomping. He also menaces the devils with his whip if they do not do well. Outside of the lines is *La Minga*, who is a man dressed as a woman. She does not follow the dancers properly. She is *Terrón*'s wife, and is free to roam about wherever she finds somebody to trap in her *rebozo* (shawl). She whips her victim, especially a young man, who watches and provokes her. The two main characters of the Dance, *Minga* and *Terrón* do not stop teasing, mocking, or beating with their whips young men

and girls among the audience, who, fascinated, follow the troupe until dusk.

Main characters: *Minga* and *Terrón*

Although the performance of the Dance of the Devils is not exactly a carnival in the true sense, during the Days of the Dead in Oaxaca and Guerrero's Costa Chica, the ritual does acquire connotations of a carnival. It is a sacred time but also a time for rejoicing and trickery. As in African religions, the Yoruba Orisha, the great Trickster, Legba, is present in the spirit of the Afro-Mexican *Costeños* who celebrate the Devils' dancers with a sacred respect for death. As in the carnival of Trinidad, the way Mexicans celebrate death astonishes European-centered mentalities. In this regards, Ian Smart declares:

> Our nonsense is profoundly purposeful. It is a mechanism we use to help us come to terms with the fundamental contradictions of the human condition: the scandal of death, for example. Whereas the existentialist philosopher is absolutely paralyzed, negated by the absurdity, we embrace it lovingly, warmly, harmoniously, indeed, rhythmically. (48-49)

Perhaps the two symbols in the Dance of the Devils who most neatly represent the figure of tricksters are the characters *Terrón* and *Minga*. They are the only two who are named. It is likely that both characters did not appear together at earlier stages of the dance. Perhaps only the leader, *Terrón*, or *Diablo mayor* (main devil), was in the original dance. According to some oral versions[26] he was named Ruja, hence, the current confusion of his name with the "African god" Ruja in whose honor this dance is supposedly performed. I will return to this discussion.

There is evidence of both characters Minga and Terrón in other dances, such as *La danza del toro de petate* (The Palm Mat Bull Dance) performed in Collantes, and *La danza del toro sabanero* (The Savannah's Bull Dance) in La Boquilla. Oral tradition indicates that *La Minga* got her name from María Domínguez, wife of Don Francisco Acho. He was a rich landowner from Oaxaca City who had 24 livestock ranches in the region. A version of the origins of the Collantes' Palm Mat Bull Dance[27] says that these may be traced to a visit paid to the village in 1911 by Don Francisco I. Madero, a democratic leader who defeated Dictator Porfirio Díaz in the 1910 elections. Collantes' neighbors then prepared a festivity in his honor by presenting this dance that brought him great delight. It is perhaps from that time on that the idea of incorporating *La Minga* into the Devils Dance started, since the same group usually performed both dances in the same festivity. This is an example of later hybridism in the Dance of the Devils of the Costa Chica. Due to historical changes in which *Costeño* black culture gradually assimilates to the mainstream, the incorporation of new characters was gladly accepted, to the extent that this feature is still maintained by all Devils groups in the region.

As for *Terrón* (literally meaning a piece of ground), he also has received different names throughout the history of the dance. Sometimes he is called "*el diablo mayor*" (the main devil), "*el jefe de los tenangos*" or "*el tenango mayor*" (the chief of Tenangos or the main Tenango). Eventually, in other communities, though not in those studied in this research, *Terrón* is also called "*El Pancho*" or "*Don Pancho*" This name directly relates to the Bull series dance. As a matter of fact, *Terrón* is the chief, not only during the dance, but all the time. In La Boquilla, he represents the group and the community before the state cultural representatives. He is responsible for maintaining discipline and solidarity. His authority is undeniable, and his personality is taken as a model for the rest. His most important duty is to preserve the dance by promoting and supporting the group. Yet, *Terrón* plays the role of a trickster everywhere. He enacts the most absurd nonsense

stressed with gesture, strong language, and corporal movements. During the performance, he has the ability to do anything, from stealing personal property and running after someone, to punishing with his whip any person in the audience who attempts to mock him. The crowd enjoys this part the most because many, especially young people, frequently provoke him.

La Minga's clowning performance is also symbolically important among Afro-Mexican and Amerindian traditions of the region of Oaxaca and Guerrero. Sylvia Rodríguez's remarkable study about the Indian Pueblo *Matachines* dance from New Mexico points out that Pueblo clowning is an "eloquent burlesque" that takes a "form of reversal" (40-41). Also, Mikhail Bakhtin in what he calls "carnivalesque" in Rabelais' world, declares that by negation and destruction buffoonery shows an upside-down world; "carnival celebrates the destruction of the old and the birth of the new world –the new year, the new spring, the new kingdom" (410). In other words, carnival is a cathartic experience able to shake collective emotions that return the world to equilibrium. In The Dance of the Devils, *La Minga* and *Terrón* fulfill the role of tricksters, buffoons, clowns. They turn into laughing and violent sarcasm all actions related to their performance. In regards to *la Minga* one might ask why a man is dressed as a woman. Clowning sexual status reversal seems to be typical across cultures. In particular, *la Minga*'s role exposes political, racial, and traditional connotations. In La Boquilla, for example, she wears a dress in red, white and blue stripes, resembling the American flag. She holds a Teddy bear in her arms, instead of a doll. Does this have special meaning in a village where 13% of the population annually emigrates to the United States as illegal workers? In contrast, her terrific mask with a wild black wig looks flirty and seductive. She whips everyone who attempts to mock her. Eventually, she either flirts or fights with the other devils, and looks for *Terrón*'s protection when she is at risk.

In Collantes, *La Minga*'s dress and look are more typical, resembling the Indian style; hence, her relation to *La Llorona* (The Weeping Woman), and perhaps indirectly revealing the tension between Amerindians and Africans. Her vampire mask is scary, painted in pink as if she resembled a white woman. In both communities, *La Minga* is allowed to make obscene expressions and to yell offensive words whenever she pleases. In the beginning, *La Minga*'s role was supposed to be a parody of the landowner's wife in a clear mockery of blacks's behaviour towards rich white women. This is a way to express irreverence in public venues, which would be otherwise forbidden. Currently, her stylish figure may vary from one community to another, but in general, her role provides a chance to represent the parody of someone unloved by the community.

The God Ruja

As the chiefs of both groups of devils at Collantes and La Boquilla reveled in recorded interviews, the main purposes of the celebration of the Dance of the Devils is to remember the African ancestors, among them the god in whose honor this dance was originally performed, a god who current *Costeños* call Ruja, pronounced [rú.ha].[28] Though eroded with the passing of time, traces of Africa—like this blurred symbol—are vehicles to celebrate identity.

One possibility to discover some African traces is to follow the method of linguistic reconstruction. Thus, it is possible to hypothesize that Ruja's original name was Ruhanga, a god of creation who still appears among Hima mythology. The Hima or Tutsi are the modern descendants of an ancient kingdom called Chwesi (eventually, Cwesi and Bachwezi) in Central Africa. Before the British united Uganda, the Bachwezi dynasty controlled or

influenced parts of current Uganda, Rwanda, Congo and Tanzania between 1100 AD and 1600 AD. The Bachwezi dynasty collapsed around 1600. It was replaced by Kingdoms of Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole, Toro and Busoga, and the chieftains of Beni-Butembo and Husi (in Congo); and Karagwe and Buhaya (in Tanzania). Parts of Rwanda such as Mutara were also included in the Bachwesi's domain (*Enter Uganda*, "History").

Although far from the African West Coast, a new Africa-wide project sponsored by the UNESCO's "The Slave Route", identifies ancient slave routes that traversed the continent, and indicates some important sites within Uganda, revealing both the historical and social legacies of this era.[29]

We should not forget that the story of European involvement in West Africa, from the Senegal River down to the Cape of Good Hope, is one of small markets and harbors along the coast tenuously held and frequently changing hands, mainly among Portuguese, British, Arab, Dutch, and French slavers. The estuaries of the great rivers were natural locations for these European slave stations. Some slavers' memoirs account for 500 to 1000 miles incursions inland to capture slaves who might be transferred by river in canoes, to ships ready for the Atlantic crossing. According to Boddy-Evans, 4 179 500 slaves were uprooted from the region of West Central Africa (40.8% of the total) by Portuguese and British slave traders.

During the colonial 19th century, British colonizers gave the name 'Ankole' to the Nkore group of Uganda. The Ankole (or Bayankole),[30] among whom Ruhanga is still adored as a god of creation, form a group of about two and a half million living around the town of Mbarara, a region between Lake Edward and Lake Victoria (*Mission to the Ankole*, "The Ankole people"). As with other Bantu groups, the origins of the Ankole can be traced back to the Congo culture. Fred Welbourn has studied various legends of the region, which hold that the first occupant of Ankole was Ruhanga, the Creator, who came from heaven to rule the earth. Ruhanga is said to have come with his three sons Kairu, Kakama and Kahima. After testing who would be his heir, Ruhanga decreed that Kairu and Kahima would serve their youngest brother Kakama to rule the land.

Up to this point, we know for sure the traces of an African god in the Costa Chica. However, neither the name nor the ritual link directly to any god or religion from Africa, for the obvious reason that the memory of African descendants in this region has eroded. Yelling the name of the god Ruja during the performance is common to many groups of Devils. Yet, some other groups of recent formation shout *hurrah*, a yell of happiness and encouragement, rather than the god's name. In the Costa Chica, the name Ruja is attested by oral tradition in both communities studied for this research. They ignore who this god was, and what attributes he bestows, but they say he was the god of their ancestors, who arrived early to this land. Written evidence (though taken from oral tradition that I cannot refrain from citing), was given in 1988 by Mr. Heraclio Bacho Daza, a 90 year old man from La Boquilla who used to dance Devils when he was younger, and affirmed that he was a descendant of former dancers too. His testimony, collected by Alejandro Rojas, President of the Collantes' *Casa del Pueblo* at that time, is as follows:

> I will say that this took place in the village of La Boquilla de Chicometepec, in Mr. Damaso Gómez's hacienda, where all the workers were blacks. In this hacienda they used to celebrate a Saint, who was a gold Christ, and the day is remembered till now. The landowner used to invite many persons from Huazolotitlán, Jamiltepec and other haciendas of the region. They used to have a big festival with food and dancing on that day, and the black workers

> remained beyond the hacienda's wall. Because of this humiliation, blacks decided to make a festival too, a ritual to their god whom they knew as Ruja. The same day of the hacienda's festivity, the blacks made a ritual. They produced such a noise that the landowner got mad; then he came out to see what was happening. He saw a group of blacks dancing, and all of them were already drunk. So, the landowner shouts the order to stop. Then he asked, What are you doing? They answered: We are celebrating a ritual to our god. What god? The landowner asked. Our god Ruja, answered one of the blacks. And who is this god that I don't know? Well, it's our god, a god that is black like us, a god we love and respect. Then, the landowner responded: What a god named Ruja, the god of the Tenangos, there is no such god. You're adoring the devil. I want you to stop dancing and yelling right now, otherwise I will accuse all of you before the Church that they might burn you with green wood.
>
> In this manner, blacks stopped celebrating rituals. They didn't want to offend the master's white god. They were alerted that in Mexico the Inquisition existed, and truly, used to burn with green wood those who adore the devil, or the black god (Rojas Sánchez n.pag.).

This story clearly specifies the origin of the dance in the Colonial period, and why the black god's name was hidden. Although most scholars, either Mexicans or Americans who have approached the Dance of the Devils agree, "no trace is available about the existence of an African god called Ruja," (Vaughn; Guzmán Calvo 67), after this investigation, I assume that the god's real name was hidden by the earlier members of the dance in order to keep their ritual alive. By this account, the god's name is readopted when the dance comes to light again; thus, the original word underwent linguistic reduction, from Ruhanga to Ruja.

Segregation and fear have taken their role in Mexican blacks' collective memory. Obviously, with the passing of time, both the name and its entire cult were forgotten, but the ritual persisted under a different structure acquiring throughout the years new representational characteristics, yet maintaining its profound expression of black identity and resistance.

In the village of La Boquilla where Mr. Bacho Daza was born, the visitor can still see the ruins of the Gómez brothers' hacienda, which was first erected during the second half of the 16th century, approximately in 1576. At that time, various groups of Africans were brought over directly from Western Sudan, Congo and Guinea to work as slaves.[31]

Mr. Bacho Daza also recalls in his narration that "later on, some blacks from La Boquilla went to work at the neighboring hacienda called *La Guadalupe*, located in the current town of Collantes, which was owned by Don Cosme del Valle." One must suppose that this occurred after Independence, otherwise, it would be impossible for slaves to change their workplace. There were already other blacks in *La Guadalupe* working as laborers in the cotton plantation or as cowboys at the prosperous hacienda. Blacks wanted to celebrate their festivities and asked Don Cosme del Valle for permission to continue performing. The landholder let blacks freely perform on condition that work hard. At that time, more black families coming from Estancia Grande, Tapextla, and Cuajinicuilapa, also arrived to work at the hacienda *La Guadalupe*. Although no historical records have been found about the real origin of *La Guadalupe*, there is speculation about its later establishment, after the Gomez's brothers of La Boquilla, perhaps by the middle of the 17th century in the Colonial period, but it continues almost unchanged into the early 20th century. Oral tradition collected during my field research does not distinguish the Colonial from the Independence periods of Mexico. This leads me to conclude that the abolition of slavery passed almost unnoticed in many communities of the Costa Chica. In fact, it

is not until the Mexican Revolution in 1910-1920 that *La Guadalupe*'s hacienda ceases to exist. According to Juan José Baños (140-234), there is evidence of the underdog condition of blacks, and about the situation of the Guadalupe's hacienda and the village of Collantes during the years of revolt in the region, around 1914-1916.[32]

Conclusion

Although it is difficult to take anything for granted in regards to the name and origin of the "god" Ruja, I speculate in this essay about some possible origins. I have presented arguments to support the relation between devils and Legba. Although Legba is one of the gods of creations among Yoruba religions, he is commonly invoked at the beginning of all rituals because no communication with other *loas* can be made without his intervention. However, he is asked to leave afterwards as his tricks and confusion might hinder concentration. In this sense, although the spirit of Legba or Exu is present during the entire performance of the Devils, it is hard to affirm that this is the hidden god who later on would be replaced by the name Ruja.

If there is evidence that the Dance of the Devils was originally performed as a pagan religious ritual in honor of an African god, today, this dance should be associated only with a ritual of celebration and remembrance. Thus, the performance becomes a form of resistance facing hostility against erosion of collective memory. The word Ruja, rather than a mere yelling of happiness, entails another meaning. However, a question arises. Could we affirm that the god Ruja is an American revival of the god Ruhanga? Certainly not. Although linguistic and theological similarities have been presented here (and maybe more can be done), the truth is that Costa Chica's Ruja is no more than a symbol. In fact, his symbolism is not deeply rooted in any religion at all. The Dance of the Devils is not a religious ceremony, but a secular ritual performed during the Days of the Dead, whenever the group is invited to perform. If it had religious connotations in the beginning, no one can truly confirm what this might be today. Rather, we should talk about different stages in the various cultural processes that the Dance has undergone, ranging from syncretism and assimilation to hybridism and dissimilation. Syncretism is seen in the co-occurrence of the African and Catholic religions in the beginning and at the middle stage. The process of assimilation, on the other hand, has been a continuum until the present.

Nowadays, the Dance of the Devils has recovered new meaning. Overall, it is an important celebration of the identity and resistance of the Costa Chica's Afro-Mexican culture. The reverse process of dissimilation started in the last decade of the 20th century when many groups of devils appeared in the region, even in some villages where the Dance had never been performed. Why this renaissance? Essentially, because the Dance of the Devils and its entire symbolism, including Ruja, directly connect current Afro-Mexicans with their African ancestors, thus becoming a cultural expression of recovering identity. Therefore, dissimilation implies self- affirmation of ethnic values. It is a phenomenon that stands in open opposition to the homogenizing Mexican nation-state ideology of Mestizaje. Dissimilation goes in augment along the Costa Chica region, paradoxically when a quick process of cultural hybridism in the era of globalization also menaces tradition, not only of folk dances, but also of oral tradition, popular medicine, and so on. In difficult times, every ethnic community chooses its own way to express resistance. In a country like Mexico, which overtly expresses having no racist policies, the ruling mestizo idiosyncrasy in fact disguises economical and social forms of racism that socially overwhelm colored ethnicities such as Africans and Amerindians. Mexico's racist practices

include: labor discrimination according to skin color, mockery of blacks and Amerindians in TV shows, comics, and movies. Moreover, these minorities seem to be condemned to social abandonment and marginality, because they do not have the opportunity to develop their own communities. Medical service, sewerage, clean drinking water, and sufficient education are the most urgent needs of most Afro-Mexican communities in the Costa Chica. On account of these needs, they are forced to emigrate in search of work when coming of age, and most of the time they leave the children in the care of grandparents. In short, social and cultural hybridism, systematically promoted by nation-state mestizaje policies in Mexico after the Revolution of 1910, has eroded the African tradition of the Costa Chica's population. However, symbolic ritual like the Dance of the Devils and other forms of ethnical representation concurrently endorse resistance and self-affirmation.

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Notes

[1]I wish to thank David Barry, Floyd Merrell, Norma Rosas Mayén, Antonio Tillis and Carmile Wilkerson for their patient readings and valuable observations to improve this essay.

[2]The artesa is a kind of zoomorphic trough made out of a ceiba or parota tree log. The artesa is placed on the ground upside down so that a couple may dance bare feet on it. *Sones de artesa* are another type of Afro-Mexican music and dance now in decay. For more information on the revitalization of the only two groups in all of the Costa Chica region, one in San Nicolas Tolentino, Guerrero, and the other in El Ciruelo, Oaxaca, see Ruiz Rodríguez 11-37.

[3]See Aguirre Beltrán, *Cuijla* 8-12, and Vaughn "Mexico in the Context of the Transatlantic Slave Trade" 2-4.

[4]Comité de cultura. "Danza de los diablos de Collantes." Casa del Pueblo, Santiago Collantes: n.p.: 1988.

[5]All translations from Spanish into English are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[6]José Vasconcelos as Secretary of Education in the 1920s postulated in his work *La raza cósmica* the notion of the mestizo as the cosmic race, the race of the future. This notion eventually turned into official ideology through education and culture after the Mexican Revolution of 1910. More recently, Agustín Basave Benítez in his work México mestizo, while criticizing to a certain extent the idea of Vasconcelos, continues praising him. On the other hand, both Vasconcelos and Basave ignore the black element in their notions of mestizaje. See Basave Benítez 136.

[7]See Bobby Vaughn's "Los negros, los indígenas y la diáspora. Una perspectiva etnográfica de la Costa Chica," in Vinson III and Vaughn. *Afroméxico* 84-85.

[8]For more information see, Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas' essay "El Signifying chango que chinga en Chin Chin el teporocho." *África en México* 79-95. Also, see Henry Louis Gates Jr. 685-723.

[9]Note also that, Cimarron uprisings from early Colonial period in Latin America were the beginning of the struggle for independence. According to Luz María Martínez Montiel "The term 'Cimarron' originated in the New World, and was used to designate the runaway livestock escaping to the mountain. From the 16th century black slaves who escaped from Spanish control were called 'cimarrones.' The term was also applied to Amerindian slaves that escaped from Spaniards, but in the case of blacks, the act of fleeing, and their resistance to be recaptured again, had connotations of 'unyielding bravery." See Presencia africana en Sudamérica 609.

[10]See Vaughn, *Afroméxico* 88, 89

[11]I am using the concept "imaginary" in Lacanian sense. See Alan Sheridan, "The imaginary was then the world, the register, the dimension of images, conscious or un-conscious, perceived or imagined." *Écrits*, Translator's notes, IX. See also, Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary* 6.

[12]See Vinson III. His criticism of Mexican official policies, such as indigenismo, and its consequences in further methodological approaches to interpret ethnic minorities, leads scholars of strong influence in the region, such as Aguirre Beltran, to show "intellectual prejudices" in his work. Vinson declares: "Como ya era evidente, en La población negra en México, en el corazón de su agenda intelectual había la tendencia a ver la historia de los negros como una historia de asimilación e integración, y en última instancia se

translucía el objetivo de lograr un mejor entendimiento del desarrollo del mestizo en la historia mexicana.[...] Esta interpretación evitó cualquier tipo de análisis racial [...] además limitó la posibilidad de separar la historia de la población negra, e incluso la de los indígenas, de las discusiones acerca del mestizaje." *Afroméxico* 56.

[13]In Collantes, they use the term tenango as synonymous with devil. In fact, "terrón is called the chief of the tenangos or the chief of the devils. One of the songs, the Beginning Son is occasionally named *Son de los tenangos* (Son of Tenangos). According to local oral tradition, the term Danza de los tenangos was in use during a certain period of time, more precisely, after the arrival of Yaquis from the state of Sonora. Now it is called Danza de los diablos. See Apodaca-Valdez 71.

[14]Babayemi refers to the Egungun mask as follows, "There is usually a masque to be worn to cover the head and over the face is sewn a net to allow the masquerade to see [...].The wooden mask may represent the head showing the facial marks of the lineage, or a totemic animal or bird sacred to the family. At times the carving may be a female head with the traditional hair do" (35).

[15]The discovery of small gold nuggets on the junction of the American and Sacramento Rivers on January 1948 spread like wildfire locally and beyond the country. Trading ships carried the word to Hawaii, China, Mexico and Chile. Since the metal was literally free for all, it is not a surprise that the rush for obtaining the precious metal attracted people from everywhere. See for more details, Oakland Museum of California.

[16]See Elizabeth Romero Pérez, "Danzas autóctonas de Oaxaca."

[17]Endoco is a local name for the shrimp of the rivers.

[18]See Rafael Reyes Larrea, "Imágenes de la Costa Chica."

[19]Cf. McDowell, *Poetry and Violence* 25-26.

[20]See Carlos Ruiz Rodríguez, 60-61.

[21]Cf. Bobby Vaughn, "Mexico in the Context of the Transatlantic Slave Trade" 7.

[22]For more information about the origin of Mexican jarabe see, Jesús Flores y Escalante 141-143.

[23]The word *Costeño* is a common term used among Costa Chica's people as a denotation of regional identity.

[24]Amuzgos together with Mixtecos and Chatinos are the most well known indigenous groups still alive in the Costa Chica. There is vast evidence of loanwords and other cultural borrowing among Afro-Mexicans and Amerindians in Costa Chica's contemporary culture.

[25]See John A. Donahue. "Applying Experimental Archaeology to Ethnomusicology: Recreating an Ancient Maya Friction Drum through Various Lines of Evidence."

[26]Interview with Alejandro Rojas. Collantes, Oaxaca, 3 Aug. 2005.

[27]Tape recording with Alejandro Rojas Collantes, 22 May 2005.

[28]Tape and video recordings with Dagoberto Mariche, Collantes, 1 Aug. 2005, and Amado Herrera Bacho, La Boquilla, 5 May. 2005.

[29]In cooperation with the World Tourism Organization (WTO) UNESCO launched a cultural tourism program on the slave route in Africa. This program aims to identify, restore and promote sites and places linked to the memory of the slave trade and to set up museums to strengthen the memory of slavery, develop a tourist trade focused on remembrance and promote social and economic development through tourism. Uganda is also included in this program, among several African countries. See UNESCO.org.

[30]See, Rita M. Byrnes, *A Country Study: Uganda*, "Bayankole", for more information about this southwestern group.

[31]For more details, see Pastor Hernández Blanco 24.

[32]Based on the scarce historical information available, it is possible to infer the social and economical conditions of blacks at this time. One of these sources is General Juan José Baños' Notas de un ranchero. Though focusing mainly on descriptions of battles, his recollections also inform about the socio-economic conditions of most towns and villages of the region of Pinotepa Nacional, Oaxaca. In addition, he also refers to the participation of many blacks, men and women, involved in the revolt. See Juan José Baños 140-234.

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"VALE LA PENA LA RESISTENCIA SIEMPRE..." PRESENTING AN OUTSTANDING AFRO-CUBAN DRAMATIST

By Paulette Ramsay

Introduction

One of Cuba's leading dramatists, Gerardo Fulleda León was born in 1941 in Santiago de Cuba. He studied for his degree in history at the University of Havana and later attended Drama School, because he could not resist his cultural impulses. Fulleda produces theatrical works for both adults and children and currently serves as President of the drama section in the *Unión de Escritores Cubanos*. The recipient of many awards, Fulleda has published more than twelve plays, the more renowned of which are *La muerte diaria* (1959), *Ruandí* (1976), *Provinciana* (1984), *Plácido* (1982) and *Chago de Guisa* (1984). His works have been interpreted by distinguished theatre groups in Cuba *Plácido* for instance, was adapted to film by the renowned director, Sergio Giral and *La querida de enmarada* is currently being adapted for radio and local television in Cuba.

I had the pleasure of meeting Fulleda and of sharing the following very stimulating and informed conversation with him about his life in Cuba, his career, his relationship with other well-known Afro-Cuban writers, among other interesting topics.

Conversaciones con el dramaturgo afro-cubano Gerardo Fulleda León

Ramsay: Dígame algo sobre sus antecedentes.

Fulleda León: Mi madre, Edicta León Ferrer, era hija de un hijo de esclavos de procedencia conga, mi abuelo Amancio León, al que sólo conocí por fotos pero cuya gallardía siempre me ha impresionado. Mi abuela materna era una jabá de pelo malagaso, de boca grande y mirada muy tierna acorde a su carácter: Elpidia Ferrer, probablemente hija de una negra liberta y un hombre blanco. Mi madre salió a mi abuelo con su color, su pelo frondoso pero de "pasa", carácter fuerte y, a no ser por los ojos, idéntica a su padre. Alta, inteligente y hermosa mujer. Mi padre: Gerardo Fulleda Abreu, un mulato blanconazo de ojos azulosos y tez amarillenta, alto, de buen porte, algo achinado y de pelo que quería ser lacio. Poco inteligente pero muy bien agraciado para las mujeres. Su padre José Fulleda, hijo de china con mulato era altísimo, desgarbado, amable y le decían el chino. Su esposa, mi abuela paterna hija de un blanco con una india venezolana parecía blanca, y aún hay una hija de ellos tía mía, que aún se lo cree. Mi abuela era muy cariñosa, apenas hablaba, cocinaba muy bien y con menos especias en la sopa que cuando lo hacía mi abuela materna. Yo, decididamente salí más a mi familia materna, no sé si por suerte; pero cuando me río sale el chino escondido. Algunas veces, al mirarme a un espejo, aflora mi madre y otras veces mi padre. Y ambas imágenes me gustan. De todas formas soy lo que suele llamarse un "salto atrás" genéticamente. Soy hijo único por ambas partes.

Ramsay: Tiene Vd. muchos detalles sobre cada persona. Vd. es una mezcla de muchas razas...Es decir, Vd. es un verdadero caribeño. ¿De qué parte de Cuba origina?

Fulleda León: Mi familia por parte de madre es de San Luis, un pueblito cerca de Santiago de Cuba. Por parte de mi padre son del mismo Santiago. Nací en Santiago de Cuba en el amanecer del 12 de febrero de 1941, pero me inscribieron el 12 de julio de 1942. Y he adoptado el año 42 como fecha de mi nacimiento para evitar complicaciones que a estas alturas de la vida no me interesa solucionar. De todas formas soy típico Acuario.

Ramsay: Acuario... los acuarios son los que tienen mucha confianza, ¿no?

Acuario de Santiago... ¿Cómo es Santiago?

Fulleda León: Santiago es una ciudad de muchas lomas, provinciana con una tradición heroica y revolucionaria y muchas ínfulas de gran ciudad, calurosa a rabiar, con lugares hermosísimos, con una gente aun más hermosa y una pasión acérrima por la bebida y la diversión. Sus carnavales en pleno julio son los mejores del país. La gente por lo general es muy acogedora. Allí nació la trova tradicional y sus frutas son las más dulces que he comido nunca, las de Ghana me parecieron igual o más dulces, favor de no darlo a conocer a la luz pública. Es la ciudad en la que más pienso y más amo, de la que me alegro haber salido un día y a la que siempre me encanta volver pero no para quedarme. Allí tuve mi primer amor, allí quisiera que descansaran mis huesos algún día, cerca de José Martí.

Ramsay: ¡Qué interesante! ¡Cerca de Martí! Es evidente que le encanta su pueblo de nacimiento. ¿Qué papel desempeña en La Unión de Escritores cubanos?

Fulleda León: Soy presidente de la Sección de Dramaturgia y miembro del ejecutivo de la Sección de Artes Escénicas.

Sobre su carrera como escritor

Ramsay: ¿Qué le inspira para escribir?

Fulleda León: Todo lo que está al margen. Todo lo que ocurre que no logro explicármelo. ¿Por qué las cosas ocurren así y no de otra manera? ¿Quiénes somos? ¿Hacia dónde vamos? ¿Por qué estamos? Los grandes acontecimientos de la historia que me golpean ya sean la esclavitud y su secuela, el fusilamiento de unos estudiantes por el poder colonial español, la situación de la mujer, del negro, del revolucionario. Todo ello para mí es un misterio y trato de desentrañarlo de explicármelo. Me imagino que así van a ser las cosas más nítidas, más favorables al cambio. Necesito aprender, saber. No creo que escriba para demostrar nada sino para aclararme cosas y así poder ser un poquito mejor. Me gustan sobre todo los perdedores, los locos, los que luchan denodadamente por lograr algo aunque no lo alcancen; me conmueven hasta el grito. Detesto la perfección pero a su vez la persigo como una forma de acercarme a lo trascendente que es la vida plena. Necesito saber, aprender, descubrir algo que constantemente se me escapa en la vida cotidiana y que se late en ella.

Ramsay: ¿Cómo define su vocación literaria?

Fulleda León: Como una necesidad perentoria, algo sin lo cual no sabría que hacer, cuando no escribo, cuando no leo, cuando no veo una exposición y no escucho buena música, me parece que no vivo. Amo todas estas cosas como el amor mismo, creo que ellas me hacen mejor amante.

Ramsay: Una postura fascinante. ¿Cuál es más importante en su obra, una visión del ser humano o del cubano? Explíque su repuesta, por favor.

Fulleda León: Ambas visiones están entretejidas. Aunque sueño con visitar París, el ser humano que soy vive en Cuba por su propia voluntad y ama a los otros seres humanos que le rodean. Soy de quienes creen que la universalidad de una obra parte de lo raigal que ésta sea a los fundamentos o las circunstancias que la propiciaron. Pero yo soy cubano y mi español no es él de Cervantes sino el de ahora, aquí. No me interesa por otro lado copiar la realidad, ni reflejarla sino interpretarla; poder hallar los vasos comunicantes entre la condición humana y las circunstancias de ser cubano que vive en una isla rodeada por el mar y otros peligros que la acechan y como escapar, mejor dicho emerger de todos ellos y las dificultades y escaseses internas- económicas, morales y mentales- con un sentido de lucidez.

Ramsay: Por supuesto. Ambas están entretejidas.

Ramsay: ¿Cuáles son los elementos de un gran drama?

Fulleda León: Un fuerte conflicto. Caracteres contradictorios que ejerzan su

voluntad. Un tema apasionante. Sucesos novedosos y atractivos. Una estructura sólida y poco común.

Ramsay: ¿Cómo intenta controlar/ manipular esos elementos en sus dramas?

Fulleda León: Como puedo, tratando que el resultado sea puro teatro o sea que haya intensidad dramática, emotiva y sensorial. Que logre llamar la atención y entretener dosificando el material y creando interés en el que me lea o vea representado mi texto. Dejándole espacio para que sienta, descubra y saque sus reflexiones propias. Diversificando las escenas, cuidando del ritmo y las facetas de los personajes y las escenas. Utilizando el humor, las canciones cuando puedo, el habla popular y el culto. Dejando a los personajes que sean ellos y que se me descubran y así mostrarlos, no contentándome con lo que me dan, exigiéndoles a cada momento, nuevas revelaciones y actitudes. No olvidándome nunca que ante todo estoy haciendo teatro pero también literatura dramática.

Ramsay: ¿Me puede dar un panorama evolutivo de sus obras?

Fulleda León: De *La muerte diaria*, primera obra escrita el 7 de diciembre de 1959 a el más reciente título *Voy por cigarros* del 2005 van unos 15 0 16 títulos. O sea que partí de una experiencia muy cercana de la vida prerrevolucionaria de ahí di el salto a la literatura de fantasía para los niños, con *Ruandí* en 1976, para adentrarme en el mundo de la historia, *Los profanadores* y *Plácido* luego penetrar en nuestras tradiciones seculares de procedencia "afrocubana" *Chago de guisa* y ahora me sumerjo en la realidad más cercana.

Ramsay: ¿Cuál es su obra preferida, y por qué?

Fulleda León: *Ruandí*, porque para mi fue reveladora de todo un mundo que había permanecido al margen y que de pronto salió a la luz, iluminándome como nunca antes ni después. En ella me reconozco y reconozco a todo lo que me rodeó desde mi infancia y que yo no sabía que guardaba dentro de mí.

Ramsay: ¿Diría Vd. que su personaje mejor logrado aparece en esta obra también? Háblenos de ese personaje.

Fulleda León: Sí, *Ruandí*. Es un muchacho aventurero, valiente, honesto, soñador, que tiene un firme propósito y lucha por lograrlo y lo logra. Me gustan sus sentimientos, sus reacciones, su fortaleza y sus propósitos.

El papel del escritor afro-cubano

Ramsay: ¿Cuál, en su opinión, es la responsabilidad del escritor afro-cubano?

Fulleda León: Indagar y exorcizar sobre los caracteres y los problemas en escena, problematizando cada una de las facetas del hombre y la mujer negros en una realidad donde ha asomado su oreja peluda y escondida el perjuicio racial con manifiestas -y latentes aún- fuerzas en las relaciones de diversa índole en la sociedad.

Ramsay: ¿Cómo usa Vd. el drama para conferirles poderes a los afro-cubanos?

Fulleda León: Como una forma de enfrentarlos a la realidad, de que vean cómo son ellos mismos y los demás y cómo se pueden comportar. Mostrándoles sus grandezas y miserias, las mías propias también. Creando personajes arquetipos que cualquier actor o actriz negra se sientan tentados de querer representarlos y los asuman como propios.

Ramsay: Yo sé que Vd. trata de integrar la cultura afro-hispana en su obra y eso para mí es admirable. Mencione algunos aspectos y las maneras específicas en que hace esto.

Fulleda León: Creo que fui el primero, en el teatro contemporáneo en Cuba que representé a un negro esclavo que no hablara en la forma "vozalón" (mi su amo, ute sa que mi..) porque esa me parecía una forma vernácula de representar al esclavo y sólo servía para acentuar los rasgos que usaban los otros para discriminarlo. Los puse a hablar español de forma "correcta" porque me interesaba más lo que pensaban, sentían y querían expresar mis personajes que la copia de verosimilitud

de su habla. Aporto sí, giros y formas estructurales del habla coloquial popular, refranes dichos, sentencias que enriquecen el habla y les dan características a los personajes. Defiendo el derecho inclusive de los personajes de hablar un lenguaje alto, el de sus sueños, y para eso por supuesto a veces sale la literatura y esa es mi peculiaridad o mí defecto, como quieran verlo amigos o enemigos. No renuncio a ello. El uso del lenguaje también es una batalla contra la mentalidad impuesta por los colonizadores. Por eso adoro a Césaire; por eso Nicolás después del *Songo Cosongo* transformó su lenguaje y no se quedó en lo ganado por dicho poemario, como hubieran deseado muchos.

Ramsay: Sí, fue una transformación importante. ¿Es importante dar énfasis a este aspecto de la cultura cubana? ¿Por qué?

Fulleda León: Porque nuestra nación es eminentemente mestiza y muchos aún no quieren reconocerlo y se avergüenzan de ella. Porque yo me miro al espejo a menudo y sé lo que soy y tengo que abrirles el camino a los que vengan detrás, porque ese es el legado más importante que puedo dejar a mis contemporáneos y porque no se hacer otra cosa y no soy camaleón ni avestruz. Y me siento muy feliz de ser como soy.

Posición frente a la Revolución

Ramsay: ¿Cuál es su posición frente la revolución?

Fulleda León: No estoy frente a la revolución, estoy con ella.

Ramsay: Una diferencia importante, admito…

Fulleda León: ¿Qué hubiera sido de aquel negrito que limpiaba zapatos en un puesto del Vedado si no hubiera amanecido el 1 de enero de 1959? No olvido que ganaba tres pesos a la semana y almorcé limpiando zapatos de lunes a domingo y que no pude comenzar el bachillerato ni la escuela Normal de maestros pues no tenía dinero para estudiar.

Ramsay: ¿Cuál es su obra que más apoya la revolución?

Fulleda León: Creo que todas pues la apoyan en el plano cultural y dan una visión de la mujer y el hombre negro que de alguna manera dejan ver claro la necesidad de la existencia de una revolución social como la nuestra.

Ramsay: Hay alguna obra que intenta exponer algún problema con la revolución.

Fulleda León: Ninguna intenta exponer algún problema con la revolución. Sino siempre problemas que se dan dentro de la Revolución y con los que yo o mis personajes puedan estar en desacuerdo y se manifiestan y se expresan y actúan a su manera porque son seres vivos y contradictorios que piensan, como quiere la revolución, por su propia cabeza y de acuerdo a sus necesidades. Creo que mostrar eso es una forma también de hacer revolución y ayudar a que todo se transforme para bien.

Chago de Guisa

Ramsay: ¿Cuál es el mensaje político de *Chago de guisa*?

Fulleda León: Los cubanos de estos tiempos hemos vivido cercados y hostigados, como los cimarrones del siglo XIX, por la potencia más poderosa y sanguinaria de nuestros días. Mi mensaje es que vale la pena la resistencia siempre que ella no nos impida mantener la espiritualidad y la particularidad de cada ser humano, en la que tienen su sitio sus diversos y variados sueños, sus necesidades y sus alcances. Eso enriquece nuestra lucha opuesta a cualquier tipo de dogmatismo, esquema o límite. La verdad, el camino de cada uno, puede ser encontrado en nuestros predios sociales, humanos y afectivos. El precio es asumirse sin auto discriminación y sin perjuicios ajenos.

Ramsay: ¿Cómo se expresa el tema del cimarronaje en este drama?

Fulleda León: Tratando de clarificar con humor, intensidad y poesía cómo la

actitud de cimarronaje se puede convertir en una fuerza liberadora y de conocimiento de todas las posibilidades y los caminos que el ser humano puede transitar para su realización plena. Siempre en lucha contra las barreras que la mentalidad de los otros pueda imponerle; así como lo desproporcionado, a veces, de nuestras ambiciones que nos impiden, como trabas, valorar con justeza las posibilidades y certezas que nos asaltan.

Ramsay: ¿Para usted qué es el cimarronaje?

Fulleda León: Un medio de lucha, de subsistencia. Como mis antepasados no me siento en desventaja ante la opresión o antes quienes me discriminan o mantienen perjuicios sobre mí o sobre lo que hago o hacemos. No me imagino la lucha de otra forma ante enemigo tan poderoso y cercano. Trato de expresarme con mis peculiaridades, con las condiciones y limitantes que me han-nos han-impuesto, pero tratando siempre de subvertirlas, de transformarlas en una visión, otra, revolucionaria.

La crítica

Ramsay: ¿Qué atención ha recibido su obra tanto a nivel nacional como internacional?

Fulleda León: Aquí ha sido bastante benévola y favorable, Inés María Martiatu Terry y Nancy Morejón y otros pocos se han preocupado de ella. Es reconocida admitida y quizás no privilegiada por todos los que debieran, pero la Historia se encargará de ponerlos a ellos y a mí en su sitio. Afuera, sobre todo en los Estados Unidos, Inglaterra y Jamaica se estudia en las Universidades.

Ramsay: ¿Opina que los críticos entienden su obra?

Fulleda León: Los dos citados más Joe Pereira[1] me han dado lecciones de interpretación de mi obra que me sorprenden y estimulan. Ellos han sabido rastrear y leer entre líneas y llegar a conclusiones valiosas que me deslumbran y atiendo aunque no tenga que asumirlas siempre como propias. Para eso también se escribe. Los ensayistas hacen sus lecturas y aportan sus lúcidas visiones, lo mejor de ello no es que ilustren lo que yo quería decir sino que me develen cosas que aún permanecían ocultas al yo escribir un texto. Les estoy muy agradecido.

Ramsay: ¿Cuál de sus obras ha sido llevada al cine?

Fulleda León: *Plácido* bajo la dirección de Sergio Giral por el *ICAIC*.

Ramsay: ¿Y cuál fue su impresión de la representación?

Fulleda León: Una muy polémica visión que dividió a la opinión en Sirios y Troyanos y que dio pie para que los perjuicios raciales enturbiaran el debate en el momento en que se estrenó, impidiendo valorar una obra cinematográfica que con sus defectos, vista ahora, es un documento hermoso y valioso que agrada y emociona al espectador de cualquier parte que la disfruta hoy en día.

Ramsay: ¿Se ha puesto alguna obra en la televisión o la radio?

Fulleda León: Sí, en la TV, *Los profanadores* y *La querida de Enramadas*. En radio, ambas más *Provinciana*.

Ramsay: ¿Cuál es su audiencia preferida, los adultos o los niños, y por qué?

Fulleda León: A ambos públicos los disfruto porque cada uno me entrega un caudal de emociones que me mantienen vivo. Los niños no son tan cándidos como algunos aseguran y los adultos son más ingenuos de lo que la mayoría piensa: Muchas de mis obras causan problemas a la hora de clasificarlas como obras para adultos, niños y jóvenes ¿Y qué? *El Pequeño Príncipe* es para niños. Y *Las aventuras de Tom Sawyer* es para adultos. ¿Así de simple? Quizás será que yo voy camino de ser un viejo joven.

Ramsay: ¿Qué hace para asegurar que sus dramas lleguen a la gente ordinaria?

Fulleda León: Tratar de entretenerme mientras yo las escribo, pues si lo logro igual les pasará a ellos. Lo intelectual es una condición interna de cada escritor

pero nadie escribe para sí mismo. No se debe tratar al lector-espectador como un idiota ni como un graduado de la Sorbone; hay que entretenerlo, emocionarlo, intrigarlo, golpearlo llegado un momento, cantarle al oído y susurrarle verdades que lo pongan colorado y enamorarlo siempre que se pueda con la verdad y la belleza.
Ramsay: ¿Ha recibido algún premio?
Fulleda León: Varios: el Casa de Las Américas por *Chago de guisa*, el Teatro Estudio por *Plácido*, La edad de Oro por *Provinciana*, el del Festival de Teatro Infantil por *Ruandí*, etc. Y numerosas condecoraciones y homenajes: La Distinción por La Cultura Nacional, la Medalla Alejo Carpentier y la José Maria Heredia entre otras.

La situación política y económica de Cuba

Ramsay: Comenta sobre la situación política y económica actual de su país.
Fulleda León: Pese a seguir bloqueados por la potencia más poderosa de todos los tiempos, seguimos viviendo y ya vamos saliendo del "Período especial" una época dura para todos los cubanos, donde las desigualdades económicas han resurgido con más fuerza y donde sin embargo se ha logrado un nuevo tipo de unidad en la población.
Ramsay: ¿Qué cambios le gustaría ver en su país ahora?
Fulleda León: Que desapareciera la libreta de abastecimientos, que ha cumplido un buen rol, indudablemente; que existiera una sola moneda y que cualquier persona normal pueda entonces salir por sus medios del país, para que comparara.
Ramsay: ¿Qué aspectos del sistema político le da más satisfacción en tu país?
Fulleda León: El sistema educativo, la labor internacionalista, los logros científicos, la alta valoración de la cultura, el desarrollo de nuestro deporte, la lucha incipiente por romper gracias al debate y difusión de los perjuicios raciales que han aflorado.
Ramsay: ¿Hay algunos aspectos de la realidad cubana actual que se refleja en sus obras?
Fulleda León: Esa pregunta se las remito a los críticos.
Ramsay: ¿Tiene alguna visión para Cuba?
Fulleda León: Espero que cada día sea mejor y logremos salir del subdesarrollo económico con la unidad latinoamericana y caribeña. Que con la cordura y el apoyo de la solidaridad de todos los pueblos se puedan llevar a cabo los sueños de nuestros próceres y quienes hoy habitamos este mundo.

El Feminismo

Ramsay: En una conferencia Vd. declaró que es feminista ¿Qué es el feminismo para Vd.?
Fulleda León: Declaré que algunos y algunas me han tildado de feminista; por algo será. La mujer para mí es un ejemplo eterno de discriminación y si es negra lo es doblemente. En la sociedad, en la familia, en el trabajo, en el amor. Todos la consideramos valiosa pero cada vez que podemos le endilgamos la escoba o el sartén o la barriga que es lo mismo. No tengo un sentido claro de lo que es el feminismo pero en una cultura falocratita por excelencia como la nuestra, me opongo a la discriminación que constantemente se ha venido ejerciendo sobre la mujer.
Ramsay: ¿Qué aspectos de la situación actual de la mujer le preocupa?
Fulleda León: Su representación como dirigente, en los empleos, en determinadas profesiones en todas las manifestaciones artísticas y literarias.
Ramsay: ¿Piensas que la mujer latina en general y la afro-cubana específicamente tienen problemas que son diferentes de los de otras mujeres?
Fulleda León: Las afro-cubanas con ligeras variaciones tienen parecidos problemas que las otras del resto mundo, con diversas y peculiares diferencias de acuerdo a la sociedad en que viven, pero

tienen aún entre nosotros el agravante de su condición étnica.
Ramsay: ¿Cuál es su obra más feminista?
Fulleda León: *La querida de enramadas.*

Frente el mandato de Fidel Castro

Ramsay: Me imagino que los escritores cubanos siempre están conscientes de las famosas "Palabras a los intelectuales cubanos" pronunciadas por su líder: "Dentro de la revolución todo, fuera de le revolución nada." En su caso ¿cómo controlan estas palabras su producción creativa?
Fulleda León: En mi caso particular todo lo que hago está dentro de la revolución. No movería ni un dedo para hacer nada que atentará en contra de ella. Yo no hago política con mi obra. Mi mundo es el de los que hacemos la revolución, día a día con nuestra labor cotidiana, seres humanos contradictorios. Con conflictos, ideas y ambiciones que podemos actuar o pensar en algún momento en desacuerdo con lo establecido. De esos de lo que luchan porque las cosas sean mejores se nutre mi mundo creativo y es mi obligación reflejarlos, sin panfletos de un lado o de otro, sino mostrando de qué forma esos vaivenes los hacen acceder o demorar su alcance a la plena condición humana a la que aspiramos.
Ramsay: ¿Se siente bajo algún tipo de censura?
Fulleda León: Sí en algún momento de mi vida como escritor pude haberla sentido por algunas circunstancias sociales adversas, ya superadas. Hoy puedo decir que en lo más mínimo. Sé lo que escribo y escribo lo que quiero. Sé que hay verdades que necesitan no tan sólo del coraje para expresarlas sino de la técnica y astucia para expresarlas y hacer que funcionen en el corazón y la mente del lector- espectador. Ninguna obra artística cambia el rumbo de una revolución o tumba un gobierno. Tan solo ayuda a determinados seres humanos a tomar más conciencia del mundo en que viven. Y para hacer eso no me siento bajo el peso de ninguna censura quizás tan sólo de mi incapacidad, a veces, para lograr mi eficacia como escritor revolucionario: hacer una obra hermosa artísticamente y que convenza a quien la recibe.
Ramsay: ¿Vd. se autocensura? Explíque su respuesta.
Fulleda León: No. Mi autocensura quizás sea un miedo a ser superficial, epidérmico, a no alcanzar mis propósitos, a aburrir, a no encontrar el tono adecuado, a no lograr una obra de arte.

Los escritores de su generación

Ramsay: ¿Quiénes son los escritores afro-cubanos de su generación?
Fulleda León: Nancy Morejón, Excilia Saldaña, Manolo Granados, Georgina Herrera, Eugenio Hernández Espinosa, Tomás González, Guillermo Cuevas, Ana Justina Cabrera, Inés María Martiatu Terry, Reinaldo Hernández Savio y otros.
Ramsay: ¿En su opinión quiénes son los que han recibido menos atención y a qué atribuye esto?
Fulleda León: Manolo Granados y Tomás González porque son muy transgresores y molestos, uno murió fuera del país, el otro vive en España, al igual que Guillermo Cuevas que vive en París.
Ramsay: ¿Cuál es su opinión de ellos y de sus obras?
Fulleda León: Nancy, Excilia y Georgina son tres grandes poetisas de la lengua hispana. Eugenio Hernández es un inmenso dramaturgo. Inés María Martiatu es la más lúcida ensayista de mi generación y una gran narradora. Manolo Granados fue un importante narrador. Tomás González es un singular teatrista y ha hecho dos de los mejores guiones de la historia del cine cubano: *La última cena* y *De cierta manera.*
Ramsay: ¿Qué relación mantiene con ellos?
Fulleda León: Fraternal y de constante intercambio.
Ramsay: ¿Ha realizado algún comentario sobre la obra de algunos de ellos?

Fulleda León: Sobre Nancy, Inés María, Georgina, Eugenio Hernández. Y tengo en proceso uno sobre Excilia y otro sobre Manolo.
Ramsay: ¿Quiénes en su opinión son los mejores escritores cubanos?
Fulleda León: Ellos y otros pocos nombrados.
Ramsay: ¿Quiénes son los escritores que han tenido más influencias literarias sobre sus obras?
Fulleda León: Nicolás Guillén, Alejo Carpentier, José Martí, Bretch, Shakespeare, Rolando Ferrer, Lorca, Neruda, Sófocles y una lista interminable.

La historia

Ramsay: ¿Qué aspectos de la historia de Cuba influyen sus obras y en qué maneras específicas?
Fulleda León: Aquellos en que las situaciones son muy dramáticas y tensas, donde se han cometido grandes injusticias y donde el ser humano ha puesto en prueba su condición indoblegable. Porque en ellas late el conflicto personal que va a obligar a determinados personajes a demostrarse y dar de sí lo mejor.
Ramsay: ¿Es su práctica de escritura una manera de escribir la historia de los negros de Cuba?
Fulleda León: ¿Para Vd. es lo que me toca, a ellos me debo, no creo que pueda decir nada muy importante sobre los demás como otros lo hacen. Pero los negros de Cuba son mi raíz, mi razón de ser. Cuando escribo sobre ellos descubro que estoy escribiendo sobre mí, sus experiencias son las mías, sus anhelos, sus temores, sus sueños y ambiciones son los míos. Quizás yo no sea un intelectual puro, soy tan sólo uno de ellos que piensa y siente como debe sentir un intelectual. No soy distinto sólo ejerzo una función diferente.

La posición de los negros en Cuba

Ramsay: Según Benítez-Rojo en *The Repeating Islands* bajo la revolución, los hijos de Calibán, es decir los negros en Cuba, fueron convertidos en dueños en vez de esclavos. ¿Está de acuerdo?
Fulleda León: Hasta cierto punto sí, se nos dio la oportunidad de luchar por serlo. Se nos concedieron determinados derechos entre ellos él de llegar a ser dueños de nuestra cultura, de nuestra tradición, del conocimiento, del acceso a mejores trabajos, el de luchar por nuestra condición plena. Eso no quiere decir que la hayamos alcanzado en su totalidad. Aún hay mucho camino por recorrer.
Ramsay: ¿Existe el racismo en Cuba?
Fulleda León: No. Pero sí existe el perjuicio racial. No a nivel estatal. No hay ninguna ley que favorezca tal mal. Pero los daños del racismo de la sociedad anterior no desaparecen tan sólo con las leyes que lo nieguen. Ni en 45 años. Es un mal que deja muy fuertes secuelas en la mente humana, en los sentimientos y las costumbres .Y las agudas diferencias económicas existentes en este momento en nuestro país sirven de caldo de cultivo para que resurjan manifestaciones de estos perjuicios que permanecían ocultas.
Ramsay: Hay los que piensan que la igualidad de las razas es un mito en Cuba. ¿Está de acuerdo?
Fulleda León: La igualdad está estipulada y defendida por los decretos y los fundamentos de la nación cubana. Ante la educación, la cultura, el deporte, la atención pública y el acceso a cargos públicos, todos somos iguales. El problema resalta cuando nos enfrentamos ante quien tiene mayor acceso a la moneda convertible y a determinados puestos de agencias o corporaciones nacionales con capital extranjero, por el color de su piel, y a la no representación equilibrada en los medios masivos de comunicación de todos los miembros componentes de nuestra sociedad.
Ramsay: ¿Qué diferencias o cambios han tenido lugar con respecto a los negros y su posición en la sociedad cubana?
Fulleda León: Hoy por hoy asumen una presencia notable en diversos sectores de la dirigencia estatal, el partido, las fuerzas

armadas, la educación, las profesiones científicas y culturales.

Las relaciones interraciales en Cuba

Ramsay: Hay los que declaran que las tendencias racistas que existían antes de la revolución todavía persisten en Cuba. ¿Cuál es su opinión sobre esto?
Fulleda León: No creo que existieran en la misma medida. Yo viví parte de mi vida en la república y no es comparable. Todavía aparece el perjuicio racial pero de otra manera, más taimada y menos explícita. No por el estado u organizaciones sino por determinados hombres y mujeres, pero por supuesto que laceran a quien es prejuiciado y limitan a quien la ejerce.
Ramsay: En 1996 Elvira Cernera habló de la limitación de la piel oscura en su intervención profesional en la escena cubana. ¿Cómo ha cambiado la situación?
Fulleda León: Está cambiando poco a poco quizás demasiado lento para algunos. Elvira fue una pobre víctima de los perjuicios del pasado. Quizás ella fue de las que creyó que la revolución era una varita mágica. Y no: es algo más real y fuerte pero que cuesta llevar a cabo. La televisión se ha hecho consciente de ello. Ya hay mayor diversidad. Aunque no hay que olvidar que el criterio "estético" es uno de los solapados escondites del perjuicio racial. Es una batalla diaria sin dogmatismos pero sin retroceso.
Ramsay: Algunos, por ejemplo Alden Knight, piensan que el negro ha perdido la redención de lo que Guillén cantó en 1964. ¿Qué opina usted?
Fulleda León: No sé a que se refería mi amigo Alden. Tendría que leer la cita en su contexto. La dolarización innegable de la sociedad, algo que ha traído sus pros y sus contras, limitó en muchos aspectos y complejizó las relaciones del cubano medio. El poder alquilar en un hotel, el entrar en ciertos lugares con moneda convertible, el asistir a cabañas en ciertas playas se ha vuelto una limitante sin lugar a dudas, pero esto no le ocurre solo al negro sino a cualquier cubano que no tenga divisas y aún teniéndolas. Así que no es un problema del negro en particular, realmente.
Ramsay: ¿Piensa que en general el negro en el teatro cubano es caricaturizado?
Fulleda León: Ya no, pocos se atreven a hacerlo. Aunque a ratos salte la rana. La visión de los que hemos puesto al negro, bien caracterizado, como protagonista en nuestras obras ha frenado esa intención.
Ramsay: En 1966 Fidel Castro declaró que la discriminación racial desaparecería cuando desaparecieran los privilegios de clase. ¿Todavía existen los privilegios de clase?
Fulleda León: Lo dicho por Fidel es un primer paso. Luego hay que andar juntos por mucho rato con equidad e intercambios. Luchar contra uno mismo y los perjuicios de los demás en la cotidianeidad, en la visión de los roles, de las necesidades humanas y del desarrollo de la psiquis. No es cosa de una generación de 40 años, o de buenos intereses. Es cuestión de toda la existencia y de nuestros hijos y nietos y los de ellos. No existían los privilegios de clase pero comienzan a aparecer los de determinados sectores, quienes viajamos, quienes esquilman al resto con sus precios, quienes roban y lucran con lo ajeno y las pertenencias del pueblo, quienes reciben dinero del extranjero y quienes consideran el poder de un cargo como un medio para lucrar.

Sobre *Plácido*

Ramsay: ¿Por qué decidieron hacer la película?
Fulleda León: Sergio Giral, el director de la puesta en escena se enamoró de mi obra que ya había sido publicada. Lo ocurrido con *Plácido* es uno de los temas más atractivos para los estudiantes y estudiosos de la historia de Cuba, pues con estos sucesos se demuestra una de las brutalidades mayores del régimen colonial español en Cuba. (Otro ejemplo es el fusilamiento de los 8 estudiantes de

medicina en 1871, tema de mi obra *Los profanadores*). La represión, el racismo y la eliminación de lo individual y, en contraposición, el afán de libertad se manifestaban a su vez en el conflicto. Cuando comencé a escribir la obra quería indagar en las raíces más funestas del perjuicio racial entre nosotros pues percibía que estaba aún latente en la realidad. Tomé a Plácido como paradigma, pues siendo un mulato "libre", no tenía porque padecer lo que pasó. Me fui adentrando en la época, en las contradicciones de clase, de mentalidad, de psicología social y humana y se me fue develando una realidad que aún hoy me parece apabullante. Nadie es totalmente libre si quiere formar parte de una sociedad determinada y de alguna forma influir en ella. Uno tiene la oportunidad de escapar de su realidad yéndose a otro lugar o no participando en el proceso social pero si esas no son sus intenciones: todos estamos presionados por las reglas, los intereses, las formalidades, las exigencias y las demandas de la época y el país en que vive. Y eso para un artista que tiene preocupaciones e intereses sociales es mayor: Plácido se creyó lo contrario y la existencia se encargó en demostrarle que era un "esclavo" de su tiempo. No sé si Sergio compartía conmigo esa lectura. Pero se valió de ella. La película propició un debate en el que salieron a relucir los miramientos y perjuicios de determinados sectores de la cultura. En un momento donde todo estaba muy soterrado y se centraron, por supuesto, más en críticas de carácter estético. Sergio quedó enamorado por la temática y cómo yo la trataba. Recuerdo que el primer día de filmación en Matanzas se nos acercó un historiador de la provincia y nos preguntó porque hacíamos esa película con Plácido y no con Milanes, un gran poeta blanco y cubano. Ambos nos miramos y sonreímos y casi le respondimos al unísono "¿Usted no nos ve? Es la película que nos toca, la que podemos hacer."

Ramsay: Es decir que todavía hay muchos que no entienden la importancia de tal película para los negros. No es cuestión de hacer una película sino hacer una película con un mensaje /una visión para los negros.

Ramsay: ¿Cuál es la posición oficial sobre Plácido y su papel en *La Escalera*[2]?

Fulleda León: La que fue un horrendo crimen y que fue un mártir de la lucha anti-esclavista y por la independencia de Cuba. Un hombre enamorado de mujeres blancas y amigo de tantos intelectuales blancos y de madre blanca no podía pensar en una guerra "para acabar con los blancos", como trataban de ver a la Revolución de Haití. Todo fue una conjura para extirpar a una clase, de negros y mulatos libres en ascenso que prosperaba gracias a sus oficios (parteras, peluqueros, peineteros, sastres, maestras, músicos, etc.) y que hasta tenía sus esclavos y acallar, a su vez, los ímpetus independentistas de la burguesía nativa blanca.

Ramsay: ¿Qué aspectos de la película le gustan más?

Fullera León: Las atmósferas, las relaciones interpersonales, los interrogatorios y la diversidad de matices en cómo se ponen al desnudo las contradicciones de una época. La intensidad de la tragedia de Plácido. El horror de la esclavitud y el perjuicio racial latentes en unos y otros. Me gusta mucho la escena con el poeta Heredia y el calvario final.

Ramsay: ¿Cuáles son las maneras principales en que el drama y la película se diferencian?

Fulleda León: Los interrogatorios no están en la obra y aportan una visión más racional. En la obra todo es más lúcido, quizás de una poética centrada en la fuerza de las palabras y las contradicciones; es literatura teatral. En la película son las imágenes, a veces de una fuerza inimaginable en el texto. Quizás la película tenga zonas aún muy teatrales pero ahora la disfruto como todos los que la ven.

Ramsay: ¿Qué importancia tiene la herencia africana en tanto la película como en el drama?
Fulleda León: Fundamental. Sin ella no habría esclavitud en nuestra América. No hubiera padecido miles y miles de seres humanos del desarraigo, la represión y la muerte. La herencia africana es consustancial a nuestra condición de caribeños, de antillanos.
Ramsay: ¿Qué mensaje tiene el drama y la película sobre cuestiones de nación y revolución?
Fulleda León: Que una nación se hace con la participación activa y consecuente de todos los que la integran y nadie está liberado de esa función. La verdadera libertad es la actitud consciente de esta cualidad. Y todos debemos ejercerla en igualdad de condiciones desde el lugar que ocupemos en la sociedad. La revolución ha de dar al hombre y a la mujer la oportunidad de ejercer ese derecho, ese deber. Hasta lograr la emancipación total.

Sus planes para el futuro

Ramsay: ¿Está escribiendo algo ahora?
Fulleda León: Sí, una obra larga *Peregrinaje al Cobre*; por supuesto ocurre en Santiago de Cuba.
Ramsay: ¿Cuáles son sus planes para el futuro inmediato y lejano?
Fulleda León: Tratar de escribir más, mejor y vivir todo lo que pueda.
Ramsay: ¡Ha sido una entrevista abierta, honesta e informativa! Gracias por haberme dado esta oportunidad de entenderle más a Vd. y su obra creativa. Estoy segura de que esta entrevista será útil para muchos investigadores y estudiantes. Le deseo todo lo mejor.

University of the West Indies

Notes

[1](Joe) Joseph Pereira is a researcher in Cuban literature and Vice-President of the University of West Indies at Mona (Jamaica). He has analyzed many works by Fullera.

[2]In 1843, following the declaration of a planter in the province of Matanzas that he had discovered a plot to overthrow the colonial government, persecution and torture spread through western Cuba. This event in which thousands of slaves and free people of colour were executed, imprisoned, or simply disappeared came to be known as La Escalera. Government officials implicated leading liberal intellectuals and pronationalists, including the writer Domingo Del Monte. They also executed Gabriel de la Concepción Valdes, otherwise known as Plácido, as suspected leader of the conspiratorial group of free people of colour.

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Reviewed by María Zalduondo

Invisibilidad, marginación y aislamiento son palabras que se utilizan para describir la situación del afrodescendiente en Ecuador. La presencia irónicamente detectable, palpable y visible en la cultura e historia de los afroecutorianos es el tema que recoge Franklin Miranda a través de dos escritores: Adalberto Ortiz Quiñones (1914- 2003) y Nelson Estupiñán Bass (1912-2002). El autor comienza la introducción a su estudio con una metáfora que le otorga privilegio a los tambores míticos, a la brujería y específicamente al antídoto del curandero que se convierte en medio legítimo para esclarecer la importancia de estos dos escritores esmeraldeños en la recuperación de lo africano en la cultura e historia de Ecuador. Estos dos autores son, según Miranda, los sembradores de las hierbas y plantas medicinales que constituyen el contra o el antídoto que a través de las palabras (y deliberadamente, el texto) han de curar la herida. Esa herida se entiende como la marginación e invisibilidad del afroecuatoriano en la sociedad y cultura dominante. Miranda analiza las obras de estos dos poetas y narradores porque utilizan "su propia voz para decirse," puesto que antes "se había hablado del negro de una manera exterior" (17). Al ser estos dos autores afrodescendientes hijos de Esmeraldas, ellos pueden expresarse desde la profunda experiencia de escribir lo vivido, desde lo interior, desde la conciencia africana diaspórica misma.

Este estudio crítico pretende enlazar y analizar dos temas relacionados entre si: lo que entendemos ser la identidad afro-latinoamericana y su relación con la literatura afroecuatoriana. Para lograr su propósito Miranda enmarca su análisis repasando conscientemente las ideas que han circulado sobre la identidad africana en el contexto hispanoamericano. En el primer capítulo Miranda traza, por ejemplo, el uso de la palabra *négre* como pronombre que en sus inicios se usa para describir a la persona de origen africano durante la colonización y comercio de esclavos africanos. Como consecuencia de esta experiencia histórica el mundo occidental se divide entre ideas negrófagas y negrófilas sobre la presencia del africano en el ambiente cultural. La décima musa mexicana Sor Juana Inés, según Miranda, se alista a los últimos en algunos de sus poemas (cita ausente que hubiera sido útil incluir). El negrófaga es un racista – utilitarista, en cuanto el negrófila es humano – paternalista.

Miranda arguye que los negros que cimarronearon y que no estuvieron constantemente en "relación vertical con el colonizador" desarrollaron una visión cultural y modo de vivir diferente que se articuló a través de costumbres y valores afrocéntricos (22). Miranda asume que un proceso de desculturación perjudicial ocurrió en la mayoría de la población africana bajo el yugo español pero que el africano cimarrón no llegó a incorporar los valores europeos. Claro está que la heterogeniedad es la clave para entender la identidad afrolatinoamericana ya que históricamente hubo contacto entre africanos de diferentes partes de África, europeos de varias etnicidades, e indígenas de diferentes culturas en las Américas.

En términos de la representación de la cultura afrolatinoamericana, en el primer capítulo Miranda retoma una discusión breve sobre el negrismo y sus diferencias con la negritud con el cual este público lector estaría familiarizado. En el negrismo, nuevamente el negro es un bozal sin voz propia. El negrismo practicado por afrodescendientes trae una vertiente contradictoria (que es el caso de Adalberto Ortiz, de hora en adelante

AOQ). Pero Miranda identifica algo positivo en el negrismo porque trajo "un despertar más temprano y profundo por la reivindicación de la cultura negra" (24). La negritud en cambio es un movimiento que se incuba en Paris. En los años treinta la negritud arguye que el negro tiene "cualidades innatas" como "su naturalidad, espontaneidad, vigor, sentido telúrico y rítmico" (25). La negritud, entonces, se recupera como una postura agresiva (y como racismo del otro lado-concepto que se podrá debatir ya que el racismo conlleva tener el poder para ejercerlo). El negro es en este esquema como un supraser (entiendo "super ser") del recuerdo de África. La ideología de Franz Fanon es más útil porque "deja abierta la posibilidad de entender lo afrodescendiente bajo los parámetros de lo diverso" (26). La hetereogeneidad histórica va a crear identidades heterogéneas africanas en las Américas. Ser afrodescendiente entonces conlleva otros conceptos para expresar la realidad de experiencias no monolíticas de antillanidad, *creolité*, Nation Language y afrolatinoamericanismo (y sus particularidades: afroecutorianidad, afro-mexicanidad, afroperuanidad, etc). Lo que no se aclara es si Miranda ve una conexión con estas expresiones culturales no-caribeñas y la *creolité* (aunque en un apartado dice que Esmeraldas es como el caribe, no lo explica). El desarrollo de un lenguaje "otro," *créole,* como resistencia cultural al lenguaje dominante, por ejemplo, no se experimenta en Esmeraldas aunque si se menciona la "esmeraldeñización del castellano" como anécdota pasajera (54).

Finalmente para Miranda, la transculturación predomina como herramienta conceptual (contra términos como culturas híbridas y sincretismo) porque, los cambios culturales no ocurren de manera pasiva sino que hay un (inter)cambio donde una modificación simultánea ocurre en ambas la cultura dominante y la cultura subalterna. Esta definición de la transculturación, que implica según el mismo autor "la creación de un algo que no es ni original, ni lo nuevo, ni una mezcla, sino algo distinto" va a ser imprescindible para el entendimiento de la identidad afro-ecuatoriana (31). Pues como lo argüirá Miranda, es (parafraseando a Cornejo Polar) una identidad construida desde la resistencia y adaptación (activa recepción pero mantenimiento de identidad) (31). El crítico va a proponer una identidad heterogénea como la llave conceptual para expresar y entender al afroecuatoriano. O sea una identidad de resistencia pero también de apropiación de la cultura dominante, elementos que se unen para efectuar la constante fluidez en la construcción de identidades. Habiendo establecido este marco teórico que rechaza la idea de Nestor Canclini de hibridismo, Miranda nos presenta el trasfondo histórico del pueblo de Esmeraldas.

El capítulo dos nos ofrece una perspectiva socio-histórica de la comunidad afroecuatoriana que se centra en Esmeraldas aunque también hace mención a la región de El Chota (hacienda de Jesuitas esclavistas). Miranda repasa los acontecimientos relacionados con los veintitrés (17 hombres y 6 mujeres) esclavos náufragos que se escapan y sobreviven para fundar la aldea donde se encuentran los inicios del mito fundacional de la identidad afro-ecuatoriana. La crónica del sacerdote español Miguel Cabello de Balboa, cuenta la fascinante historia de lucha y supervivencia de la comunidad de cimarrones. Los héroes casi épicos, primero Antón y luego Alonso de Illescas, forman parte de esta historia de lucha contra los indígenas que no reciben con brazos abiertos a los nuevos refugiados. El mestizaje con los grupos de indígenas lleva a construir una "hegemonía zamba en la zona (hasta el año 1600)" (43). Illescas se convierte en el primer gobernador de esta 'República de Zambos.' Este trasfondo histórico fascinante ha de fundar las bases para entender la relativa autonomía en la cual

vive el pueblo afrodescendiente en Esmeraldas.

El tercer capítulo de este estudio constituye la mayor contribución por parte del autor al análisis de las narrativas de AOQ y Nelson Estupiñán Bass (de ahora en adelante NEB). Debo notar que es el capítulo más largo (pp.59-177), con unas ciento dieciocho páginas, que se divide en dos secciones correspondiente a los dos autores. Miranda analiza estos textos mayormente desde la perspectiva de la alegoría. Por ejemplo, en sus últimas reflexiones sobre la obra principal de AOQ, *Juyungo* (1943) el autor señala que "Antonio representa la contradicción paralizante de lo multicultural; Ascención el sujeto visceral que...," etc. (105). A esta aproximación analítica se le añade la consideración de la biografía personal. En otras palabras, Miranda representa a AOQ como un mulato acomplejado que nunca pudo reconciliar su etnicidad y resintió el color de su piel, viéndola como una barrera y no como una oportunidad. Se enfatiza la ambigüedad cultural del autor y cómo ésta influye en la propuesta del mismo sobre la problemática afro-ecuatoriana. Según Miranda las propuestas de AOQ se anclan en el mestizaje y la lucha de clases, discursos considerados no consistentes con una ideología afrocéntrica (79). Lo interesante de toda esta discusión es la referencia que hace Miranda a esta práctica supuestamente pasiva de AOQ dónde "se le escapa constantemente su identidad afrodescendiente" (79). Es decir, AOQ se declara abiertamente negrista (por ejemplo, ve la marimba como salvajismo negro) pero hay momentos donde una expresión autóctona, afrodescendiente, surge de su discurso, casi sin querer.

De los dos autores, Miranda ocupa más tiempo en la obra de NEB, dedicándole por lo menos veinte páginas más en el tercer capítulo (pp. 106-177). Su aproximación a la obra de NEB es más compleja. Miranda no se detiene en la obra principal de NEB *Cuando los guayacanes florecían* (1954) sino que incluye otras novelas como *El último río* (1966) y *Senderos brillantes* (1974). NEB es un autor abiertamente comprometido a la causa afroecuatoriana y la identidad africana esmeraldeña. Al igual que AOQ, también simpatiza con el partido comunista y reconoce la influencia del Grupo de Guayaquil en los años treinta. Pero NEB no se aleja del Ecuador y mantiene sus vinculaciones culturales "desde adentro" en una postura afrocéntrica que es palpable y presente en su obra literaria. Desde el realismo social que primero inspira al autor a narrar la situación marginada en que vive el afroecuatoriano hasta llegar a las vertientes vanguardistas que han de marcar su obra literaria luego, NEB se muestra como un expositor de la injusticia racista que resiste el afrodescendiente. NEB celebra la tradición oral y la oralidad en su poesía, sus cuentos y novela, desde la perspectiva afrocentrica y no negrista.

Para concluir, Miranda nos brinda un estudio valioso de dos autores poco conocidos fuera de los estudios afro-latinoamericanos. También quisiera observar a propósito de la discusión que mantiene Miranda con el crítico Henry Richards sobre el "estupiñanismo" (p. 156) que uno de los estudios todavía por hacerse es precisamente la juxtaposición de otros autores latinoamericanos con la obra de NEB. Me pareció interesante que aunque las obras de AOQ y NEB se representan en forma progresiva, sus obras literarias se desarollaron simultáneamente y que parece no haber encuentros entre los dos autores (por lo menos no los registra Miranda). Me parece importante también definir términos como "afrocentrismo," ¿que significa esta palabra en el contexto afroecuatoriano? No lo descubrimos en este texto. Debo señalar que el autor chileno comienza su estudio con un epígrafe que celebra la voz, la tradición oral y así incluye citas de Aimé Césaire, NEB, AOQ y Nicolás Guillen. Concluye su trabajo con un apéndice sobre las décimas esmeraldeñas y el cuento oral

donde no provee ejemplos pero sí repasa los puntos generales sobre el tema. Es un homenaje a la importancia de la tradición oral pero no se hace mención de este apéndice en la introducción lo que me hace pensar que fue añadido *a posteriori*. Me hubiera gustado ver una conexión más concreta entre el apéndice y los autores estudiados. Fuera de estas pequeñas observaciones, considero que este es un estudio valiosos que aporta una importante visión a las letra hispánicas ya que entra en el espacio semántico cultural narrativo de dos autores escribiendo dentro de su país desde una perspectiva afrodescendiente. Un estudio crítico que inspira al lector o lectora a querer leer a un autor como NEB, por ejemplo, merece ser celebrado por despertar la curiosidad intelectual. Bien se pudiera decir que Miranda ha logrado hacer su magia. ¡Que repiquen los tambores…!

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***El metro* por Donato Ndongo. Barcelona: El Cobre Ediciones, 2007. 458 páginas.**

Reseña por Elisa Rizo

El metro, la tercera novela de Donato Ndongo (Niefang, Guinea Ecuatorial, 1950), da prominencia a un tema transnacional:[1] la inmigración ilegal de subsaharianos a Europa. Ya manifiesto en la producción narrativa de Ndongo desde la década de los setentas,[2] el tema migratorio se desarrolla en *El metro* mediante una exploración de las estructuras culturales, económicas y políticas que destierran de sus lugares de origen a sectores de la población que se ven a sí mismos sin opciones, condenados a la pobreza.

El hecho de que Obama Ondo Lambert, el protagonista de *El metro*, es un camerunés y no un guineoecuatoriano – como los protagonistas de las novelas anteriores de Ndongo—subraya el espacio transnacional en el que se desarrolla esta narrativa. En el contexto subsahariano representado en *El Metro*, el concepto de ciudadanía no llega a ser más relevante que la afiliación de los habitantes a una etnia, religión o lengua con la que se identifican en un territorio no necesariamente definido por un país. De esta forma, la etnia fang y no un espacio nacional se afirma como el lugar de origen o punto de partida de la migración de Obama Ondo hacia el norte. Si bien las fronteras nacionales no son completamente ignoradas en *El metro*, su relevancia sólo es percibida por el protagonista a medida que éste se aleja de Mbalmayo (su aldea) y se aproxima a centros urbanos. Al final de su trayecto, en España, la obtención de documentos que definan su identidad nacional y su estatus legal se convierte en una constante preocupación.

El canto del griot o la memoria como táctica de supervivencia

Los diecinueve capítulos de *El metro* pronto revelan sus dimensiones épicas. La narración de la vida de Obama es precedida por una genealogía y está acompañada por núcleos narrativos que dan a conocer las problemáticas de personajes secundarios. Tal envergadura, aunada a frecuentes evocaciones a la grandeza de los antepasados y a la aplicación de viejos refranes para explicar ciertas situaciones, conectan estilísticamente la saga del joven camerunés con una vieja institución africana: los *griot*.[3] Así, mediante descripciones, análisis y rectificaciones, la voz omnisciente del griot-narrador relata múltiples sucesos, desde tensiones familiares en tiempos coloniales hasta prácticas racistas en la Europa contemporánea, siempre con el objetivo de informar claramente sobre las andanzas de Obama en su desplazamiento desde Mbalmayo hasta Madrid.

El capítulo uno sitúa a Obama en Madrid. En su caminata por los andenes del metro, este personaje se revela al lector como un inmigrante africano con plena conciencia de ser rechazado por su entorno:

> Sólo era un negro: negro –dijeron- sin historia, ni ciencia, ni técnica; negro despojado de su lengua, de su identidad, de su cultura; negro sin poesía, sin arte ni noción de la estética; negro –dijeron- sin pasado, ni presente, ni futuro. (21)

Obama percibe que se encuentra en una sociedad que le rechaza. Necesita asegurarse a sí mismo que su migración ha sido la mejor opción. El acto de rememorar, entonces, corresponde a la necesidad de mantener la cordura. Como explica el narrador:

> (…) era entonces inevitable que rumiase su propia existencia, rememorando el momento exacto en que se truncó una vida que inició armoniosa y equilibrada, aunque la perspectiva

> proyectase ahora un proceso largo, lento e inexorable, no exento de cierta lógica, pues los eslabones se concatenaban para formar la cadena que le amarraba sin remedio a la fatalidad. (38)

El tono determinista de este primer capítulo pronto se disuelve en el segundo. Allí, el narrador da a conocer la historia de la familia de Obama Ondo Lambert para, de este modo, contextualizar el inicio de su saga. A partir de aquí pueden distinguirse cuatro momentos que guían el desarrollo de la trama principal, es decir, la vida de Obama: "origen," "destierro," "migración," y "llegada al puerto final."

Dos elementos destacan en la fase narrativa que he denominado como origen, misma que relata la infancia y adolescencia de Obama. Por un lado, su exigua instrucción escolar que, a falta de otros libros, se basa en el dictado y la memorización de *El Principito* de Antoine De Saint-Exupéry. Por otro lado, su preparación tradicional, fundada en el aprendizaje de la historia ancestral (transmitida por los ancianos del pueblo), las estrategias de la caza y el entendimiento de prácticas agrícolas fang. A lo largo de la narración, tanto su saber tradicional como la historia de *El principito* se revelarán como las herramientas conceptuales a las que recurrirá el joven Obama para encontrar lógica, consuelo y esperanza en sus vicisitudes.

El núcleo narrativo que he nombrado arriba como destierro relata cómo –a pesar de sus esmeros—la opción tradicional no sólo se prueba limitante para el protagonista sino que, de hecho, coarta sus opciones de vida en la aldea. Una traición familiar le obliga a abandonar su querido Mbalmayo y dar inicio a su éxodo. Contenido en los capítulos nueve a quince, este núcleo narrativo de migración, se desarrolla en dos fases. La primera, inicia con el traslado de Obama a Yaundé y a Duala. En estos centros urbanos, el protagonista se enfrenta ante dinámicas que gobiernan las áreas más pobres de las ciudades africanas (y del mundo, para el caso): el miedo, la desconfianza y la comercialización de absolutamente todo. La segunda fase de la migración da comienzo con su partida de Camerún como polizón en un buque comercial español. Su desembarque en Dakar y su breve encarcelamiento en esta ciudad senegalesa marca el inicio de su experiencia como inmigrante ilegal. Frente a un horizonte plagado de obstáculos, el siempre analítico y prudente Obama considera regresar a casa:

> Regresar a su país era lo sensato. (...) Moriría sí, pero apaciblemente, cuando llegara su hora (...) Y entonces recordó el libro que les leía en la escuela su maestro, y esa evocación le reafirmó en la idea de que intentara ser un hombre de acción. (...) El Principito le azuzaba, le mostraba que el mundo es de los audaces. (303-4)

El referente metropolitano de *El principito* se plantea como una fuente de inspiración, como una imagen que facilita a Obama el permitirse el derecho a soñar. Sin embargo, pronto queda claro que las ilusiones del protagonista tienen un alto precio. Al llegar a Casablanca se pone en manos de "La Red," una organización criminal que "facilita" el paso de emigrantes ilegales hacia Europa. El trayecto desde Casablanca hasta la costa de El Aauïn y el consiguiente viaje en patera entre las costas de Marruecos y Lanzarote dejan claro a Obama y a sus compañeros de viaje que, para alcanzar el bienestar, tienen primero que privarse de su propia humanidad. Dice el narrador: "Ellos mismos lo sabían: eran seres vencidos, despojados de todo asomo de dignidad." (341)

Con el capítulo dieciséis se inicia el relato de la llegada al puerto final, España. Esta parte de la novela ilustra la experiencia de Obama como inmigrante, y se caracteriza por momentos de descubrimiento, de asombro, de miedo, de humillación y, sobre todo, de nostalgia. Por otro lado, es importante indicar que la novela no es solamente el listado de una

serie de infortunios; también se relata la reconfortante solidaridad brindada por otros inmigrantes en España y por algunos españoles. Por cada una de sus experiencias, el narrador indica cómo Obama toma la oportunidad de analizar su circunstancia y asegurar su supervivencia.

Hacia el final, la narración revela su estructura circular al situar a Obama en el metro de Madrid, lugar en donde dio comienzo su recopilación de recuerdos. En una alusión indirecta al cuento de De Saint Exupéry, Obama alcanza su anhelo de retornar al hogar y encontrarse con sus ancestros. Sin embargo, al contrario del cuento francés, a este príncipe africano (heredero del reino perdido de su abuelo Esang Motúu) no se le es dado decidir su propia muerte. El final es de doble filo: ¿derrota o triunfo?, esto es para que el lector decida.

Personajes femeninos

Aunque la vida de Obama Ondo Lambert define el eje de la trama, es importante destacar la importancia de los personajes femeninos en la novela. Comenzando con el personaje de Dorothée Oyana (madre de Obama), pasando por Anne Mengue (su primer amor y madre de su primogénita) y Jeanne Bikíe (madre de Anne Mengue), hasta llegar a Sylvie (prometida de Obama y madre de su segundo hijo), estas mujeres son –junto con la veneración de sus ancestros— punto de referencia en las cavilaciones del protagonista durante su búsqueda por una vida mejor. En esta constelación de personajes femeninos sobresale Anne Mengue, una mujer honesta y bella que se convierte en la obsesión de Obama. Sin embargo, más fuerte que la gran atracción sexual entre estos dos jóvenes es el hecho que Anne es también dueña de una mente analítica y un espíritu progresista. Su prostitución en Duala y su completa decepción del sistema tradicional son resultado del doble yugo que, como mujer en un mundo de hombres, se ve forzada a soportar con plena conciencia de no merecerlo. Aunque Obama también llega a prostituirse, pronto abandona esta práctica gracias a Sylvie. Este personaje le ofrece amor, apoyo y la posibilidad de establecer una familia. En el caso de Anne—esto lo deja muy claro el narrador—no hay apoyo al cual recurrir, sólo la esperanza de que su "apoderado" en Duala cumpla la promesa de conseguirle los papeles para emigrar a Europa y comenzar una vida nueva. El personaje de Anne es uno de los muchos aciertos de esta novela, ya que permite una visión más comprensiva de estructuras de opresión que afectan tanto a hombres como a mujeres y, a la vez, muestra dinámicas de desigualdad que afectan especialmente al sexo femenino.

***El metro* y el canon literario guineo-ecuatoriano**

La problemática del exilio y la emigración son tropos recurrentes en la producción poética guineoecuatoriana.[4] Sin embargo, el tratamiento de estos temas en el corpus poético responde mayormente a los efectos de la primera dictadura nguemista. Con excepción de poetas como Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel en su colección *Historia íntima de la humanidad,* es importante reconocer que el tema migratorio como fenómeno continental no ha sido muy visitado por autores guineoecuatorianos, sobre todo en lo que corresponde a la narrativa. En este sentido, *El metro* se une a obras como "El sueño" (1997) del mismo Ndongo y el relato "Emigración" (2000) de Maximiliano Nkogo, por mencionar dos.

A un lado del tema migratorio, es importante subrayar que *El metro* tiene una relación temática con otras expresiones de la narrativa guineo-ecuatoriana. En este aspecto, la tercera novela de Ndongo presenta una salutación literaria a textos seminales, como *Cuando los Combes Luchaban* (Leoncio Evita Enoy, 1953) y *Ekomo* (María Nsue Angüe, 1985) en tanto que describe las

respuestas de una comunidad tradicional (yendyok) ante valores occidentales. De la misma forma, la migración doméstica (del campo a la ciudad) narrada en *El metro* ficcionaliza la experiencia de la vida poscolonial en África. Obama, un hombre nacido con las repúblicas africanas, es un personaje que tiene experiencias similares aquellas aludidas por la narrativa de autores como Maximiliano Nkogo en su relato *Adja Adja* y, por supuesto, por Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, en obras como *Nadie tiene buena fama en este país* y *Rusia se va a Asamse*. *El metro* sin embargo, trasciende estos momentos literarios para meterse de lleno en la experiencia del destierro en Europa vivida por aquellos hombres y mujeres a quienes la ilusión de la república vino a traerles, paradójicamente, la privación de su derecho al bienestar.

Como corolario se podría añadir que *El metro* es una lectura de interés para aquellos interesados en estudios afro-hispánicos, transatlánticos, diaspóricos, de identidad, migración y raza. Pero, sobre todo, hay que señalar que *El metro* es una narrativa que aboga por el reconocimiento de la conciencia y la voluntad de los esforzados—y forzados—peregrinos del Sur.

Iowa State University

Notas

[1]Hasta ahora, las narraciones más conocidas de este autor de se han concentrado en el tratamiento de problemáticas guineo-ecuatorianas. *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (con ediciones en 1987 y en 2000) y *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997) ilustran el período de transición de Guinea Ecuatorial de ser colonia a ser estado independiente; así como la simultánea irrupción de la dictadura de Francisco Macías Nguema. Una de las voces literarias más conocidas de Guinea Ecuatorial, Donato Ndongo es—además de narrador— periodista, historiador, y promotor de la literatura de su país natal.

[2]Publicado por primera vez en 1977 (*Nueva narrativa guineana,* U.R.G.E., Madrid) y firmado con el seudónimo de Francisco Abeso Nguema, "El sueño" es la primera muestra del interés en el tema de la migración de subsaharianos a Europa por parte de Donato Ndongo. Nuestra referencia proviene de su re-impresión en *Literatura de Guinea Ecuatorial (Antología)*.

[3]El profesor Thomas Hale ofrece un magnífico estudio de esta institución narrativa de base africana en *Griots and Griottes*.

[4] Para un análisis del corpus poético de Guinea Ecuatorial producido tanto dentro como fuera del territorio ver *An Introduction to the Literature of Equatorial Guinea* by Marvin Lewis. También, para un análisis de los temas del exilio, hogar, desplazo y globalización en la poesía guineoecuatoriana, ver "Salvando a copito de nieve: poesía, globalización y la extraña mutación de Guinea Ecuatorial" y "African Poetry in Spanish Exile: Seeking Refuge in the Metropolis," por Benita Sampedro Vizcaya.

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Reviewed by Mónica G. Ayuso

As a member of the African American, West Indian and Latin American communities herself, Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo has a personal investment in tracing the origins of racial consciousness and transnational identity in *Black Cosmopolitanism*. As the daughter of a Jamaican mother and a Nigerian father who met in Wisconsin, she experienced first-hand a life and an education in which all three cultures coexisted. That experience led to this book, which Nwankwo succinctly describes as "an integrative reading of disparities, similarities and interactions between the varied approaches to identity in general and Blackness in particular articulated by people of African descent in Cuba, the United States and the British West Indies during the nineteenth century" (6). The book is a productive attempt at integrating areas of study that are, for the most part, traditionally separate in the academy.

In the introduction, Nwankwo makes a series of useful preliminary arguments. First, she identifies the Haitian Revolution as an event of cataclysmic importance that marked the difference between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century slave narratives and significantly changed the attitude towards interrelatedness among people of African descent in the Americas and throughout the Black Atlantic world. For instance, Nwankwo notes that in the wake of the uprising, public figures as different as Williams Wells Brown and David Walker reacted in diametrically opposed ways to the revolution. The former chose to ignore it; the latter used it as a threat to instill fear of similar uprisings elsewhere. Second, Nwankwo discusses a number of related critical terms and explains her choice of "cosmopolitanism" in the title. She justifies her complete rejection of "Pan-Africanism"—a term with an emphasis on "political action that seeks to ameliorate the lives of all people of African descent elsewhere" (11)—and her partial rejection of "transnationalism"—a term she argues fails to describe how and why ideologies move across national boundaries—but she still (for reasons that are unclear) uses in the title. The term she adopts, "cosmopolitanism," is qualified. Her audience is not to understand the subject of her study, the cosmopolite, as a citizen of the world with a detached attitude towards nation, even if such an attitude existed at all. Rather, she cautions: the Black cosmopolite had a conflicted relationship to birthplace, which oftentimes denied him/her affiliations to it. She also defines the cosmopolite as someone with a special attidude towards travel; the slave or ex-slave traveled often without will and always without leisure. Finally, Nwankwo places her project at the nexus of relevant scholarship that discusses the tenuous assumptions on which the notion of a Black community rests. Recognizing the transnational emphasis of most of these studies, Nwankwo hails her project as an attempt at broadening the understanding of what "African American" means. Reading a number of nineteenth-century texts—novels, poems, slave narratives, autobiographies, speeches, newspaper articles, and government documents—by or about four figures in the public eye and at the crossroads of disparate and competing groups, Nwankwo traces the development of a Black community that did not grow organically as a result of slavery across national boundaries. *Black Cosmopolitanism* is divided into three cohesive parts of two chapters each. Part I, entitled "The Making of a Race (Man)," contains a discussion of mid-nineteenth-

century Plácido, a free Cuban poet of color, from the point of view of White and Black abolitionists. Part II is entitled "Both (Race) and (Nation)?" It concentrates on both Plácido and Frederick Douglass, two individuals whose very prominence prevented them from defining themselves publicly. Part III, called "Negating Nation, Rejecting Race," concentrates on British West Indian (ex-) slave Mary Prince and Cuban (ex-)slave and poet Juan Francisco Manzano. Both denied national and racial identity—Mary in favor of a "cosmopolitan consciousness" that linked her to the broader Black Atlantic; Juan Francisco Manzano in favor of an attitude that Nwankwo calls "racial disidentification" (155), made possible because his racial ambiguity allowed him to escape fixed racial categories.

In "The View from Above, Plácido through the Eyes of the Cuban Colonial Government and White Abolitionists," Nwankwo introduces poet Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés, the man called Plácido, executed by firing squad on June 28, 1844, for allegedly heading what the government perceived as one of the largest conspiracies of slaves and free people of color against Cuban whites. The conspiracy was called La Conspiración de la Escalera (The Ladder Conspiracy) after the infamous torture tool used by the Cuban government. Nwankwo details the historical backdrop against which Plácido was executed. After the Cuban revolution, Cuba was a leading colony exporting sugar to the U.S. The resulting economic boom was made possible by the importation of African slaves until 1886, the year Cuba officially ended slavery. The chapter painstakingly unearths the conditions that motivated both pro- and anti-slavery forces writing from or about Cuba to track what were perceived as the threatening connections among people of color, not just in Cuba but all over the neighboring Caribbean countries. By way of dramatic contrast, Nwankwo juxtaposes two key documents: the 1845 letter to the editor of the *Jamaican Guardian and Patriot*, written by London resident British West Indian Joseph Soul, on the one hand, and the text of the *Sentencia*, the document imposing the official sentence upon Plácido and his fellow conspirators, on the other. The two documents regard Placido's social status very differently. While Saul extolls Plácido as a Cuban poet, an international martyr and a hero, the authors of the *Sentencia* deny him as a Cuban or a subject of the Spanish crown. This reading of documents highlights the tensions in the interests of two different groups that appropriated the figure of Plácido for self-serving purposes. In a poignant moment, Nwankwo even points out the "error" of zealots like Soul, who constructed Plácido as a slave when he was born free, an error that showed Soul's abolitionist ardor.

"The View from Next Door: Plácido through the Eyes of U.S. Black Abolitionists," analyzes two versions of Placido's story that traveled beyond the frontiers of his native island and became part of the discourse of the Atlantic world intent on unifying the Black community. Prominent among these was William Wells Brown who—like Soul—took considerable license: he presented Plácido as a Black man when he was not; as a slave when he was born free; and as a member of an African nation linked by degradation and oppression to Blacks living elsewhere. But by far the most sophisticated representation of Plácido in circulation in the nineteenth-century was openly fictional. Between 1859 and 1862, U.S.-born Black activist Martin Robinson Delany wrote a series of stories about a hemispheric Black rebellion led by Henry Blake/Henrico Blacus, an African American-Cuban slave with a cousin named and modeled after the historical Plácido. Collectively published under the title *Blake; or, the Huts of America*, this work was published at the time when debate over the annexation of Cuba was raging in the U.S. Unlike Henry, Delany's

Plácido is ambiguously Black and unambiguously male. He has a deep understanding of Africa and expresses radical anti-slavery politics that condone violence when necessary. One of Placido's salient characteristics is his awareness of the interrelatedness of all people of color, a fact made plausible because *Blake* is set in Cuba and the U.S. Delany obviously had multiple groups of oppression in mind: the Cuban creoles who wanted independence from Spain, the Cubans of color who wanted independence from whites, and the African Americans who wanted freedom from Blacks in the U.S. Nwankwo's detailed reading of *Blake* ultimately shows Plácido as a fictional object rather than a historical subject intended for White and Black audiences alike. Delany's aim as an activist seems to be to instill hope in a volatile area of the Caribbean since Cuba was a slave-holding society flanked by a free Haiti to the east and an emancipated Jamaica to the south.

"On Being Black and Cuban: Race, Nation and Romanticism in the Poetry of Plácido" makes a substantial contribution to Afro-American scholarship because it sheds light on an under examined area: the sixty years leading to the revolutionary period of 1868-98. Nwankwo rejects the hasty assumption that identity was forged by racial ties alone. She thoroughly explains that Blacks of the period felt connected on the basis of ethnicity and culture too. This section shows that, unlike the representations of Plácido by those who positioned him as a race man, his poetry shows no references to color difference. Nwankwo concludes that Plácido himself reveals a nuanced approach to identity and a broad racial affinity while the writers who appropriated him for political purposes denied him both. Nwankwo argues that two factors take precedence over his racial identity: the demands of the genre of Romantic poetry he used and his involvement in the Cuban fight for independence from Spain. As a result, Plácido never mentions Africa, the African race or the Black race though most of the writers who appropriated his figure paint a one-dimensional man exclusively defined by race.

In "We Intend to Stay Here: The International Shadows in Frederick Douglass's Representations of African American Community," Nwankwo moves to a figure of tremendous importance in African American history. Frederick Douglass was born a slave; as a free man he became U.S. ambassador to Haiti. In the course of his long public life, he published three autobiographies in which he pricked the conscience of his nation through an accounting of its crimes. The last one, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, was published in 1881, twenty years after the abolition of slavery in the U.S. The wealth of material in this section shows Douglass's torturous manipulation of his persona—both literary and political—trying to reconcile his interests as a U.S.-born individual, a U.S. Black, and a member of the Black collective. In "More a Haitian than an American: Frederick Douglass and the Black World beyond the U.S.," Nwankwo shows instances of Douglass's "twice-doubled consciousness", a term she adapts from W.E.B. Du Bois, to conceptualize "the tension between [...] (Douglass's) apparent belief in the connection between African Americans and Africa and the desire to claim Americanness" (138). This balance proves to be painfully tricky during Douglass's tenure as U.S. Consul to Haiti and *chargé d'affairs* of Santo Domingo (1889-1891), an appointment bitterly opposed by White U.S. statesmen. During this period, Douglass was charged with building a U.S. base on the island of Môle St. Nicholas. In this instance, he had to negotiate North American imperialism over a nation with which he was connected as a Black.

The last section concentrates on two authors who distinguish themselves radically from all nineteenth-century authors treated in the book thus far. Mary

Prince, who wrote a slave narrative that transcended the notion of national allegiance altogether; and Juan Francisco Manzano, who challenged the presumption that he spoke for the good of the broader Black community because of his ambiguous ancestry and race.

In "A Slave's Cosmopolitanism: Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave," Nwankwo reconstructs Mary Prince's background. Born in Bermuda, she spent several miserable years working in the salt mines on Turks Island and the plantations of Antigua as punishment for her incorrigibility. *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*, is the first slave narrative written by a woman in the Americas. It was published in England in 1831, when the battle for the emancipation of slaves was raging. Mary unambiguously embraces Blackness and the slave community, but denies the bonds that limit community to geography and language. In Nwankwo's reading, Mary evidences a well-developed sense of the world beyond the small islands that she was forced to inhabit. She is the best example of the cosmopolite the author defined in the introduction, a woman aware of the world beyond the boundaries of nation. Mary Prince's section is crucial to Afro-Caribbean writers and critics in general and Afro-Caribbean women in particular because of the gendered underpinnings of the nation Mary rejected, which always assumed the citizen as a male subject.

Finally, in "Disidentification as Identity: Juan Francisco Manzano and the Flight from Darkness," Nwankwo covers the author of the only extant Spanish-American narrative discovered to date. In typically meticulous manner, she packs information that includes the events leading to the publication of Manzano's narrative in English in 1840 and in Spanish in 1937 and the endless critical debate that followed publication. Nwankwo defines the neologism "disidentification" with which she describes Manzano's racial identity. "Disidentification," she clarifies, is not a synonym of "passing," a word indicating movement away from one identity group (*pardo* or *mulato* in the case of the bi-racial Manzano), to another (white) (189-190). Nwakwo claims that Manzano felt exceptional—he was raised "like a white child" (195); everyone was prohibited from flogging him; he was a fast learner; and his own mother was a favorite among her masters. This feeling diminished the bonds he felt towards Blacks, who are traditionally lumped by whites as an undifferentiated mass. Ultimately Manzano, like all the writers studied in this book, configured his identity to counter the brutal denial of his humanity.

There is much for Afro-Latin/ Americanists to use in *Black Cosmopolitanism.* By combining a wealth of information (supported by copious bibliographic notes) on four nineteenth-century writers of pivotal importance to the tradition, Nwankwo explores the deep-seated tensions inherent in the construction of Black intellectuals and their political genealogy. The tensions she identifies are basic and still relevant to contemporary notions of self and community among people of African descent in the Americas. As Nwankwo says in the conclusion, the personal investment that underlies her treatment of the subject motivates her to think of the future when promising coalitions among people of the Black Diaspora will be made possible by a deeper, better nuanced understanding of the forces individuals in different places had to contend with.

California State University, Bakersfield

CREATIVE WRITING

Introduction by Antonio Tillis

During my tenure as a visiting international scholar in the Faculdade de Letras at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, I had the pleasure of meeting two gifted writers: Odete Costa Semedo, Guinea-Bissau; and, Jussara Santos, Brazil. The work of both is being featured in critical collections on Black writings in Portuguese language. As noted in the selections below, their creative production sings the post-colonial circumstance regarding place, displacement, identity and resistance. Using bold and powerful metaphors such as artificial flowers and metamorphosis, the poetic and narrative voices speak of the plight of the African and Brazilian subject in a context that spans from colonialism and emancipation to modernism and neo-colonialism in Guinea-Bissau and in Brazil.

Maria Odete da Costa Soares Semedo is professor at the Escola Normal Superior "Tchico Té" and adjunct professor at the Universidade Colinas de Boé in Bissau. She received her doctoral degree in Letters from Pontíficia Universidade Católica of Minas Gerais. She is former Minister of National Education and President of the UNESCO National Commission in Bissau. Senior researcher at the National Institute for Study and Research (INEP-Bissau), she was recently the country's Minister of Health. She has numerous published works in varied literary journals, anthologies, and magazines. Her publications include, *Entre o Ser e o Amar* (poetry, Bissau: INEP, 1996), *SONÉÁ histórias e passadas que ouvi contar I* (stories, Bissau: INEP, 2000), *DJÊNIA histórias e passadas que ouvi contar II* (stories, Bissau: INEP, 2000), *No Fondo do Cantar* (poetry, Viana do Castelo: Edição da Câmera Municipal de Viana do Castelo-Portugal, 2003). Her work can be found by visiting: nandyala@nandyala.com.br or www.nandyalalivros.com.br.

The following poems are from *No Fondo do Cantar* (2003).

A LEMBRANÇA

O vaticínio sempre apontara
embrulhos não faltariam
e em cada um
nada seria surpresa
apenas recordação
do predito
e depois porfiado

Aberto o primeiro embrulho
será o encontro com o desalento:
onde está Estin?
sucumbiu durante a Guerra!
Onde estão os filhos da nossa moransa?
pereceram, atingidos por estilhaços
Choro em todas as moransas

Mar de gente... floresta intensa
povo prostrado
difícil a travessia de lálas
bolanhas e rios
bombas e obuses traspassando
a carne humana impotente

Bens desaparecidos
gente em pânico
famílias inteiras perecem
a construção
perdida entre bombas

O ESPANTO DE BISSAU

Bissau não quis acreditar
que estava sendo violada
violentada
adulterada

Sentiu os golpes

não verteu lágrima
Vergou
com a dor dos seus filhos
mas não se quebrou
Ajoelhou-se
mas não caiu

Sentiu no seu corpo
a violência
do corpo estranho
do mau trato...
e num grito
disse:
Porque tudo isso
oh Guiné?
Porque tudo isso
minha gente,
porquê?
Calou-se
Olhou os seus filhos

METAMORFOSE

Nascerão corpos novos
ajustados à medida
frutos da metamorfose
Não serão nem carne nem peixe
invertebrados
padecerão de artrose
Não serão nem galho nem feixe
nem da fauna nem da flora
Assim mesmo
abrirão o terceiro embrulho
e aparecerão
Matutino
virando vespertino
mais Viviano
e Presentino
cada um a sua história

Jussara Santos was born in Minas Gerais, Brazil, and is a professor of Portuguese language and Brazilian literature for the Belo Horizonte Municipal Schools. She received her doctorate in literature and Portuguese language from Pontíficia Universidade Católica of Minas Gerais. She writes short fiction and poetry and her work has appeared in numerous Brazilian newspapers, literary journals and cultural magazines. She is a published scholar on Afro-Brazilian literarure. Her creative works include: *Com afago e margaridas* (Contos, 2006), *Minas em mim* (Poesia, 2005) and *De flores artificiais* (Contos, 2002). To inquire about her work, you may contact Jussara Santon directly at: jus.santos@ig.com.br.

The following short story is from *De flores artificiais* (2002).

De flores artificiais

Madrugada. Ouço o latido cão.

Desço a rua da Bahia e vomito. Sou toda vômitos.

Há coisas que vemos, ouvimos, pressentimos que chegam a nos revolucionar o estômago; repugnância tanta que o nó que se dá nas tripas não é cego, ou melhor, enxerga muito bem.

À tarde, quamdo, às vezes, observo as tais montanhas, penso no que elas esconderiam do outro lado, o lado que não vejo, não alcanço.

Ouço novamente o latido.

Observo meu vômito de repente concluo que expelir ou expulsar e forma violenta algo que aparentemente engolimos pode ter sua dose de poesia (por que não?) um quê artístico, estético.

"Os montes vulcânicos vomitam fogo. O mar vomita à praia escombros do naufrágio." Patético, ops...poético.

A partir dessa perspectiva estética, os montes

vulcânicos vomitam a fala-a pau-sa-da-a do autodidata.

Meu vizinho contou-me, certa vez, que sonhou com seu

próprio velório e que ele fora grande. Realizado num

famoso espaço cultural onde todos o reverenciavam. "É

grande ser grande!" Desde então, devora livros, busca

dominar mais e mais teorias, treina em-pos-ta-ção de voz,

analisa relacionamentos, cronometras, calcula, seleciona.

Elege aqueles, somente aqueles que lhe poderão render

ganhos num futuro próximo. Não é natural nunca,

representa sempre; tudo por um velório em algum nobre

salão da cidade.

Balanço minha cabeça. O som do cão não me larga.

Nas linhas que se formam nos desenhos de meu

vômito, vejo um homen magro, negro, solitário, assentado

num banco de praça... Frio.

Embaixo de uma árvore, uma mulher negra, lenço

branco na cabeça e vestido cinza, sorve solitária um sorvete.

À professora fazem a seginte pergunta: *"em qual casa*

de família você trabalha?"

Blitz: é preciso mostrar documentos

-Mas falamos muito bem o português: dizemos

-O português de Portugal: insisto.

Blitz: é preciso comprovar que existimos, que não somos nehuma aberração de humanidade.

Novo latido de cão.

O centro me expulsa, me expele, me lança na periferia,

o centro da periferia me expulsa ainda mais para sua periferia.

Balanço a cabeça, não ouço o cão.

Com fome, ele sorve meu vômito, desfazendo minha produção artística.

Descendo a rua, ouço agora os latidos que são meus.

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Throwing Off the Weight--Rap Lyrics and Black Liberation
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Liberationist Ideology as Critical Pedagogy
21st Century Liberations and African Diaspora Texts
Themes of Liberation in Francophone Literature, Linguistics and Culture
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Mass Movements and Liberation Themes in the African Diasporas
Black Liberationist Ideology and the African Diaspora Text
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Transnational Liberation and the Black (Con) Text
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Codified Liberation: Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality in Afro-Latino Literature
Themes and Strategies for Using Technology and Science Fiction as Critical Media
Pedagogical Approaches to Reading Themes and Strategies in Afro-Hispanic Literature

Submission deadline: October 1, 2008

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