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Maps, Mythologies and Identities: Zombies and Contra-Anglo Spirituality in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Angie Cruz's *Soledad*

by Elizabeth West

I. Race and Identity in the Atlantic World

The black-white binary that has for so long marked the boundaries of race and identity in the United States has never been as firmly proclaimed or rigidly imagined in the rest of the Americas. In the United States where, early on, laws dictating that the child follows the condition of the mother and the one-drop rule shaped a discourse of race that validated white rulership and black subservience. No matter that people of African and European descent had already intermarried before the installment of these laws, in the U.S. there remained a persistent discourse of racial identity that allowed white America to disregard the reality of racial border crossings that compromised the neatness of the constructed black-white binary. Therefore, despite the knowledge that by the middle of the nineteenth-century a significant sector of the black population was either mixed or descendants of mixed unions, the construct prevailed. While slavery was deeply rooted in the nations that emerged throughout the Americas, the black-white binary was manipulated in more complex ways than in the U.S. In his study of race and identity in Latin America, historian, Peter Wade, sheds light on this variance. He explains that in the U.S.,

the category 'black' supposedly includes anyone with a known 'drop of black blood'... In Latin America, to over-simplify a complex situation, there is a continuum of racial categories and often only people who look quite African in appearance will be identified as black; people of evidently more mixed ancestry frequently will be classed by a variety of terms denoting a position between black and white. (14)

As Wade further explains, these differing concepts of race and identity can have dramatic consequences for border crossers of the Americas who arrive on U.S. soil: "Thus, for example, a Puerto Rican, used to not being classed as black in Puerto Rico, when she moves to the mainland US, may find herself suddenly identified as a black person" (14).

Myriam Chancy explores how the more complex divisions of racial identity in Latin America have played out in a discourse with the west to cater to the black-white binary that has historically anchored U.S. racial division. She explains specifically how this discourse has been shaped to construct a myth of racial difference between the nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic:

... a wide range of contemporary articles on race in Latin American studies exhibit a high degree of anxiety regarding black racial antecedents specifically ... this anxiety is a reflection of long-standing practices in Latin American societies to deny the presence of African heritage and to deny blackness as a defining trope of any given Latin American nation ... Interestingly, racial anxiety in the present day is often and consistently buttressed by anti-Haitian sentiment that appears to be held throughout the region, most markedly (of course) in its neighbor, the Dominican Republic. (*From Sugar to Revolution* 17)

The irony in what Chancy outlines is of course the shared geography and the long shared history and ancestry of Haitians and Dominicans. Shedding further light on the African legacy in the Dominican republic, Silvio Torres-Saillant asserts that "a demographic assessment taking account of racial distinctions would show blacks and mulattos as making up as much as 90 percent of the country's nearly 8 million inhabitants" (110). Torres-Saillant reminds us also that the two island nations share a

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history that dates back to runaway slaves from Haiti who in 1678 “founded San Lorenzo de los Minas, a neighborhood that still strives today in the midst of the Dominican capital” (113). Other distinct moments in their shared histories includes a twenty-two span of unification under Haiti’s rule and the ongoing importation of Haitian labors (Torres-Saillant 115-116). The centuries old division between the two nations, despite their interwoven histories dates back to the aftermath of Haiti’s successful revolution and the “elite Dominicans in power [who] wished to preserve the Spanish colonial heritage” and felt threatened by the possible domination of black Haiti (J. Heredia 88). The result has been a longstanding “process of antihaitianismo (anti-Haitianism) [in which] all Dominicans learned to deny any aspect of their black heritage, including mulattos and blacks” (88).

II. African Culture/Spirituality in the Atlantic World

As with the matter of racial identity, spiritual practices and sensibilities connected to Africa have been historically ridiculed and exoticized by westerners. Conversion to Anglo Christianity has been the presumed marker of the African’s spiritual redemption and passageway to civilization. Throughout the Americas, the Middle Passage set the stage for transformations in African religiosity as blacks were, to varying degrees, driven underground with their traditional practices and/or to refashion their religions to survive under the umbrella of Anglo Christianity. In general, western scholarship has maintained that new world Africans lost all meaningful connection to or preservation of their past and culture; however, increasingly scholars are challenging this assertion. Across disciplines, scholars of the African diaspora now acknowledge that throughout the Americas blacks fashioned societies rooted in an African ethos. This was no less the case for their religion in the new world. That new world blacks have in great numbers come to identify their religion as Christianity, does not mean they have abandoned the continental origins of their religiosity. As scholar Jim Perkinson explains, contemporary trends suggest that in fact blacks of the African diaspora increasingly look to Africa for spiritual guidance and grounding: “Despite the touted triumph of book religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.) over oral carryovers (traditional religious practices of various ilk) from a ruder age and in spite of the withering auspices of scientific advance, West Africa and Afro-diasporic religious practices are expanding and proliferating rather than receding” (575). Perkinson explains that outward genuflections or shows of reverence to Christianity on the part of blacks do not consequently confirm an absence or abandoning of African spiritual principles and practices. The surface impression does not necessarily represent the core or the foundation of African diaspora spirituality. Perkinson submits that on the contrary, “it is apparently possible for a human being to preach Jesus while dancing Xango,” and further that perhaps “inside the body baptized in the Spirit we find spirits, that the Holy Ghost of the twentieth-century Pentecostal movement is itself ghosted by Ogou and Gede” (590).

III. Zombies and Blackness in Anglo and African Ethos

What western scholars have labeled with terms such as “magic,” “magical realism,” “black magic,” and “superstition,” speaks to the colonial ethos that continues to inform western intellectual and social discourse. Population groups whose survival and life skills involve beliefs and practices that reside beyond the material fabric of western religiosity are stamped with these labels, with the intimation that this is yet another sign of their still “developing” state. In general, then, western intellectual discourse continues to marginalize or diminish the religious depth and worthiness of African derived spirituality. More damaging perhaps is the inclination of westerners to exoticize, humorize and sensationalize African rooted spirituality. In the Americas this

has played out repeatedly in popular staging of conjure and voodoo/hoodoo. In the United States, audiences in the north and south warmly received turn-of-the-century texts on black folk culture of the south. Publications by Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page are among those still well known and discussed to date. These works generally portrayed simple-minded blacks, living in a world of superstitious and illogical beliefs, having no real religious foundation. In its more sensationalized form, this denigration of black spirituality was staged in frightening images of blacks dealing in “black magic,” practices that involved collaboration with evil forces—in contrast to western Christianity’s “all-good” divinity. With the U.S. occupation of Haiti in the early decades of the twentieth century (1912-1934), there resulted a heightened vilification of African spiritual practices. Representations of Haitians and their culture as savage and threatening predate twentieth century U.S. occupation: these stereotypes date back to nineteenth-century commentaries on the black-ruled country that aligned it with the tainted “‘dark’ continent [i.e. Africa].” Like Africa, Haiti was then “condemn[ed] to unfair and often unsubstantiated stereotypes and criticisms. These ranged from charges of Haitians’ inferiority and inability to rule themselves to allegations of child sacrifice and cannibalism” (Rhodes 70). This sentiment was not limited to forces outside Haiti, however, for “dating back to the aftermath of the Haitian revolution, the new elites—particularly those descendants of white planters “cloaked their fear of the masses in a loathing for black spirituality” (Wilcken 198). U.S. influence would help to fuel this legacy of loathing. In U.S. discourse Haitian Voodoo became the symbol of an African and savage past out of which Haiti had to be led: during this early U.S. occupation “any marine or journalist with a flair for writing could produce a potboiler about ‘voodoo,’ with special attention to the zombie, the soulless body of Haitian legend” (199). The critique of voodoo then grew to be a commentary on the nation and the people, and this extended as well to a general critique of Africa—as the mother of black Haiti. The refrain from the west was that Voodoo was evil, and that western powers/whites had to exert their superior powers to subdue this evil.

In literature and film one of the most pervasive symbols of voodoo’s evil was the zombie: “The plot of *The White Zombie* [1932 film directed by Victor Halpen] bears a message that has been repeated in the dozens of voodoo-zombie films succeeding it: Haiti needs North Americans to solve its problems caused by its own ignorance and superstition” (Wilcken 199). From the earliest, U.S. literary and cinematic accounts of Haitian voodoo and zombiism had an eerie resonance to the denigrating and sensationalized tales propagated about blacks in the U.S.ⁱ An independent Haiti and a free population of U.S. blacks seemed to have inspired similar reactions. In both cases, whites responded by representing black freedom and independence as a threat to white civilization, and this was exemplified most dramatically in the presumed threat black men posed to white purity. As was the case for blacks at the turn-of-the century in the U.S., Haitians would be subjected to pernicious characterizations that rested in sexualized stereotypes—particularly the myth of black male hyper sexuality and desire for white women. Whereas native Haitian zombie tales were of the living dead whose horrific state may have been the result of their own evil or an external evil source, in U.S. tales the narrative carried a distinctly racist tone. In U.S. tales of Haitian zombiism a “master narrative” was established: standard in the tales was a white or near-white female victim, of wealth and high social standing cast against a sinister and lustful black sorcererⁱⁱ” (Paravisini-Gebert 42). For Haitians, however, zombies are more often shunned than feared: their lifeless state represents a loss of the inner self—the soul—and a disconnect from the community and its spirit (Paravisini-Gebert 38). A people rooted in the belief of community over individualism, Haitians thus find the alienation of the zombie a fate to be avoided.

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While the zombie prototype that originated in western cinema and fiction continues as the blueprint for depictions of Haiti and Haitian/African spirituality, the Haitian trope of the zombie as soulless and disconnected provides a critical lens for reading texts by Haitian and diasporic black narratives. In zombie tales of black lore the lifelessness of the zombie creature corresponds to the malady that spring out of slavery: "The concept of the zombie best illustrates the West's disjunction of flesh and spirit, especially as the concept of the zombie grew out of the Haitian-evolved Petro rites as a metaphor for the slave, a person whose soul/psyche has been stolen," thus marking her as "the living dead" (Jennings 165). The trope is particularly useful in readings of black women's texts, which are often rooted in tensions between western and African worldviews. Again, across the Americas, zombiism has been propagated through interpretations both internal and external to black folk culture. Reading black authored works as informed by black originating tropes of zombiism, we find narratives of resistance that challenge Anglocentric assertions that maintain a western worldview as the path to black progress and humanization. This narrative subversion in diasporic black women's writings reveals again the shared cultural and ideological past of new world blacks—even in the case of Hispaniola, the two nation island where Haitians and Dominicans have been lead to proclaim distinct and separate identities, despite their shared island location and overlapping histories. This paradox of separate but same is revealed most poignantly through the critical juxtaposition of fictional works by Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat and Dominican writer, Angie Cruz. In particular, applying the zombie trope as the critical lens to read Danticat's *Breath Eyes Memory* and Cruz's *Soledad*, the case is clearly made for the shared African roots of Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

IV. Africanity/Blackness and the Zombie Protagonist in *Soledad* and *Breath Eyes Memory*

The walking dead are often the product of trauma or violence, and this is portrayed in both Danticat's and Cruz's novels. In the case of Danticat's *Breath Eyes Memory*, Martine gives birth to a daughter after she has been raped as a young girl. The violence and the shame of the trauma leaves her permanently scarred, and thousands of miles of distance from the site of the injury cannot free her from the imprisonment of her soul. Similarly, Cruz's heroine, Olivia, becomes pregnant under shameful circumstances. Although she is not raped, she succumbs to the world of prostitution after leaving her home in search of economic opportunity in the Dominican city of Puerto Plata. Unable to find legitimate work, she is coerced into prostitution. Pregnant, but uncertain of the father's identity, she persuades Manolo, who unknown to Olivia, has bought her time on the promise that she was a virgin, that he is the father. After the birth of the mixed race child that is clearly not his, the marriage becomes a violent affair. Eventually Olivia retreats into a psychological state that echoes images of the walking dead zombies of voodoo myths. She is alive, but she is not awake: she has lost her essence—that is, her soul.

In chapter two of her full length study on Caribbean women's writings, Brinda Mehta's focus is Danticat's novel, *The Dew Breaker*; nonetheless, her assertion of Danticat's use of the body in her fiction offers a useful point of entry into reading both Danticat's *Breath Eyes Memory* and Cruz's *Soledad*. According to Mehta,

... the body represents a certain textual historicity in its capacity to reveal multiple oppressions, violations, and triumphs within the parameters of Haitian history. Danticat pays particular attention to the body of the survivor as a physical marker of racial, sexual, and economic difference as it negotiates subalternity within oppressive power structures. ... the body is directly involved in a political field." (70)

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Martine and Olivia cannot escape the past. Their inability to free themselves from the scars of violence and trauma echo a similar inability of blacks to free themselves of historical traumas and violent encounters. Just as many ex-slaves and their victimized descendants of violent regimes were unable to reclaim their life force/essence post trauma, Martine and Olivia are trapped, and their living bodies magnify their lifeless souls. Martine is not able to emerge out of her zombie state, but for her daughter, Sophie, the struggle against a similar fate depends on "the folktales the older generations tell to the younger ones" (Chancy *Framing Silence* 121). Housed in these tales is the wisdom and the road to healing, but "the language of the ancestors, which grows increasingly difficult to access" is not always discernible to the younger—and especially physically distanced—generations (121). Just as Martine's daughter must leave New York and return to her Caribbean homeland, so must Cruz's heroine, Soledad.

IVa. Protagonists as Zombies in *Breath Eyes Memory*

In Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, we find a mother-daughter relationship rooted in trauma that manifests itself in the victim's zombie-like state. At the heart of the text is the rape Martine suffers when she is only sixteen, a rape that is coupled by the likelihood that the rapist was a Macoute and that his threat to kill her should she dare to look up confirmed that the crime would go unpunished (139). The horror of the rape leaves Martine "in a perpetual state of aphasia while her body takes over" (Roselle 123). The trauma that defines Martine's victimization does not originate singularly in male orchestrated violence, however. The practice called testing, a name that veils the act of rape by the hand of the mother is a form of sexual violence that precedes that of Martine's rapist. Whether by the hand of the mother or the Tonton Macoutes who regularly seize and rape young girls like Martine, the rape act is seated in male hegemonic social order that places the value and fortunes of women in male sexual desire. The loss of virginity out of marriage, especially for impoverished women, means no chance for marriage and an even more diminished chance of economic survival—a state that effectively leaves women alive but without real life: in effect, zombies. Mothers "test" their young daughters to make certain that they have maintained the central value that they hold—their virginity. As she initiates this ritual with Sophie, Martine explains its origins: "When I was a girl, my mother used to test us to see if we were virgins. . . The way my mother was raised, a mother is supposed to do that to her daughter until the daughter is married. It is her responsibility to keep her pure" (60-61). In this paradoxical attempt to protect the daughter from disgrace and ill fortunes, the testing mother physically invades the daughter's body and reaffirms male authority over women's bodies. In a discussion with Sophie Martine highlights the eerie similarity of these two acts: "I did it . . . because my mother had done it to me. . . . I realize standing here that the two greatest pains of my life are very much related. The one good thing about my being raped was that it made the testing stop. The testing and the rape. I live both every day" (170).

Through the Caco women of Danticat's novel, we see three generations of mothers and daughters whose bonds are complicated by the mother's horrific invasion of the daughter's body. The paradox is more complicated for Martine and Sophie: as a young girl, Martine is tested by her mother, but this safeguard does not protect her from the unidentified rapist, whose violent act has left Martine to the fate her mother's testing was designed to prevent. The product of that rape, Sophie, becomes the recurring image and reenactment of the event; thus, Martine is never able to free herself from the memory. Even in his absence then, the rapist, like the zombie sorcerer, wields power over Martine. With this single, violent act the rapist establishes ongoing control of Martine, who in the aftermath of the rape, lives in the shadows of society, socially and

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spiritually disconnected from the world around her. Recognizing that she is only a step ahead of insanity, Martine goes through the mechanics of living—working, paying bills, engaging in the commercialism that confirms one's place in what is deemed normal society. By night, however, Martine is revisited by the rapist—the sorcerer, whose presence she cannot escape.

While the rapist is the direct agent of Martine's trauma, the novel interlaces the political, revealing the connection between the personal fortunes of these women and the larger politics of their nation. On the exterior, the politics play out through the machinations of black led government regimes that rule the people through their terrorist tactics. It is the Duvalier reign of terror that serves as the backdrop of the narrative. We see this, for example, when Sophie departs for the U.S. to live with her mother. Though Sophie longs to remain in Haiti, Tante Atie reminds her that the violent scene they witness between the police and students exemplifies the life she is escaping by going to America (34). This is further impressed upon Sophie by the sight of the young boy in tears boarding the plane, having to flee Haiti after his corrupt father has been executed (37 -38). When Sophie returns years later to Haiti, the vestiges of the Duvalier's reign are still present: as Louise reports the death of the old man Dessalines, she explains despairingly that he was killed by the Macoutes. Remembering the violence against Martine years earlier Sophie's grandmother reminds Louise why she is not moved by Louise's fear that they could be the next victims: "We already had our turn" (138). Violence and the threat of violence are part of the landscape, and the political regime fuels and empowers this ongoing terror against the population.

The power of the Macoute who rapes Martine results not just from the immediate regime in power, but from a long political history that is tied to U.S. occupation of Haiti and its ongoing relations with the nation. The rapist is then the sorcerer that we see—at least partially, but the U.S. is the sorcerer that while invisible, has a heavy influence in the lives of Haitians as well. Thousands of miles from home, Martine does not escape the rapist/sorcerer nor does she escape the sorcery of U.S. influence. The terror of the political regimes does not rest simply in the hands of those in power in Haiti. Haiti's culture and politics are very much shaped by western influences. In the New York Haitian restaurant where Martine and Marc take Sophie upon her arrival, the Haitian immigrants discuss their homeland and the U.S. influence is evident: one man proclaims, "Never the Americans in Haiti again . . . They treated our people like animals . . . and they made us work like slaves" (54). The Americans may be useful for helping to build roads and infrastructure as one man asserts; however, these immigrants denigrating remarks about boat people and those Haitians that remain in the country suggest a deep self hatred informed by American propaganda on Haiti and its inhabitants (54). Martine's own body alteration is a reminder of the deep-seated, denigrating influence of western racism upon Haiti. In America, Martine bleaches her skin, making her more acceptable to the lighter skinned Marc and diminishing the contrast of her dark skin in the lighter world of New York. She explains to Sophie that she must quickly learn English to avoid the insults that are strewn at Haitians if their accent is detected: "Many of the American kids even accused Haitians of having AIDS because they heard on television that only the 'Four Hs' got AIDS—Heroin addicts, Hemophiliacs, Homosexuals, and Haitians" (51). Haiti resides in the American imagination then as the equivalent of those most despised and outcast.

Martine departs Haiti after the rape, hoping to emerge from the brink of insanity and desolation. The move to New York offers her financial opportunity but not a pathway to spiritual renewal. She goes through the mechanics of daily living—working, consuming, eating, etc. However, upon her reunion with Martine Sophie observes immediately a physical affect that can be likened to the living dead. Sophie notices that in person her mother does not look like the picture that stood on Atie's

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night table in their home in Haiti. The real life image lacked vivacity: in the flesh “her face was long and hollow. Her hair had a blunt cut and she had long spindly legs. She had dark circles under her eyes and, as she smiled, lines of wrinkles tightened her expression” (42). Sophie associates her mother’s harried expression to that of Haitian cane field workers, but the similarity to the zombie figure stands out. Although Martine’s portrait on Atie’s nightstand projected a more vivacious image, the affect of the zombie was suggested even in this image. Although Sophie recalls her mother bearing a smile in the portrait, her mother’s image was threatening rather than comforting: “She witnessed everything . . . She saw us when we got up, when we went to sleep, when we laughed, when we got upset at each other. Her expression never changed. Her grin never went away” (8). She feared that her mother would “try to squeeze [her] into the small frame” with her (8). Sophie’s fear is reminiscent of the Haitian fear of zombies originating not out of a physical fear of the zombie, but rather that those in contact with the zombie might be zombified themselves (Paravisini-Gebert 38). Sophie’s description of the portrait paints Martine as “incapable of words, incapable of evolving, but capable of instilling in the onlooker, the fear of being contaminated by her traumatic consciousness. The child might be, if the mother catches her, turned into a picture too” (Rosello 125). While Mireille Rosello equates Martine’s state to that of vampire, the prevailing stasis that Sophie associates with Martine’s image is arguably reflective of zombification.

During her return to Haiti after many years away, Martine answers her mother’s inquiry about her noticeably lighter skin not by confessing that she uses lightening crèmes, but rather telling her that “It is very cold in America . . . The cold turns us into ghosts” (160). Clearly, it is not just America that causes Martine’s ghostliness. This is revealed in her confessions to the then teen-aged Sophie regarding her fear of returning to Haiti: “There are ghosts there that I can’t face” she tells her. Years later, after they return from Dame Marie and begin to reconcile, Martine explains again that home brings her too close to the realm of the dead: “Whenever I’m there, I feel like I sleep with ghosts” (189). In Haiti and in New York, Martine is threatened by ghosts and the fear of being drawn into their realm—the realm of the dead. Her sleeplessness is the result of her attempt to resist the sleep that might render her powerless to their lure.

As a young girl, Sophie saved her mother often from her nightmares: Martine reminds Sophie of this as they begin to restore their relationship in Haiti: “I want to be your friend, your very very good friend, because you saved my life many times when you woke me up from those nightmares” (170). What Sophie knows instinctively is that she must seek a remedy for her mother because her mother’s pain is in fact hers:

After Joseph and I got married, all through the first year I had suicidal thoughts. Some nights I woke up in a cold sweat wondering if my mother’s anxiety was somehow hereditary . . . Her nightmares had become my own, so much so that I would wake up some mornings wondering if we both hadn’t spent the night dreaming about the same thing: a man with no face, pounding a life into a helpless young girl. (193)

Sophie too is victim: she suffers the scars of her mother’s rape, and she suffers the scars of her mother’s testing. In contrast to Martine, however, Sophie knows that the cure is to be found not in the flight from but rather in the return to home—both spiritually and physically. Martine accepts western medical treatment for her cancer, but she has no faith in their power to treat the ghosts that haunt her. And since as she tells Sophie, “you can’t report a ghost to the police,” she remains terror stricken and helpless (199). In contrast, Sophie has sought counseling, but not through conventional western practices: her therapist is “a black woman who was an initiated Santeria priestess,” who held their sessions not in a sterile office building but “in the woods by the river” (206).

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It is the therapist who clarifies for Sophie that her mother's cure and her own would be found in their return to Haiti to face the rapist ghost (211). She explained that this confrontation would free them of the rapist's hold.

Martine dies in her New York home from self-inflicted wounds; thus, confrontation and resolution at the cite of the trauma cannot happen for her. Sophie returns her mother's body to their Haitian homeland for burial, however, and with this return Sophie frees her mother's spirit and confronts the evil in the cane field that her mother could not. Before she departs New York with her mother's body, Sophie knows that this will be Martine's journey to freedom. She dresses Martine in her favorite color, red, a color that in western culture signals promiscuity and immorality in a woman: "it was too loud a color for a burial" (227). But for Martine and a legacy of Haitian women, red signaled Erzulie, the goddess of love: the equal to the Christian Virgin Mother (113, 227). When Marc suggests that Martine may have some trouble entering heaven in red, Sophie explains that Martine will be going to her ancestral home—to Guinea, or wherever else she might choose. With this journey, her mother will finally be free (228). Following the advice of her Santeria therapist, Sophie returns to the site of her mother's trauma. She rushes from the burial site where her mother's body is being covered in the grave, to the cane field. "Attacking the cane" Sophie suggests what would have been the actions of the young Martine in the cane field had she been able to defend herself (233). Sophie confronts and defeats the rapist and his hold. She recalls this moment of triumph, "I took off my shoes and began to beat a cane stalk. I pounded it until it began to lean over. I pushed over the cane stalk. It snapped back, striking my shoulder. I pulled at it, yanking it from the ground" (233). Sophie's triumph is then confirmed with the call-and-response like exchange that ends this scene:

From where she was standing, my grandmother shouted like the women from the market place, "*Ou libéré?*" Are you free?
Tante Atie echoed her cry, her voice quivering with her sobs.
"*Ou libéré!*" (233)

IV.b. Africanity/Blackness and the Zombie Protagonist in *Soledad*

Angie Cruz's *Soledad* has been publicly celebrated for its powerful representation of the complex cultural world of Dominican immigrants in the United States, specifically, New York City. While *Soledad* speaks to a specific immigrant identity and experience, the novel also represents Cruz's exploration into "the African element of her Dominican heritage (J. Heredia 85). The novel sheds light on the pervasive resonance of a spiritual ethos found throughout non-Anglo population groups of the Ameri-Atlantic world and pointing to Africana origins. Cruz's *Soledad*, not unlike works by black women writers of the U.S. such as Toni Morrison (*Beloved*), Gloria Naylor (*Mama Day*), and Paule Marshall (*Praisesong for the Widow*), tells the story of a woman and a community's search for healing and belonging and her eventual arrival through pathways that point away from the structures and strictures of Anglo Christian and western, "rational" sensibilities. It is a journey that requires remembrances that are passageways to revisiting and restoring the past to make the present livable. This revisit and restoration is only possible through the "magic" and "myths" found outside Anglo culture. The Dominican family in Cruz's *Soledad* finds its way in the alienating Anglo-determined world of NYC only by reinstating the spiritual ethos of their homeland. The adroitness with which Cruz weaves the subversive nature of her text is most glaringly evident in her unconventional play on the passing trope. Whereas writers have historically employed this trope to signal the silencing of black identity, Cruz's fictional family is haunted by the mother's attempt to conceal her child's white parent. It is a stark play with irony, given the Dominican Republic's legacy of leadership that has been committed to whitening the country's narrative of identity. This

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denial has been so emphatic that the brownness evident in the larger population of Dominicans would still not deter the dismissal of the nation's link to Africanity. In Cruz's *Soledad*, however, whiteness is the genetic link that is denied: while Olivia wants Manolo to accept Soledad as his daughter, he knows from the earliest that she is not: "Since the day she was born, he watched her, waited to find a trace of himself in her and the paler she became, her nose, the shape of her eyes, her fine straight hair, neither Olivia's or his," he became more certain that he was not the biological father (Cruz 140).

Manolo's dark skin stands as constant reminder to Olivia that her façade cannot stand, and while she contributes his dark skin to "too many years in the sun" (19), the doubt concerning his paternity persists. The violence and distrust that comes to define Manolo and Olivia's marriage, results in Manolo's death at Olivia's hand, and Olivia's retreat into the world of the living dead. Again, while the zombie figure is popularized in the west through tales of walking dead who have been brought to this hideous state through the evil of folk magic and sorcery, Cruz's heroine falls into this state through trauma. Olivia's zombiism is induced not by an evil, black sorcerer, but rather results from a crisis white/western in origin. As a young girl of fifteen, Olivia leaves home to avoid a forced marriage: she knows that given the economic and political hardships, "her parents were looking for ways to move to the States," and that marrying Olivia off to Pelao, who had moved to New York, could prove the family's ticket out of the Dominican Republic (47). While she escapes the threat of being delivered to the sexual hunger of Pelao, she finds a worse fate in Puerto Plata. In Puerto Plata, Olivia is forced to give her body for the purchased pleasure of male customers who find their way to her via an unlikely sorcerer—unlikely that is, through the conventions of the western zombie trope. The innocent, sexually pure maiden is not the helpless, white maiden of western zombie lore, but rather the young, innocent, black Olivia. Like so many other young, poor black girls in Puerto Plata, Olivia's victimization does not rest in the machinations of the evil black sorcerer of white-authored zombie myths. On the contrary, Olivia is tricked by the sorcery/deception of whiteness and western capitalism embodied in the "Swedish man, balding head, rosy cheeks, who . . . said he managed models around the world [and] . . . promised Olivia she would make enough money so she could buy a house" (47).

The staging of Olivia's trauma has been set: her marriage to Manolo with the lie that he is the father, begins their tumultuous relationship and years of violence that she would suffer at Manolo's hand. While Manolo's death at Olivia's hand is arguably the climatic trauma precipitating the onset of her zombie like state, Soledad's departure pushes Olivia into the extreme coma/zombie state where we find her at the novel's onset. No one is more aware of this than Soledad, who had witnessed the years of Manolo's violence and abuse and also his death: "On many nights when I still lived with my mother, she screamed for help, woke me up asking me for forgiveness. She was always apologizing between screams. And no matter how far I tried to push back the screeching sound of her voice, I hear it, and hate myself for letting her carry the burden of my father's death" (14). Soledad's grandmother also sees her departure as the event that triggered Olivia's transformation; she explains to Soledad that the loneliness at her departure "pushed her [Olivia] to live in her dreams (12). When Soledad returns she finds that her mother "looks like a walking dead person" (30).

The quest to deliver Olivia out of her living-dead state clearly drives the plot, but she is not the only family member in this kind of limbo. Her father who has suffered a stroke, also wavers between the world of the living and the dead. Through death, however, he finally escapes the zombie entrapment that resulted from western medicine. When Soledad calls 911 to attend the lifeless body of Don Fernando, Abuela reminds her that her grandfather slipped into his lifeless existence because they had invited "the

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devils" in to treat him and their after they "put those machines inside of him . . . to help him breathe and make his heart beat . . . He had no reason to work at living no more" (182). Don Fernando's lifeless state after his stroke portends the failure of western alternatives to facilitate healing for Soledad and Olivia.

Arguably, Soledad functions in a living-dead state that results from her mother's experience: Manolo's violence and rejection leave Soledad traumatized as well. Soledad's zombiism plays out in the form of self-denial and flight: ashamed of her Washington Heights upbringing, she manufactures a biography that locates her roots to the "Upper Upper Upper West Side" (2). She desires Europe and whiteness, hoping to escape her Dominican heritage. The art gallery symbolizes this attempted escape into whiteness: "At times the art gallery looks like a psychiatric ward. Everything is white, the walls, the ceilings" (56). Though she works in the gallery, she still remains outsider, hoping for the day when the elites will invite her to one of their exclusive gatherings (64). Before she is called back home to her mother's side in their Washington Heights apartment, she imagines herself "following James Baldwin's footsteps," escaping far away, to Europe, to Paris even, (3). Soledad has fled from the site of trauma, living a sterile and spiritless existence, and though she returns for the sake of her mother's recovery, the journey will lead to her recovery as well.

Manolo's death propels both Olivia and Soledad into spiritual recess, and both attempt escapes that are futile. Soledad retreats into a world of indifference in which she removes her father's death from her memory (134). Olivia seeks an immediate return to the Dominican Republic to "re-live her niñez," but her effort is thwarted when she is unable to buy her family's old land in Juan Dolio because the government had bought it and sold it to Germans. Gorda explains to Soledad that with that disappointment "Olivia cracked and her spirit spilled out from her" (155). In death Manolo's spiritual presence is the evil force that brings Olivia to her dramatic zombie state, and she struggles against him for herself and for Soledad: "My body fights to get out of bed. I need to see Soledad. I have to tell her I love her. Tell her about her father. Tell her that she has to get out of my apartment. She doesn't have much time before Manolo gets to her too" (154). When Soledad realizes that Manolo has captured her mother's spirit, she must abandon the world of western rationality, and return to home and ancestors as a way to recovery for her mother and herself as well.

Together, Soledad and her mother return to the Dominican Republic, to homeland, family, and ancestors to recover their spiritual essence so that they can begin to live again. That Olivia's cure will not be had through western medicine or religion is signaled early in the novel. While Olivia does not believe in the mystical healing and prevention practices of her sister, Gorda, she finds no healing in western alternatives. Olivia "believes in X rays, prescriptions, things that come out of a pharmacy," and does not believe that the ill ease she feels is due to an evil spiritual presence (13). Though she reveres western culture, Soledad senses early that the white world, particularly white religion, holds no remedy for her mother. This is expressly conveyed in the bedside scene where Soledad notices that her mother's rosary feels "cold and useless," and determining its uselessness she then puts it away in her pocket (20). In similar fashion, even in Olivia's zombie state she comes to understand not only the uselessness of western religion, but also its oppressiveness: thinking of her own mother's burdensome life, Olivia wants to tell her that it is "the golden Virgen Maria around her neck that keeps her from flying" (220).

After Soledad has herself seen Manolo's ghost and the other male ghosts from her mother's past, she realizes that these are powers to be reckoned with in ways that go beyond Anglo rationalism and science. She and Gorda agree that the unwelcomed spirits must be removed from their lives. They agree that a return to the Dominican Republic to a sacred place, for a sacred ritual will free Olivia and Soledad of the

haunting past that threatens their future. Taking the list of male customers that Olivia had compiled and stowed away for decades, and photographs of Olivia, Soledad and their Washington Heights family members, Soledad travels to the Dominican Republic with her mother to the waters of a secret cave to find freedom and rebirth.

After her awareness of the spirits haunting her mother, Soledad understands that nothing she has learned in the rational orientation of western thinking can serve her in the quest to be free of this presence. She is now ready to return home, to a mythical place where one can revisit the past and resurrect oneself: in this place Soledad and her mother can destroy the list that has empowered the evil spirits in their NY apartment. Gorda explains to Soledad how the ritual will work: "We can have Olivia retrace her steps, erase her past step by step. She will start again" (206). In Santa Domingo Soledad and Olivia travel to the secret cave with Tía Christina and their young guide who navigates the raft, warning them that the waters are both healing and dangerous. The young boy explains that the water is much deeper than it seems—bottomless—and that no one survives if they fall in. Christina explains the water's power to change evil to good, the promise that brings them to this paradox of danger and hope: "Even if the person is evil or ill, this water has been known to cleanse, rejuvenate, change a person's life for the better" (223). When Soledad falls into the water after attempting to find her photograph that does not reemerge after being placed in the water, all fear that she will be lost to the water. Remembering a time when Soledad was a little girl and they went to the bottom of the ocean, Olivia is not initially afraid. Instead of meeting the dreaded water monster, Soledad finds a peace and understanding at the bottom of the water that allows her to reemerge alive. It is when she "surrender[s] to the warmth of the water" that "the past, present and future become one," and Soledad is cleansed and reborn (226-227). The zombie curse is broken; the sorcerers no longer hold power over Olivia. Soledad's journey through the water is both hers and Olivia's: when she washes ashore, her mother receives her, restored herself to life and to speech. She can now tell Soledad the stories that will clarify the past and allow them to move into the future.

VI. Conclusion

In her essay on Lucía Charún-Illescas's novel of seventeenth-century Peru, *Malambo*, Aida Heredia argues that the story of Jacinto's manumission reminds us of slavery's lasting imprint on the psyche of the enslaved—even in freedom. As a free man, "Jacinto behaves as if he were chattel and subjected to his master's will. So permeating is this internalized form of oppression that his memories of the rituals of initiation into adulthood, which he underwent in his native Angola are replaced by his actual captivity in Lima as the only way of life possible for him" (86). The story of seventeenth-century Jacinto of Peru resonates with the Haitian notion of the zombie as slave figure, and likewise, the stories of Danticat and Cruz's protagonists. For Martine and Olivia, the freedom and hopefulness of their youth is replaced by the horror of the trauma they experience. Trauma strips them of their life spirit or essence, and they navigate the world as mere physical entities. They are then forced into the realm of the living dead. In both novels the break from the sorcerer's curse suggests a more salient triumph. As these heroines find their way out of spiritual death, their return to home and ancestors underscores a dynamic tension between western and African worldviews. In the history of western intellectualism the presumption has been that the presumed superior gaze of the west prevails. Jim Perkinson explains, however, that this perspective is one-sided: he contends that so-called "religions of the oppressed" . . . represent a form of signification upon the academy as salient as the academy's comprehension of these same religions in its own discourses of ethnography, history, philosophy, and theology" (569). In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *Soledad* the authors signal to the academy that the so-called oppressed possess and exercise the power to

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gaze the west and to reject the sorcery that it conceals under the veneer it calls civilization and rationality.

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ⁱ Most pervasive in its influence was Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spot* (1902) and the silent film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), that was based on Dixon's 1905 novel, *The Clansman* (1905). These works suggested that Reconstruction had failed and that as free and unsupervised, blacks—particularly black men—were a threat to the nation. Historians have argued that Dixon's novels and the film played a major part in the rise of the KuKluxKlan.

ⁱⁱ Called the bokor in traditional Haitian Vodou, this name for the master of the zombie was converted to sorcerer in U.S. and western discourse.

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Juana Esperanza de San Alberto: monja negra en el México colonial

by Valerie Benoist

Durante la década de 1640 la población negra de la Nueva España era la segunda más grande en todo el continente americano (Bennett 1). De los esclavos que llegaron durante ese periodo, 30% eran mujeres, entre las cuales muchas trabajaron como sirvientas domésticas tanto en casas particulares como en conventos, hospitales y colegios (Velásquez 64 y 130). Juana Esperanza de San Alberto fue una de estas mujeres: llegó como esclava a Veracruz a principios de los años 1600 cuando sólo tenía 6 años. Allí fue bautizada y comprada por doña María Fajardo, quien poco antes de morir la legó como parte de sus bienes al Convento de las Carmelitas Descalzas de San José en Puebla, México. Juana entró entonces a la comunidad de las Carmelitas como servidora y después de varios años fue confirmada y se le permitió quedarse en el convento de forma indefinida. Acabó viviendo allí durante 68 años, durante los cuales trabajó en la cocina y la enfermería y siguió todas las reglas de vida de las carmelitas descalzas. Al final de su vida, después de varios pedidos, primero por religiosos carmelitas visitantes y después por el señor decano, don Diego de Malpartida, Juana aceptó profesar, pero sólo justo antes de morir. En 1678 pensando estar en su última hora y cumpliendo su palabra, Esperanza hizo llamar al obispo Santa Cruz para tomar el hábito. Esperanza sobrevivió casi un año después de profesar, pero nunca volvió a levantarse de la cama, y murió en el convento en 1679. Fue enterrada con multitud de gente y de flores. Durante su funeral, los sacerdotes y la población de Puebla celebraron su vida con devoción (Gómez de la Parra 308-320).

Como es el caso con los esclavos negros en Latinoamérica durante la época colonial y también con muchas de las monjas de la misma época, lo que sabemos sobre la vida de Esperanza es poco, y toda la información ha sido filtrada o compuesta por otras personas. En el caso específico de Esperanza, la información proviene de la obra escrita por el doctor José Gómez de la Parra en el siglo XVII sobre el convento de las Carmelitas Descalzas donde vivió Esperanza. Gómez de la Parra era doctor en teología y sacerdote, y predicó en la Iglesia catedral de Puebla y sus conventos. Fue autor de muchas obras, entre ellas, *Fundación y primer siglo: crónica del primer convento de Carmelitas descalzas en Puebla* (1703). Para escribir su obra, Gómez de la Parra se sirvió esencialmente de los archivos del convento (Gómez de la Parra XV-XVI). Dentro de su historia del convento, Gómez de la Parra le dedica 14 páginas a Juana Esperanza, basado en gran parte en el cuaderno de la madre Juana de Jesús María, escrito en 1680, bajo la orden del señor Santa Cruz, para presentar las virtudes de Juana Esperanza (Gómez de la Parra 310).ⁱ

Hasta ahora el grupo minoritario y marginal de las mujeres africanas traídas a Nueva España como esclavas ha sido poco estudiado, esencialmente por la escasez de material sobre estas personas.ⁱⁱ Se encuentra aún menos información sobre las mujeres de procedencia africana en los conventos de Nueva España. Mi punto de partida para este trabajo fue doble: la breve pero iluminadora nota a pie de página en la obra de *Afro-Latino Voices* editada por Kathryn McKnight y Leo Garofalo en la que se identifica que la vida de Esperanza fue transcrita por el clérigo Gómez de la Parra y el resumen de su vida que se encuentra en *Brides of Christ* editado por Asunción Lavrín.ⁱⁱⁱ En este trabajo me propongo analizar con detenimiento esta obra que de acuerdo a mi conocimiento hasta ahora ha sido el enfoque central de un análisis textual más extenso por una sola persona, Joan Bristol. En mi estudio espero no sólo explorar con más profundidad este escrito tan rico sino también contribuir a la labor de críticos como Electa Arenal y Stacey Schlau sobre la presencia de las mujeres africanas en los

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conventos hispanoamericanos y combinarla con los estudios sobre los africanos en Nueva España iniciados por investigadores como Gonzalo Beltrán Aguirre y continuado más recientemente por otros como Herman Bennett y Carmen Fracchia. En su análisis de la biografía de Esperanza, Bristol argumenta que el lenguaje de excepcionalismo que se encuentra en la biografía le permitió a los cronistas de Esperanza proponer que ella no representaba el potencial espiritual típico de la mujer negra (72). En este artículo espero demostrar que si bien la biografía sobre Esperanza emplea un discurso de excepcionalismo al caracterizar a Esperanza, al mismo tiempo también contiene un discurso conflictivo al tratar la negritud de ésta. Más específicamente, la obra presenta una visión de la negritud de Esperanza en ciertas maneras excepcional al desconectar la corporalidad negra de esta mujer, percibida como negativa, de su interioridad presentada como ejemplar en su calidad moral. Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo su biografía no logra evitar conectar el cuerpo negro de Esperanza con una interioridad negativa al nivel intelectual y ultimadamente propone que la corporalidad negra de Esperanza fue percibida por ésta y por otros como un impedimento para profesar mientras estuviera viva.

En la sociedad colonial de los siglos XVI y XVII la imagen de los negros era generalmente negativa, pero a la vez algo conflictiva. En la mente de algunos intelectuales todavía existía el concepto medieval de “preste Juan” en el cual los soberanos negros que sirvieron de inspiración para los Reyes Magos poseían cualidades cristianas y eran evidencia de que África había recibido la palabra de Dios antes de olvidarla y volverse pagana (Fra Molinero 3). Sin embargo, la visión de África y de los africanos predominante era generalmente mucho más negativa y combinaba los conceptos del “pagano salvaje” y del “monstruo”. Los africanos eran percibidos como “paganos salvajes” porque venían de África, un lugar salvaje, y por lo tanto eran seres asociados con el diablo y simbolizaban el pecado. De hecho, muchos pensaban que su piel negra era un castigo de Dios y símbolo de su pecado (Gómez 146, Fra Molinero 3). La segunda visión de los negros como “monstruos” estaba enlazada con la visión de los negros como “salvajes paganos”, es decir que precisamente por su naturaleza de paganos salvajes, los negros eran considerados como seres inferiores e imperfectos (Fra Molinero 4). Tanto en la visión del “pagano salvaje” como del “monstruo” se creaba entonces una conexión entre la exterioridad de los negros, por el color negro de su piel castigo de Dios y su apariencia monstruosa, y su calidad interna. Es decir que se creía que la apariencia exterior de los negros era un reflejo de la calidad interna inmoral imperfecta de éstos.^{iv}

En la biografía sobre Esperanza, a primera vista la identidad externa negra de Esperanza no parece estar conectada con su identidad interna, ya que si bien la obra insiste en la corporalidad negra de ésta como algo negativo, a la vez la asocia con una identidad moral ejemplar. Por ejemplo, el texto presenta a Esperanza definiendo su identidad externa como “despreciable morena” (Gómez de la Parra 308) y “si por el color negro que le dio la naturaleza pudo ser despreciable” (Gómez de la Parra 309-10). Y sin embargo, combina estas descripciones con “sus santos ejemplos” (Gómez de la Parra 308) y “por la gracia de Dios, de que tenía hermosa su alma con el adorno de sus virtudes” (Gómez de la Parra 309-310). En estas citas, se reconoce el color de piel negra de Esperanza como algo percibido como negativo por la sociedad, pero justo después se yuxtapone esta caracterización negativa de su corporalidad con otra serie de descriptores esta vez internos para hacer hincapié en la calidad interna moral excepcional de Esperanza. Se rompe por lo tanto con la idea tradicional que establece una correspondencia entre la exterioridad y la interioridad de los negros, y si bien se continúa con la visión de la exterioridad como negativa, a la vez se construye esta exterioridad como un espejo opuesto de su interioridad. Dentro de esta nueva

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construcción se define el interior de Esperanza como el opuesto de su piel despreciable y además se le atribuye su interioridad de calidad moral ejemplar a la mano de Dios, una definición que se acerca más a la visión de “preste Juan” que a las de “salvaje pagano” y de “monstruo”. No sólo esto sino que la obra lleva aún más allá esta visión del “preste Juan” porque Esperanza ya no es parte de un grupo que recibió la palabra de Dios en el pasado y la ha olvidado sino que se le caracteriza como una escogida de Dios en el presente, una propuesta muy radical para el siglo XVII.

Para transformar a Esperanza en una negra escogida por Dios, la obra añade un segundo binario al de adentro/afuera: el binario de alma/cuerpo. Este segundo binario se introduce como intrínsecamente conectado con el primero a través de la correspondencia implícita de adentro y alma vs. afuera y cuerpo. En la biografía de Esperanza su cuerpo está representado como una fuerza negativa y está frecuentemente asociado con el color negro mientras que su interior está asociado con el concepto de alma y definido como ejemplar y asociado con lo divino. Para marcar mejor este binario, el texto emplea la metáfora del azabache:

Adornada, la hermana Juana Esperanza, en el alma con esta corona, por el color negro que le dio la naturaleza en el cuerpo, podremos decir que tuvo la espiritualidad diadema interior guarnecida, en lo exterior, con otra corona de finísimo azabache porque, conociendo su calidad, se juzgaba indigna de estar entre las religiosas, y así crecía y se aumentaba la perfección en el ejercicio de las virtudes, y principalmente en la humildad. De esta piedra preciosa (dice Calepino), que aunque por el color negro es despreciable y se tiene por rústica, en lo interior encierra y contiene algo de divinidad. (Gómez de la Parra 309)

La metáfora que se usa aquí es la piedra preciosa del azabache, la cual corresponde con la exterioridad de Esperanza ya que es de color negro. Sin embargo, a pesar de su consistencia muy frágil, al azabache se le atribuye un carácter protector contra el mal, es decir que la piedra esconde una interioridad muy diferente de sus características visibles.^v En el texto se compara a Esperanza con el azabache para resaltar la falta de conexión entre su exterioridad a primera vista negativa y su interioridad moral asociada con lo divino como el azabache. Para resaltar aún más esta dicotomía presente tanto en el azabache como en Esperanza entre el afuera y el adentro, al hablar de la piedra se emplean exactamente las mismas palabras “despreciable y rústica” y “divinidad” que ya se habían usado para describir a Esperanza.

Al final del capítulo sobre Esperanza se vuelve a encontrar la metáfora del azabache, esta vez combinada con la del ébano negro:

Fue también singular el favor de haber conducido el Señor esta insigne morena a este religioso convento, porque como real palacio de sus queridas esposas, no quiso que careciese de la principalísima alhaja con que se adornan las casas de las reinas, cual es un esparcido, dilatado y cristalino espejo, guarnecido con marco de exquisito y peregrino ébano negro de las Indias, como fue, lo es y lo será la hermana Juana Esperanza, para las religiosas presentes y venideras que leyeran su ejemplarísima vida, en la cual, como clarísimo espejo de virtud y de observancia, hallarán ejemplar para corregir las faltas y ejercitar virtudes... En la cual tienen cada una de las religiosas, una riquísima joya, que siendo en el interior formada de las preciosas piedras de las virtudes, engastadas en el encendido oro de la caridad, y en lo exterior guarnecida de azabache... (Gómez de la Parra 312)

✂ Como la metáfora del azabache, la del ébano negro sirve para insistir en la dualidad de Esperanza y resaltar la gran calidad de su interioridad.

El texto explica más claramente las calidades internas de densidad y resistencia del ébano en otro segmento, “Su madera es tan pesada que no se sobreagua

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como los demás, sino que se va a al fondo” (Gómez de la Parra 321) y asocia estas características con los atributos internos de Esperanza:

así, el racional ébano de Esperanza, si en lo corporal, por ser corpulenta, era tarda en moverse; en cayendo, parecía tronco de ébano pesadísimo en lo espiritual, con su humildad y abatimiento; jamás la pudieron elevar los aprecio y estimaciones, que hacían de ella las religiosas y otras personas de autoridad, sino que siempre estaba en el fondo de la cocina, sirviendo a las hermanas de velo blanco, y obedeciendo lo que mandaban las religiosas. (Gómez de la Parra 321)

Al mismo tiempo, en esta metáfora ocurre algo un poco diferente a la metáfora del azabache porque en lugar de sólo desconectar la exterioridad negativa de Esperanza de su interioridad muy positiva, se juega a través de la repetición de la palabra “fondo” con el elemento aparentemente negativo de la exterioridad y se le redefine para convertirlo en una calidad. En efecto, después de hablar de la pesadez del ébano, característica que vuelve precisamente al ébano una madera preciosa, la cita explica que por eso esa madera “se va al fondo”. Al final de la cita Gómez de la Parra establece el mismo paralelo con Esperanza al decir que a ésta “nunca la pudieron elevar los aprecio” y que “siempre estaba en el fondo de la cocina”. Es decir que la metáfora sirve para mostrar que la corporalidad pesada, como la del ébano, es precisamente una de las claves del valor de Esperanza porque refleja su capacidad de permanecer abnegada en su trabajo de la cocina, uno de los cargos más bajos en la jerarquía social del convento.^{vi}

Un elemento único en el uso de la metáfora del ébano negro es su conexión exclusiva con Nueva España ya que al concluir la biografía el texto pone énfasis en la particularidad del ébano negro a las Indias:

Siendo, pues todos los conventos de la Sagrada Reforma, frondosos y fecundos huertos, de todo género de plantas y árboles, cuantas son las virtudes que ejercitan en ellas las Carmelitas descalzas, habiendo traído la divina Majestad a Esperanza, desde la gentilidad a esta Nueva España, la condujo a este fértil jardín, plantado en la América, para que no le faltase el exquisito árbol indiano del ébano negro, a quien Calepino apellida árbol peregrino, y que tan solamente se da en las Indias. (Gómez de la Parra 321)

Aquí se ha añadido la comparación con el ébano negro para caracterizar a Esperanza como una monja singular a Nueva España, escogida y traída a América por la voluntad de Dios. Gracias a esta metáfora su viaje desde África hasta Nueva España es ahora presentado como un viaje desde la “gentilidad” hasta la cristiandad y su lugar de destino como el “fértil jardín” del paraíso terrenal. Dentro de esta construcción la llegada de Esperanza --una mujer claramente sin limpieza de sangre por su color de piel -- al convento de las Carmelitas descalzas de Puebla y su vida y muerte dentro de esa comunidad se vuelven evidencia de que el convento fue escogido por Dios.

La caracterización de Esperanza como una “joya” que sirve de evidencia de que el convento de las Carmelitas descalzas fue escogido por la mano de Dios como lugar especial era realmente único para el siglo XVII. Primero, existían muy pocas monjas negras, tanto en España como sus colonias y aún menos información biográfica sobre sus vidas. En España tenemos a la hermana Teresa también conocida como Chicaba (c. 1676-1748) y la biografía escrita por el padre Paniagua quien entrevistó a Chicaba en los últimos meses de su vida.^{vii} En el Perú se puede encontrar a Úrsula de Jesús (1604-1666), la primera mujer de procedencia africana quien escribió su autobiografía espiritual.^{viii} En Nueva España además de Esperanza, otra mujer negra llamada María de San Juan también vivió su vida en un convento siguiendo todas las reglas de vida de las monjas y cumpliendo cargos que sólo eran reservados para las

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monjas, pero a diferencias de Esperanza nunca consiguió profesar. Su vida fue resumida por Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora.^{ix} De estas obras no obstante ninguna presenta la negritud como una joya particular a un convento específico ni evidencia de que una monja negra hubiera sido escogida por Dios, lo cual pone énfasis en el carácter realmente excepcional de la representación de Esperanza.^x

La conexión especial de Esperanza con Dios también se resalta a través de una tercera metáfora relacionada con el color de su piel, el carbón, una retórica que se repite varias veces a lo largo de la obra: “en la caridad, fue esta insigne morena un carbón encendido y abrasada con el fuego del divino amor y de los prójimos” (Gómez de la Parra 311), “como un carbón inflamado con el ardor de la caridad, siempre estuvo llena y rodeada de este divino fuego” (Gómez de la Parra 311). En estas dos citas Esperanza se compara con el carbón de color negro en su estado original, pero ahora transformado en carbón “encendido” o “inflamado” por el amor de Dios. La cita más extensa con esta metáfora contiene más elementos:

De la hermana Esperanza, por el nativo color que le dio la naturaleza, viendo y admirando las obras de su ardiente caridad, podemos decir que fue un carbón encendido e inflamado en fuego del divino amor, que ardía en su corazón, con el cual fervorosa, cuando en el torno encomendaban y pedían las oraciones de la comunidad para el remedio de algunas almas que estaban en pecado, aplicaba todas sus oraciones y mortificaciones, y con amorosos deseos de que no fuese ofendido su amante Esposo, solicitaba y preguntaba si se habían remediado aquellas almas, y si estaban en gracia de Dios. (Gómez de la Parra 311)

A través de la metáfora entre el carbón y Esperanza, lo que propone el texto es que ésta era como un carbón, negra por fuera, pero que adentro ardía por su amor a Dios. En otras palabras, tal como las dos metáforas anteriores del azabache y del ébano negro, esta tercera metáfora subraya las calidades internas ejemplares de elementos cuyas exterioridades son negras y por la misma establece que Esperanza posee en su interioridad un amor divino ejemplar.

Como demostración de este amor divino, el final de la cita alude a las “mortificaciones” que Esperanza hacía para salvar las almas de los que estaban en peligro y estas mortificaciones y penitencias son el sujeto de gran parte de la biografía, como era común en las biografías o vidas de las monjas.^{xi} Lo interesante sin embargo es que como ha demostrado Nicole Von Germeten, el sufrimiento de los esclavos junto con su pobreza y su humildad también habían sido interpretados como elementos que acercaban a los esclavos a la experiencia de Jesucristo y en sus escritos algunos Afro-mexicanos y españoles también habían usado el lenguaje de la esclavitud para subrayar su propia santidad (Van Deusen 51-8).^{xii}

Como ha señalado Joan Bristol, la biografía parece caber dentro de esta tradición de escritura al hacer constantes referencias a la humildad y a la vez reconstruirla como un elemento un poco diferente de la humildad que caracterizaba a las monjas españolas. La humildad de éstas era causa de admiración precisamente porque no correspondía con su estatus social, es decir que aunque provenían de la clase alta y poderosa, muchas monjas se comportaban con mucha modestia. Para Esperanza la situación era diferente: a ella se le admiraba porque reconocía y aceptaba su posición de servidumbre y actuaba de acuerdo a lo que se esperaba de las limitaciones de su calidad (*Gender* 76).

Además de la humildad ya señalada por Bristol, como parte de esta tradición la biografía espiritual también insiste en el sufrimiento que se esperaba de una monja ejemplar para demostrar su divino amor. Por ejemplo, las monjas “la veían escupir sangre de la fuerza que hacía para no responder y observar el silencio, cuando

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falsamente la acusaban, imitando en esto a su amante” (Gómez de la Parra 311) y “sucedió que viniendo algunas religiosas a pedirle unas brasas, se quedaba sin cenar, y a veces sin comer por no tener lumbre en que calentar la comida” (Gómez de la Parra 314). Es interesante aquí cómo el sufrimiento que se esperaba de toda monja ejemplar toma una cara un poco diferente con Esperanza, porque la causa del dolor que ésta recibe proviene de las otras monjas del convento, fuera porque éstas la acusaban falsamente con frecuencia o porque le pedían su lumbre y la dejaban sin fuego para calentar su comida. Las citas sobre el sufrimiento apuntan entonces también hacia el hecho que algunas de las monjas usaban su posición tanto racial como de estatus social superior para oprimir a Esperanza, una experiencia de racismo que la biografía espiritual reconstruye como prueba adicional del sufrimiento de Esperanza que más le acercó a la experiencia de Jesucristo.

Uno de los ejemplos más poderosos de esta reconstrucción se puede hallar al final de su vida cuando Esperanza ya tenía gran dificultad en caminar:

Como estaba tan impedida, que no era bastante el bordón para andar, se iba deteniendo de las paredes, con lo cual se deslustraban, y la prelada dijo que no lo hiciese, por no tener el cosijo de blanquear el convento. Obedeció con tan pronta prontitud que, aunque el andar tan sólo con el bordón le ocasionaba algunas caídas, jamás volvió a valerse del arrimo de las paredes, aunque algunas de las religiosas, viendo el trabajo que le costaba andar y las caídas que le daba, le decían que se arrimase a las paredes. (Gómez de la Parra 313)

Este episodio puede ser leído de forma literal, pero también metafórica. Al nivel literal revela el valor inferior que tenía para la prelada la vida de Esperanza en relación con el valor monetario de las paredes del convento ya que ésta consideraba más importante que no se usaran los muros y menos grave que se cayera y lastimara Esperanza. Al nivel metafórico el episodio adquiere una dimensión racial al identificar la cita como razón para no arrimarse a las paredes el “no tener el cosijo de blanquear las paredes”, una alusión que implica que al tocar las paredes por su color de piel, Esperanza les estaba quitando a las paredes su color blanco deseado. Juntas las dos lecturas revelan el maltrato de Esperanza a manos de algunas de las monjas, asocian este agravio con el color de su piel, y presentan su sufrimiento como prueba adicional de su acercamiento hacia Dios. ✓

De la misma forma, los cargos de cocinera y enfermera a los que fue relegada Esperanza toda su vida y su identidad subalterna dentro de la comunidad religiosa en general, se presentan como pruebas adicionales de su calidad interna. Es decir que su trabajo se introduce no como evidencia del relego de ésta a los trabajos menores por su condición exterior de negra sino que se redefine como prueba de su humildad y por lo tanto de su conducta ejemplar dentro del convento. Aquí es importante recordar que las esclavas negras como Esperanza se encontraban en la esfera más baja de la jerarquía del convento. Aunque muchas de las monjas se llamaban esclavas por su servicio a Dios, el significado de esclavo cobraba un significado muy diferente para Esperanza, una mujer negra, que para ellas porque en realidad muy pocas monjas realmente hacían los trabajos más duros de limpiar la basura o lavar los pisos, y cuando barrían o se encargaban de los enfermos la mayoría tenía sirvientes que se encargaban al mismo tiempo de sus necesidades. De hecho, algunas visionarias hasta decían haber sufrido porque sus sirvientes no eran buenas (Van Deusen 52-53). A diferencias de estas mujeres, las muy pocas monjas negras esclavas, como Esperanza, recibían los peores cargos dentro de la comunidad entre los cuales trabajar en la cocina y la enfermería. Además, se consideraban propiedad del convento y podían ser vendidas en cualquier momento (Loreto López 128).

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De la misma manera que hace hincapié en el sufrimiento y la humildad de Esperanza definiéndolas como características asociadas con la esclavitud y la negritud de Esperanza, la obra resalta las otras calidades de Esperanza como monja ejemplar, y en particular la del silencio. Como ya bien se sabe, la ideología de convento de los siglos XVI y XVII promovía el silencio de las mujeres como parte de las características del estado de perfección que llevaban a las monjas a una entrega total a Dios. Dentro de la tradición de escritura de vidas, la obra introduce el silencio como una de las virtudes principales de Esperanza. Al presentar a Esperanza y citando a la madre Juana de Jesús María, la obra menciona como primera virtud su silencio:

Llegando a tratar de las virtudes, la madre Juana de Jesús María certifica que, en los treinta nueve años que la conoció, siempre la vio en un mismo ser, porque era tan grande su silencio, que rarísimas veces preguntaba alguna cosa, por ser muy necesario y forzoso. Jamás se introducía en inquirir lo que sucedía en el convento. Habiéndole encargado cuidase la comida de las enfermas, aunque algunas la molestaban porque se diese prisa, no les respondía palabra alguna de disculpa, tan solamente decía: Bendito sea Dios, amado sea Jesús. Y diciendo esto con tanta mancedumbre y humildad que confundía y dedicaba a las que la solían reñir; jamás se disculpaba, aunque le atribuyesen algunas cosas que no tenía culpa... (Gómez de la Parra 310-311)

El voto del silencio acompañaba frecuentemente los cuatro votos de la profesión de cada monja --obediencia, castidad, pobreza y incultración-- y se consideraba como un método adicional de expiación de los pecados. Este voto había originado de la prohibición hecha por San Pablo de la palabra por las mujeres en la iglesia y se convirtió en forma de lograr la contemplación indispensable para alcanzar una comunicación con Dios (Quispe Agnoli 37). En nuestra cita anterior la presentación del mutismo de Esperanza corresponde con esta visión del silencio como una virtud que acompaña el voto de obediencia ya que ésta obedece la orden de encargarse de la comida del convento y no habla ni para defenderse de las acusaciones que no les corresponden. Sin embargo, como señala Rosalva Loreto, este silencio también servía para mantener las jerarquías existentes adentro del convento (146). Dentro de estas jerarquías Esperanza ocupaba claramente el nivel más bajo por la combinación de su raza, género y estatus social y, como lo señala el texto, era frecuentemente la víctima de acusaciones y de racismo por parte de algunas de las otras monjas del convento. En este contexto, el acto de callar junto con su humildad extrema, y sufrimiento constante, tres elementos contruidos en la biografía siguiendo la tradición de acercar a los esclavos negros a la experiencia de Jesucristo, sirven de gran contraste con el color de piel negra despreciable de Esperanza.

Hasta ahora, hemos visto cómo a primera vista el capítulo sobre Esperanza compuesto por Gómez de la Parra usando las notas de la madre María no parece seguir la tradición de conectar la exterioridad negra despreciable con una interioridad negativa sino que la obra usa una serie de metáforas entre Esperanza y los elementos del azabache, el ébano negro y el carbón para caracterizar la interioridad de Esperanza como ejemplar al nivel moral y estrechamente conectada con Dios. Estas metáforas junto con la evidencia de humildad, sufrimiento y silencio ejemplares en la conducta de Esperanza sirven para poner hincapié en la ejemplaridad interna moral de la monja negra. Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo, el discurso sobre la negritud de Esperanza presente en la obra es algo conflictivo y revela la diversidad de ideas sobre la negritud que existían durante el siglo XVII en Nueva España. En efecto, la biografía espiritual también asocia la corporalidad negra de Esperanza con características negativas intelectuales. La primera de éstas se encuentra en la primera hoja de la obra con "siendo una pobre negra, bozal, ignorante y rústica" (309). Este tipo de caracterización se

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vuelve a repetir hacia el final del texto con exactamente el mismo lenguaje “en una negra, rústica e ignorante” (Gómez de la Parra 319). Esta descripción cabe dentro de la visión negativa del negro predominante en esa época y es evidencia de la presencia de dos visiones conflictivas de la negritud de Esperanza en la obra. Al yuxtaponer y repetir las palabras “ignorante y rústica” con la identidad negra de Esperanza, el texto estaba reforzando la idea que por causa del color negro de su piel Esperanza era ignorante y rústica, es decir, la idea que la identidad negra considerada inferior estaba intrínsecamente conectada con una identidad interna intelectual inferior y despreciable. ✓

La idea que la corporalidad negra de Esperanza era un impedimento para su identidad interna ejemplar se acentúa a lo largo de la obra. Uno de los ejemplos más contundentes de este rechazo se puede encontrar cuando Esperanza se rehúsa a darle de comer a su cuerpo, una prueba de amor a Dios muy común entre las monjas que les permitía acercarse más hacia Dios. Sin embargo, lo interesante en el caso de Esperanza es cómo se describe el impacto del ayuno de ésta en su cuerpo: “En algunas ocasiones, solía estar muy mala, tanto que la llegaban a conocer las religiosas, por verla tan descolorida, que parecía mulata, y jamás se quejaba” (Gómez de la Parra 314). El uso del lenguaje “mulata” aquí tiene implicaciones reveladoras sobre la percepción de la negritud: más específicamente, al asociar la acción de ayuno que lleva al acercamiento con Dios con el cambio del color de la piel de negra a mulata, el texto implica sutilmente que para acercarse hacia Dios era necesario que Esperanza se distanciara del color de su piel negra.

La decisión de Esperanza de sólo aceptar ser profesa a la hora de morir confirma esta percepción, esta vez por parte de Esperanza misma y no de sus biógrafos, de que la corporalidad negra era un impedimento a la profesión de monja durante la vida terrenal:

Mas ni de una ni de otra manera la pudo convencer a que profesara, diciendo y repitiendo Esperanza: Señor, no me atrevo ni me hallo con ánimo para hacer los votos de la profesión. Y tan solamente pudo conseguir el señor Deán que a la hora de la muerte pidiese el hábito y la profesión, y como lo prometió, así lo hizo. (Gómez de la Parra 317)

Aunque la cita no identifica el color de piel como la razón por el rechazo de Esperanza de profesar, por las constantes alusiones negativas asociadas al color de su piel, es muy probable que su falta de atrevimiento en profesar hasta la hora de su muerte, estuviera relacionada con su estado corporal y que precisamente porque a la hora de morir Esperanza sabía que perdería ese estado corporal de negritud y pasaría a ser alma, pensaba que podría entonces volverse digna de ser profesa.

Esta caracterización del estado corporal de negritud de Esperanza como algo considerado como impedimento a su santidad contiene implicaciones negativas problemáticas. Porque si bien la biografía espiritual representa a Esperanza como una monja negra ejemplar en su interioridad al nivel del alma, a la vez al yuxtaponer esta caracterización poco común durante el siglo XVII con una descripción de su corporalidad negra como algo negativo que tiene que ser blanqueado o borrado para poder llegar Esperanza a ser profesa y conectarla con una interioridad intelectual inferior, la obra implícitamente está describiendo cómo a pesar de sus acciones e interiores ejemplares, las mujeres negras como Esperanza nunca podrían llegar a ser un miembro igual a las otras monjas dentro del convento durante su vida.

Este discurso conflictivo en la caracterización de la negritud de Esperanza está particularmente bien emblematizado en el hecho que casi todas las acciones ejemplares de Esperanza que se describen toman lugar durante la noche:

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Si sabía que algunas religiosas padecían algunos trabajos interiores, se entraba a deshoras de la noche en su celda, sin ser sentida, y echándoles agua bendita, les rezaba algunas oraciones... y estaba con la paciente hasta que la dejaba mejorada y sosegada; sucediendo esto muchas veces, de donde se infiere que el Señor le revelaba el trabajo que padecía la religiosa para que tuviese en qué ejercitar su ardiente caridad (Gómez de la Parra 312)

La noche sirve como buen emblema del discurso conflictivo acerca de su negritud porque, al traer oscuridad ésta esconde las acciones de Esperanza, cuya presencia no es percibida por las monjas a las que cura. De forma paralela esta vez al nivel metafórico, la interioridad ejemplar de Esperanza detrás de estas acciones era invisible para algunas de las monjas quienes sólo veían la oscuridad externa de su piel.

Este discurso conflictivo bien puede haber sido por lo menos en parte el resultado de la doble autoría del texto. En efecto, si el autor oficial de la biografía fue Gómez de la Parra, a la vez éste consultó, parafraseó o citó el cuaderno sobre Esperanza escrito por la madre Juana de Jesús María bajo las órdenes del señor Santa Cruz para presentar las virtudes de Esperanza. Es decir que las dos voces mezcladas en la biografía espiritual tenían objetivos un poco diferentes: la madre estaba siguiendo órdenes y tenía que producir un escrito que evidenciara las virtudes de Esperanza mientras que Gómez de la Parra estaba escribiendo una crónica del convento de las Carmelitas Descalzas de Puebla y la biografía sobre Esperanza tenía la función de señalar la historia ilustre del convento. Estos objetivos un poco distintos pueden haber afectado la representación de la negritud de Esperanza. Al leer la obra, el texto aclara cuando se está presentando la voz de la madre con “la madre Juana de Jesús María certifica que” (Gómez de la Parra 310) o del “cuaderno de la madre Juana de Jesús María” (Gómez de la Parra 310) o “como lo testifica y confiesa la madre Juana de Jesús María” (Gómez de la Parra 319). La información que precede estas referencias es casi siempre alguna de las acciones ejemplares que fueron evidencia de su valor interno. Dentro de estas referencias no parece haber alusiones directas al color negro de la piel de Esperanza menos en las instancias del cambio del color de su piel a una más blanca al no comer y morir, o sea en las instancias en que el texto está caracterizando la piel de Esperanza como un impedimento corporal que necesita ser remediado para alcanzar un estado moral más alto. Al leer esta caracterización más negativa de la negritud de Esperanza cabe recordar que la madre Juana de Jesús María fue contemporánea de Esperanza y que si bien tenía la orden de presentar por escrito las virtudes de Esperanza, al mismo tiempo, fue parte de la comunidad con la que vivió Esperanza y quien la trató como subalterna a causa de su piel. En cambio, ninguna de las tres metáforas que se repiten en el texto y sirven de *topoi* para establecer la desconexión entre la exterioridad negra de Esperanza, percibida como negativa, de su interioridad, descrita como ejemplar al nivel moral, está precedida por un reconociendo que esta información origina del cuaderno de la madre Juana de Jesús María. Por lo tanto se puede asumir que no provenía de allí sino que fue añadida por Gómez de la Parra, usando referencias literarias y filosóficas como las de Calepino para insertar a Esperanza dentro de la tradición de “preste Juan”. Estas metáforas, como ya hemos visto, sirven todas para resaltar el valor de la interioridad de Esperanza a pesar de su corporalidad negra y la metáfora del ébano negro en particular sirve para caracterizar a Esperanza como una joya del convento, una descripción que correspondía perfectamente con la meta de Gómez de la Parra de elogiar la historia del convento de las Carmelitas descalzas de Puebla.

También es probable que el discurso conflictivo acerca de la negritud de Esperanza presente en la biografía espiritual reflejara la diversidad de creencias culturales presentes en la época de producción del texto. Para mejor contextualizar la

construcción de la negritud de Esperanza hecha por Gómez de la Parra, por lo tanto se vuelve necesario compararla con la que se encuentra en otras obras sobre religiosas negras en Nueva España. De acuerdo a mi conocimiento, la obra compuesta por el jesuita Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora, gran amigo de la célebre Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, es la única otra biografía de una mujer religiosa negra novohispana escrita durante el siglo XVII. En el capítulo XV de su obra *Parayso Occidental* Sigüenza y Góngora introduce a María de San Juan Negra. Su biografía contiene tensiones acerca de la raza de María muy parecidas a las que se encuentran en el texto sobre Esperanza. En el texto Sigüenza no usa una serie de metáforas para resaltar la exterioridad negra de María como lo había hecho Gómez de la Parra con Esperanza. Tampoco establece Sigüenza una desconexión entre lo despreciable de su piel y la apreciable de su interioridad moral como se había hecho en la biografía de Esperanza, pero el discurso conflictivo sobre la negritud de María sí existe claramente, sólo que toma una cara diferente. Por un lado, la interioridad moral de María --tal como la de Esperanza-- se caracteriza de forma muy positiva, diciendo que muchas personas blancas podrían aprender de su fe (Sigüenza 175), e insistiendo que María tenía enormes virtudes entre las cuales sobresalía su amor a Dios (Sigüenza 175-176). Por otra parte, se explica que María nunca logró profesar a pesar de su deseo porque el demonio le llenó el alma de confusiones, es decir que a pesar de merecer ser monja por su interioridad moral ejemplar, no lo consiguió (Sigüenza 177). Postulo que sí hay un discurso conflictivo sobre su negritud aquí, pero construido de forma un poco diferente del caso de Esperanza: en lugar de ser a través de una interioridad intelectual inferior y la necesidad de separarse del cuerpo negro para conseguir ser monja como se había construido en la biografía espiritual de Esperanza, en el texto de Sigüenza sobre María se propone simplemente que el valor moral interno de María nunca se logra traducir a su toma del hábito por presiones externas del demonio. Aunque nunca se menciona específicamente que el color de su piel negra tuvo un impacto negativo importante en el auto-cuestionamiento por María de su valor interno, es probable que lo tuviera si recordamos todas las ideas negativas sobre la negritud y el racismo que existían en su época y que se presentan en casi todas las obras sobre las vidas de las monjas negras.

En su biografía sobre Chicaba, como en las obras sobre María y Esperanza, Paniagua subraya que la interioridad de Chicaba se caracterizó por su valor moral y su ejemplaridad. La obra insiste particularmente en su condición de sufrimiento fuera y dentro del convento, su abnegación, su humildad, y su calidad de esclava de Dios. Al mismo tiempo, la obra contiene un discurso conflictivo sobre la negritud de Chicaba. En efecto, si bien Chicaba logró profesar bastante temprano en su vida a diferencia de Esperanza y de María, fue claramente gracias al apoyo del marqués de Mancera quien usó toda su influencia para que después de varios fracasos, un convento aceptara finalmente dejar entrar y profesar a Chicaba a cambio de una dote considerable.^{xiii} Sin embargo, ya dentro del convento, la obra hace constantes referencias al maltrato de Chicaba por las otras monjas por su calidad racial y a la vez, tal como en la biografía sobre Esperanza, el texto reconstruye el maltrato como evidencia adicional del sufrimiento y acercamiento a Dios por parte de Chicaba. También se encuentra al final de la obra otro evento que ejemplifica el discurso conflictivo acerca de su negritud cuando se presenta la muerte de Chicaba como un proceso de blanqueamiento: “El color de su rostro, por su naturaleza negra, antes de expirar se le puso blanco, y aun después de muerta perseveró así no poco tiempo” (Paniagua 195). Este final es problemático porque una vez más, como en la obra sobre Esperanza, implica que la corporalidad negra es un impedimento para alcanzar el estado moral más alto, revelando que la ideología española de la época no permitía una redención completa a la raza negra y que para conseguir ésta se necesitaba una operación de blanqueamiento.

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Como Esperanza, María y Chicaba, Úrsula nació esclava y trabajó como esclava durante 43 de sus 62 años de vida haciendo las labores más pesadas (Van Deusen 1-3). Después de adquirir su libertad en 1645 gracias a una monja del convento que compró su libertad, Úrsula profesó como donada en 1647 en el mismo convento de Santa Clara donde había vivido. Las donadas en este convento eran casi todas indígenas, castas o afro-peruanas (Van Deusen 29). Estas monjas eran sirvientas religiosas con más prestigio y estatus social que las criadas y las esclavas. Por ejemplo, cuando ya habían terminado sus tareas diarias, tenían el derecho de encargarse de cargos más religiosos como prender las velas o tocar la campana (Van Deusen 29-30). En el caso específico de Úrsula, aunque profesó en 1547, ésta siguió haciendo los mismos cargos principales que antes de profesar, es decir los trabajos más duros de la cocina y la enfermería (Van Deusen 30). En la biografía de Úrsula por una parte se presentan sus talentos como mística y se inscribe su vida dentro del modelo hagiográfico que enfatizaba la humildad, subyugación, caridad, y abnegación, es decir una interioridad moral ejemplar (51). Para lidiar con su negritud de forma positiva y siguiendo la tradición del “preste Juan”, se le compara con otras personas negras admirables de la Biblia como Sheba, la reina de Saba (49), una comparación que recuerda el paralelo entre Esperanza y las hijas de Jerusalén y esposas de Jesucristo de la cita “Aunque soy negra soy bella” (Gómez de la Parra 310). Sin embargo, al igual que las biografías de Esperanza, María de Jesús y Chicaba, la obra de Úrsula revela un discurso conflictivo acerca de su corporalidad negra. Como la obra sobre Chicaba, el texto sobre la vida de Úrsula hace varias referencias a los actos del racismo del cual fue víctima dentro del convento y además como explica Van Deusen, el lenguaje empleado por ésta revela su lucha por encontrar su voz y al mismo tiempo “lidiar con las tensiones que separaban su propia visión de su auto-imagen, de las percepciones raciales establecidas por otros y no por ella” (51).^{xiv}

Después de comparar la construcción de la negritud de Esperanza con la que se encuentra en las escasas obras sobre las vidas de las muy pocas monjas negras de España y sus colonias, podemos llegar a la conclusión que la biografía es consistente con estas otras obras en su caracterización conflictiva de la negritud de su protagonista. En cada una de estas obras encontramos la interioridad de la mujer negra descrita como moralmente ejemplar y no obstante en cada texto al mismo tiempo esta interioridad no parece ser suficiente para que la protagonista negra sea considerada y tratada con igual respeto que las otras monjas. En la obra sobre Esperanza en particular, a pesar de ser caracterizada como ejemplar al nivel moral por su humildad, sufrimiento y silencio, esta ejemplaridad no es suficiente para llegar al modelo esperado de monja hasta la muerte, es decir, hasta el momento de separación entre el cuerpo negro y su alma. Esta visión del cuerpo como algo negativo que estorbaba a la mujer para llegar al estado espiritual más alto era común en las biografías sobre las monjas.^{xv} Dentro de ésta, generalmente el cuerpo era percibido como negativo a causa de su poder seductivo de tentación (Van Deusen 52). Sin embargo, en el texto sobre Esperanza la corporalidad toma una dimensión diferente porque si bien el cuerpo es visto como un elemento negativo que necesita ser borrado, ya no lo es por su belleza y potencial de seducción sino por su negritud y las implicaciones culturales asociadas con este color de piel. Dentro de este contexto, la cita bíblica que Gómez de la Parra usa para describir a Esperanza “Aunque soy negra soy hermosa” (310) se convierte una imploración por el reconocimiento de su belleza interna a pesar de su corporalidad negra.

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Notas

- ⁱ La madre Juana fue priora del convento dos veces (1668 y 1674) y conoció a Juana Esperanza por 39 años (Gómez de la Parra 121). Escribió su cuaderno sobre ella basándose en ese conocimiento y lo complementó con información dada por otras religiosas (Gómez de la Parra 310).
- ⁱⁱ Electa Arena y Stacey Schlau han empezado una labor muy valiosa de estudio de estas mujeres en *Untold Sisters*. Para más información véanse las páginas 165-168 de su libro.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Esta información se puede encontrar en las páginas 216 en *Afro-Latino Voices* y 169-170 en *Brides of Christ*.
- ^{iv} Sin embargo, a pesar de la visión tan negativa de los negros por parte de los católicos, según ellos, los negros sí poseían un alma y por lo tanto pertenecían al mundo cristiano (Fra Molinero 4).
- ^v La definición que usa Gómez de la Parra proviene de Ambrogio Calepino, un agustino lexicógrafo italiano quien escribió su diccionario en latín titulado *Cornucopioe* en 1502, un diccionario que fue vuelto a imprimir 18 veces entre 1542 y 1592.
- ^{vi} La cocina y la enfermería eran los espacios más humildes en los conventos. Para más información véase Fernández.
- ^{vii} Para más información léase Houtchins y Fra Molinero.
- ^{viii} Para más investigación recomiendo la lectura de Van Deusen.
- ^{ix} Véase Lavrin p. 167-68 y Sigüenza y Góngora.
- ^x También existe Sor Magdalena de la Cruz en España. Para más información consúltase Contreras.
- ^{xi} Se puede encontrar un excelente ejemplo de esta tradición en el diario espiritual de la madre María de San José (1656-1719) quien entró al convento agustino de Santa Mónica de Puebla a la edad de 31 años y escribió su autobiografía siguiendo el modelo de Teresa de Ávila. Para más información consúltase la excelente obra de Kathleen Myers y Amanda Powell, en particular las páginas 22-24.
- ^{xii} Más específicamente Von Germeten explica que la esclavitud y la santidad eran frecuentemente conectadas simbólicamente al compartir el sufrimiento. Identifica como buen ejemplo de esta tradición a Lope de Vega con su drama sobre San Benedicto y también argumento que en las co-fraternidades de los afro-mexicanos del siglo XVII éstos utilizan la flagelación como método para acercarse más a la experiencia de santidad de Jesucristo, un método aprobado por la sociedad de su época (35).
- ^{xiii} El marqués pagó más de 10,000 reales. Para más información, véase Melián 574.
- ^{xiv} La cita es una traducción mía de la cita originalmente en inglés que se encuentra en el libro de Van Deusen, p. 51.
- ^{xv} Para un ejemplo concreto de esta visión del cuerpo como impedimento al ejercicio espiritual recomiendo la lectura de Patricia Martínez sobre la caracterización de la venerable Madre Marina de la Cruz, fundadora de la Orden de Carmelitas Descalza p. 207.

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The Black Man's Destiny: Place, Movement and Identity in *El metro* by Donato Ndong Bidyogo and *Chambacú, corral de negros* by Manuel Zapata Olivella

by Nicole D. Price

From the first encounter between the European and the African, the Black man's destiny has been tinged with tragedy. Whether it be on his own continent or transported to the Americas through the Middle Passage, he has been victimized by the colonial system. Even after the abolishment of slavery and the independence of African and Latin American nations, he has never fully recovered from the aftermath of colonialism because "[a]ll post-colonial societies are still subject to in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and independence has not solved this problem" (*The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 1-2). The (post)colonial experience is the common element that bridges the African with his brothers across the Atlantic. The desire to restore his dignity and come to terms with his post-colonial identity has become an important theme in Afro-Hispanic literature as Richard Jackson states: "[b]lack consciousness, however, does not prevent a broader view of man, or of man's inhumanity to man, from becoming a literary concern" (*Black Image* 91). Although this literature has endured years of marginalization within the Hispanic literary canon, it has played an important role in providing voice to the silenced, history to the those whose histories had been erased and identity to those whose identities had been irrevocably altered through colonialism and imperialism of the West and thus has been frequently examined under the critical umbrella of post-colonial theory because:

Post-colonial literatures are a result of this interaction between imperial culture and the complex of indigenous cultural practices... Once colonized peoples had cause to reflect on and express the tension that ensued from this problematic and contested, but eventually vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience, post-colonial 'theory' came into being. (*The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 1)

It is from this critical point of departure that this article intends to examine *Chambacú, corral de negros* (1963) by Manuel Zapata Olivella and *El metro* (2007) by Donato Ndong Bidyogo. Although most of Zapata Olivella's early novels deal with the marginalized in Colombia – *Tierra mojada* (1947), *La Calle 10* (1960), *En Chimá nace un santo* (1964) –, *Chambacú, corral de negros* is "often considered to be the first Afro-Hispanic novel to call for revolution as a solution to the problems of the downtrodden..." (*Black Writers* 57) and at the same time is "una obra que representa un capítulo en la historia silenciada de los afrodescendientes colombianos" (Ortiz 157). This novel skillfully indicts colonialism and imperialism as the root of many of the modern day problems of Afro-Colombians. *El metro*, is a departure in theme for Ndong Bidyogo. His first two novels, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987) and *Los poderes de la tempestad* (2007) exclusively deal with the effects of colonialism and despotism in his native Equatorial Guinea. With *El metro* his vision is Pan-African. Instead of the Equatorial Guinean as the only victim of colonialism and imperialism, it is the African in general. Although forty years and an ocean separate the two novels, both highlight the struggle that the African and Afro-Latin American have in the search for his place in this post-colonial society. The tragic destiny of the characters in both novels suggests that the fight is far from over.

While *Chambacú, corral de negros* and *El metro* deal with significantly different time periods and political situations, the examination of both novels proposes that for the African and the Afro-Latin American life is an infinite series of battles in the quest to find self (past, present and future) and place. The questions of "Who am I?"

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and "Where do I belong/fit in?" preoccupy the respective main characters throughout the novels. These questions highlight the connection between place, or rather, displacement and the development of identity. This connection and how it is manifested through movement and migration will serve as the main focus of this article.

The ideas of place and displacement are two fundamental aspects of post-colonial discourse. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin:

'place' ... is a complex interaction of language, history and environment... [T]he sense of dislocation from an historical 'homeland' and that created by the dissonance between language, the experience of 'displacement' generates a creative tension within the language. Place is thus the concomitant of difference, the continual reminder of the separation, and yet of the hybrid interpenetration of the colonizer and colonized." (*The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 345)

In both *Chambacú, corral de negros* and *El metro*, place and identity are inextricably connected. The actual *barrio* of Chambacú, an island off the coast of Cartagena where Zapata Olivella's novel takes place is symbolic of its inhabitants' social marginalization in Colombia. In his study on Zapata Olivella's works, Antonio Tillis notes that:

This locale is important because it is the furthestmost point off the mainland extending into the ocean. It is connected to the mainland by a bridge that facilitates travel to Cartagena and back. It is also where many Colombians of African ancestry and the region's poorest people reside. Thus, in terms of its geographical space, this community of largely poor black Colombians exists as an isolated island that is literally cut off from the sociopolitical structure that governs it. (62)

The place of Chambacú reflects, in essence, the identity of those who live there: the marginalized, the invisible and the forgotten. Zapata Olivella makes several allusions to Chambacú as a cemetery which underscores the loss/death of cultural identity of the first African slaves that were brought there and the subsequent inability of their descendants to recover it: "Chambacú es tierra de muerte" (55); "Chambacú era un cementerio de fantasmas muertos" (72); "Tuvo conciencia, aunque difusa, de estar en un cementerio de sepulturas abiertas" (98); "Esta tierra no es buena para nada. ¡Para enterrar vivos" (126); "Chambacú o la sepultura, les era igual" (184). By equating Chambacú with a cemetery Zapata Olivella reminds the reader of the tragic destiny of Afro-Colombians (and on a larger scale all people of African ancestry enslaved in the Americas) as the result of colonialism. Parallel to this negative image of place, however, Zapata Olivella also reminds the reader that Chambacú has not lost all connection to the collective ancestral memory through the image of the drum: "[l]a isla era un gran tambor" (49); "Los tambores en la distancia" (128). The symbol of Chambacú as the drum serves two purposes. First, while it is the physical reminder of oppression and a history almost completely erased by colonialism, Chambacú still has the ability to communicate with the ancestors in Africa (in the distance past) through those customs that survived colonialism or at least adapted to the new reality and thus gives strength to its inhabitants through the struggle for dignity. Second, throughout the novel, the place of Chambacú becomes the epicenter for the revolution headed by the protagonist Máximo and calls on its people (as a drum were to alert of impending danger) to wake up from the long sleep, "cuatro siglos dormidos" (33), that is, (post)colonial oppression, and join the fight. Chambacú, the place, therefore becomes another character in the novel and represents the past, present and future of those who live there as Tillis points out: "[t]he author takes a geographical construct, either real or fictitious, and exploits it in order to reveal the story of a people who are intimately tied to it for the purpose of exposing the realities of that people's existence through fiction"

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(64). For better or worse, Chambacú plays an integral part in the formation of its people.

In the novel Máximo recognizes that Chambacú, the place, represents an imposed identity because, “no hemos venido acá por nuestra propia voluntad” (184). The slaves that were brought there lost their cultures and languages and are now forced to use the colonizers tongue to communicate with each other, “[n]uestra cultura ancestral también está ahogada. ... Desde hace cuatrocientos años se nos ha prohibido decir ‘esto e mío’. Nos expresamos en un idioma ajeno. Nuestros sentimientos no encuentran todavía las palabras exactas para afirmarse” (188). Máximo does however, claim Chambacú as his place and dies defending it from yet another attempt by the hegemony to displace the Afro-Colombians who live there because the blood and sweat of the slaves brought there are literally built into the walls of the island: “[l]as fortificaciones se construyeron en varios siglos. Los esqueletos de los esclavos muertos en ellas, habrían bastado para levantar murallas más altas y extensas que las vemos” (192). Although Chambacú represents the brutality of slavery and colonialism, the fact that the walls that surround it are composed of the skeletons of those who built them make Chambacú Máximo’s place. Under the threat of yet another displacement, this time by gentrification – destroying the slums where Máximo and his people live in order to build luxury homes for the wealthy – and US imperialism – the Peace Corps who will help the Afro-Colombians find another “place” – Máximo has no other choice but to defend what he has claimed as his in order to maintain his dignity.

While place also serves as a prominent link to identity in *El metro*, unlike Zapata Olivella, Ndongo Bidyogo focuses more on displacement and the search for place. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in their introduction to *The Empire Writes Back*, “[a] major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (8). This is particularly salient in *El metro* because Lambert Obama Ondo, the Cameroonian protagonist, is essentially displaced from birth. His father, Guy Ondo Ebang chooses to abandon his native culture and completely assimilates into the role that colonialism has created for him – subordinate to the white man but materially comfortable. Choosing to live in Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon, as the cook for Christian missionaries, Guy Ondo Ebang denies his son contact with his ancestral roots. From the beginning, Lambert Obama Ondo is assigned a colonial identity. When Guy Ondo Ebang is sent back to Mbalmayo, his native village, as the new catechist, his son views his native culture through the eyes of a colonialist prism and judges it as inferior. After a long description of his comfortable life in the capital as a child, Obama Ondo compares it to his “subpar” living conditions in Mbalmayo: “Esa vida de privilegio terminó cuando regresaron al pueblo... La vida en la aldea era desagradable... En el pueblo no se conocía la luz eléctrica...” (49, 50). What he considers as his place, the mission in Yaounde, is actually the construct of the colonial system and what he should consider as his place, Mbalmayo, is other. It is not until after the death of his mother that he realizes the damage that colonialism has caused him and his people:

Un halo de amargura y de rabia retrospectiva se apoderaba de Obama Ondo al recordar esas otras estampas de su infancia en la Misión de Yaoundé, etapa en la que creyó haber sido feliz, debido a que nunca padeció privaciones porque comían las sobras de los platos de los religiosos – aunque la picardía de su padre se encargaba de que también sobrara algo en la olla –, y a las comodidades de las que disfrutó, en comparación con el resto de sus paisanos: en aquellos tiempos, comer pan o chupar un polo fabricado por uno mismo eran inequívocos signos de distinción. Pero ahora comprendía que el hecho

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de que su padre hubiera sido cocinero de los misioneros no había constituido un privilegio para ellos; además de apartarles de los suyos, condenándoles a ser extraños en su propio pueblo, condicionando para siempre su existencia, el sometimiento de sus padres a las leyes de los opresores extranjeros les había inutilizado, impidiendo que pudieran asumir sus propias vidas, privándoles de los asideros espirituales y materiales que permiten a un hombre gozar de su libertad y ser responsable de sus propios actos. (83)

This long passage marks a turning point for the protagonist because it is here when he begins his search for a place that is free from the touch of colonialism which seems to cause nothing but misery for the African continent. He attempts to return to the place of his ancestors by rejecting all aspects of European cultural influence in order to reconnect to his "true" identity unadulterated by colonialism: but soon realizes the futility of his experiment:

Quería que su vida se pareciera lo más posible a la de sus antepasados, que concebía tranquila, sin demasiados sobresaltos... Aquella fue una época distinta, con costumbres y necesidades también distintas, y era necesario acomodarse a las exigencias del presente... Entonces asumió que había basado su vida en una quimera, en la irre realidad... Porque había muerto el pasado; el presente no existía, pues se reducía a la miseria moral y a las calamidades materiales en que se debatían los que tenían el infortunio de subsistir; y el futuro estaba siendo escamoteado por los ilusionistas y los manipuladores. ¿Qué hacer? ¿Cómo sustraerse a tanta desgracia? (90, 172).

Obama Ondo realizes that his native land, the land of his ancestors has been forever changed because of colonialism. Although his village occupies the same space, it is no longer the same place that it was for his ancestors:

... el pueblo no había luchado por la independencia para engordar las panzas de una pandilla de egoístas y perezosos, sino para que la gente realizara sus anhelos de libertad y de justicia y recuperase los aspectos positivos de su cultura milenaria, valores que había pisoteado el colonialismo y que los africanos tenían el ineludible deber de recuperar y fomentar si querían salir de la opresión de la miseria. (80)

Resigned to accept the fact that the place of his ancestors no longer exists and that in its place lies a culture irreparably deformed by colonialism, Obama Ondo has no choice but to accept the hybrid identity produced by colonialism. Because place and identity are so intertwined, the loss of place damages Obama Ondo's sense of identity and thus propels him into a futile search for a new one.

Parallel to the theme of place/displacement in both *Chambacú*, *corral de negros* and *El metro* are movement and migration, which like displacement are part of the post-colonial legacy. As Edward Said states: "[f]or surely it is one of the unhappiest characteristics of the age to have produced more refugees, migrants, displaced persons, and exiles than ever before in history, most of them as an accompaniment to and, ironically enough, as afterthoughts of great post-colonial and imperial conflicts" (332). The constant motion of the main characters in each novel mimic the interior restlessness that is the result of centuries of displacement. Zapata Olivella never allows Máximo to leave Chambacú because his presence in this place is paramount in the fight for true freedom. The author chooses to explore migration through the character of José Raquel, Máximo's brother and antithesis and to a lesser degree, Inge, José Raquel's Swedish wife. Unlike Máximo, who is imprisoned for refusing to fight in a foreign war, José Raquel volunteers to join the armed forces as an escape from justice due to his illegal activities. It is also an escape from a place that lacks any semblance of civilization, at least for José Raquel. In his mind, if he leaves he has a chance to

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reinvent himself as a civilized man. Ironically leaving changes nothing as Liliana Ramírez states:

Lo contradictorio radica en que Chambacú se presenta como la tierra del salvaje, pero el afuera no es realidad mejor. No es más civilizada Corea, ni lo poco que aparece de Cartagena, básicamente centrada en la cárcel. Quien sale de Chambacú con deseos de no volver, no entra a la llamada civilización, sino que cae en un estado de barbarie peor. José Raquel, por ejemplo, se entrega como soldado voluntario, viaja, va a Corea y Europa: pero no vuelve más civilizado, sino más degradado. (124)

It is not surprising that changing place does not change José Raquel because he has never had any sense of place, not even within the family unit. From the moment of his birth his aunt Petronila steals him from his mother, la Cotena, and claims him as her son since she cannot have children, “[f]irme en su propósito de criarlo como hijo propio, trajo una cabra que lo amamantara y padrinos que los bautizaran José Raquel. Así se había llamado su abuelo. ‘Me lo ha robado,’ refunfuño la Cotena. Aceptaba la maternidad de la tía. Pero el sobrino dió (sic) muestras desde pequeño de haber nacido para nadar en dos aguas” (53). His inability to show loyalty and opportunistic attitude are a direct result of the tension between Petronila and la Cotena. Upon returning to Chambacú it is revealed that he not only goes to war in Korea but also to Sweden where he finds his wife Inge. Inge’s presence in Chambacú is initially disturbing because she is viewed as other. Soon after her arrival, however, she finds herself drawn to Máximo’s social activities, which give her the sense of identity she has been searching for all of her life. When José Raquel asks her to abandon Chambacú and move to Manga, the upscale neighborhood in Cartagena where many Chambacoans work for wealthy whites, Inge adamantly refuses:

El dolor de reintegrarse a las cosas olvidadas. El rechazo. Otra vez una desconocida en Estocolmo... Aquí en Chambacú he conseguido lo que nunca tuve. Amor. En mi país jamás supe que existían otras condiciones de vida que son una afrenta a la dignidad humana. Ahora no podría vivir sin el calor de los pobres. De tu madre y de tu hermana, de todos. Luchar por ello no solo ha llenado mi soledad, sino que ha dado sentido a mi existencia. ¡Lárgate! (165, 216)

While José Raquel continues to flee from Chambacú to other places in search for self, ironically it is the woman who is “other” who finds place and self in Chambacú.

In *El metro*, Obama Ondo’s migration is directly related to his search for place and identity. He leaves Mbalmayo after feeling rejected by his long time lover Anne Mengue. Mbalmayo has become a troubled space for Obama Ondo because it reminds of painful memories: the death of his mother; his failed experiment to return to the “place of his ancestors”; the betrayal of his father on various levels and finally the failure of his relationship with Anne Mengue. For Obama Ondo the only way we can truly rediscover himself is by leaving and starting anew. His migration is actually a series of various types: rural to urban (the village of Mbalmayo to the large cities of Yaounde and Douala); country to country (Cameroon to Senegal) and finally continent to continent (Africa to Europe through the Canary Islands). Each movement takes him further away from his roots and therefore changes his outlook of the world. He realizes that he must find a way to live in the modern world created by colonialism in order to survive. After working on the docks of Douala for a time, he determines that Europe must be his alternative place since it was European colonialism that created his present dilemma. By choosing emigration to Europe he understands that assimilation into the colonizer’s culture could possibly extinguish all hope of any cultural recovery:

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Es cierto que en Europa estaban expuestos al desarraigo, al racismo, a la xenofobia, a convertirse en ciudadanos de segunda, inseguros y acomplejados; verdad que criándose entre los blancos podían adquirir hábitos negativos como la insolidaridad y el individualismo, volverse egoístas, crecer sin amparo ni amor como unos huerfanitos, perder su lengua maternal y tener problemas psicológicos, caer en la droga y esas cosas; pero ese era un riesgo calculado... (217)

Unfortunately for Obama Ondo, this calculated risk leads him to an even greater loss, that of his life. Although he dies violently at the hands of skinheads in a desolated metro car in Madrid the real cause of his death are the prolonged effects of colonialism. Not only does colonialism permanently change his native culture into an unsatisfactory hybrid, but it also never completely allows the colonized to be accepted into the dominant culture, thus leaving him without place and therefore with an identity in permanent crisis.

As we see both in *Chambacú* and in *El metro*, the desire to want to search for a place in order to create a sense of cultural security is tantamount to defining one's identity. One important place that defines identity for both the African and the Afro-Latin American is the Atlantic because of its sordid history of the slave trade. In his landmark work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy brings to the forefront the shared experiences of people of African descent on both sides of the Atlantic, the symbol that separates (slave trade and Middle Passage) and unites (common histories of the people in Africa and the descendants of slaves in the Americas). While his emphasis is on the African Diaspora within the Anglophone world, the connection of which he speaks can also apply to the African Diaspora in the Hispanic world. Tying into the idea of place/displacement, Gilroy focuses on the image of the ship traversing the Atlantic as a symbol of communication between the members of the Diaspora:

I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa and the Caribbean as a central organising (sic) symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point. The image of the ship – a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion – is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons...(4)

In *Chambacú*, Zapata Olivella interweaves this image of the ship into the fabric of the novel as the vehicle that transports the Black man to a tragic destiny, first through the Middle Passage and then as a conscript soldier in the Korean War: “[n]uestros antepasados fueron traídos aquí para construir las [las murallas]. Los barcos negros llegaron atestados de esclavos provenientes de toda África. Mandingas, yolofofos, minas, carabalíes, biáfara, yorubas, más de cuarenta tribus (189). These words of Máximo to Inge remind the reader that the very existence of the Black man in the Americas commenced with the fateful voyages of the slave ships. Four hundred years later, a different group of ships forcefully takes Afro-Colombians to Korea in another form of oppression: US imperialism. Marvin Lewis states that “Colombia has the distinction of being the only South American country to commit troops for fighting alongside United States forces” (104). The Colombian dictatorship agreed to this illegal deal in order to receive arms to quell uprisings among its enemies. Its payment was in the form of Afro-Colombian conscripts force to go to war. As part one of *Chambacú*, *corral de negros* ends, Zapata Olivella paints a scene of frantic relatives searching for their loved one about to leave for Korea in warships:

La fragata iluminada en el muelle. Los cañones forrados con lonas grises. Las chimeneas botaban un humo espeso... Los camiones cargados de reclutas. Voces

militares... - Capitán, quiero despedirme de mi vieja, que está allí detrás de la alambrada. - Está prohibido. - ¡Puede que sea la última vez que la vea! ... La sirena alargó su alarido. Las máquinas de la fragata rechinaron en lo hondo del barco. Un lenguaje mecánico que pedía soldados. (86-87)

This scene is so powerful because at the same time it illustrates the destructive forces of modern day western imperialism, it also brings to mind images of what it must have been like for the families of loved ones that were forced onto slave ships never to be seen again. Zapata Olivella demonstrates the cyclical nature of the black man's tragedy. If not for the first groups of ships that brought Africans to the Americas, the present day scene may never have taken place. Once again the ship uproots and displaces the Black man stripping him of the ability to control his destiny.

Unlike Zapata Olivella, in *El metro* Donato Ndongo Bidyogo uses the image of the ship as a symbol for escape from the tragic indelible print that European colonialism has left on the African continent. Disillusioned with a life full of disappointments and hardships, Obama Ondo chooses to leave the African continent for the promised land of Europe. Although he tries to create a life in Senegal, moving there from his native Cameroon, he finally determines that he can only live the life he wants by going to Europe. He is not alone as Ndongo Bidyogo observes, "[d]espojados de su futuro y muerta toda ilusión, los jóvenes empezaron a considerar que sus países no eran lugares para vivir, y la emigración constituía su única salida" (253). In his first attempt to escape to Europe, Obama Ondo hides on a freighter ship and notes that even though the ship represents a passage to freedom, the experience connects him to his ancestors that suffered on slave ships through the Middle Passage: "[n]o estaba encadenado de pies y manos, pero experimentaba las mismas sensaciones que los esclavos en aquellos barcos negreros de un tiempo anterior" (291). The juxtaposition of the free African being imprisoned on a slave ship by Europeans and the colonized African subject using a similar ship to flee to Europe as the promised land is striking as well as ironic. Obama Ondo's first attempt to escape is thwarted when he and other stowaways are caught. In his second attempt he leaves the coast of Morocco for the Canary Islands in a *patera*. Ndongo Bidyogo's description of the *patera*, thirty-six people crowded into a space built for about twelve along with excrement, urine and vomit is truly horrifying, not only because it provides the reader with a glimpse of how it must have been in the slave ships but because it reminds the reader of just how destructive in nature the European colonization of Africa was that would propel people to leave their homeland and endure a voyage under these circumstances to the land of those who oppressed them in the first place. Ndongo Bidyogo also reminds us just like Zapata Olivella, that a ship in the Atlantic can bring tragic results. A storm arises and:

Era palpable el pánico colectivo. El aullido unísono de las mujeres atronó la noche, ... Las mujeres seguían gritando, y cuando una se levantó como para salir corriendo en un acto reflejo impulsado por el pavor, fue abatida por la ola. Otras dos se elevaron para intentar sostenerla, pero fue solo una intención irrealizable, porque también se perdieron arrastradas por aquel mar enfurecido y tenebroso... Obama Ondo trabajaba como los demás, frenéticamente, mecánicamente, pero su retina retendría la imagen indeleble de las tres mujeres tragadas por las aguas. (342)

As the bodies wash upon the shore of the island of Lanzarote along with the survivors, there is a sense that the waves of the Atlantic are bringing the histories of Africans, past, present and future, full circle. As Gilroy states:

The history of the black Atlantic since then, continually crisscrossed by the movements of black people – not only as commodities but engaged in various struggles towards

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emancipation, autonomy and citizenship – provides a means to reexamine the problems of nationality, location, identity and historical memory (Gilroy 16).

In addition to the image of the ship, Ndongo Bidyogo begins and ends his novel with another form of transportation: the metro. Although the majority of the novel takes place on the African continent, the metro is the most significant symbol because like Gilroy's ship, it too is a "living, micro-cultural and micro-political system in motion." Obama Ondo chooses to move his street vending business to the metro in order to flee from the brutal Madrid winter. The metro, which at first frightened him, becomes the space that gives him an identity. He observes that people from all walks of life take the metro to their various destinations. It serves as a school for him that teaches him that Europeans have the same preoccupations as people of color. For him it becomes the great equalizer of men. However, just like the slave ships of the past, the metro is a place that is in a constant state of change. The place that Obama Ondo has come to define as his own is no longer when he is confronted by those who do not want him there. After selling items for a period of time, Obama Ondo becomes friends with a Spanish woman named Lucía who invites him on a date. At the end of the night, they agree to meet again the following week and he kisses her on the cheek as she leaves. Unbeknownst to Obama Ondo several skinheads have been watching him with Lucía. As Obama Ondo steps into the metro car, he finds himself face to face with them and no way of escape. When the last passengers exit the car, the skinheads brutally beat Obama Ondo to death. With no identifying papers, Obama Ondo's lifeless body travels into anonymity as the metro car continues traveling to unknown destinations. This last chilling scene in *El metro* serves two purposes. First it reminds the reader of all of those anonymous slaves who lost their lives in the Middle Passage. Their names may be forgotten but their spirits live on within the collective memory of all people of African descent. Second, it puts the reader on notice that while there have been many improvements in rectifying some of the continuing effects of colonialism, total justice is still far away. Even more tragic is that at the end of the first chapter of the novel, where we see an Obama Ondo contemplating the injustices that have beleaguered his race throughout the centuries, he makes a conscious decision to overcome them: "...había reforzado tanto su territorio personal, fortaleciendo de tal modo sus deseos de elevarse sobre la adversidad, que había determinado que su muerte nunca sería una muerte anónima" (21). Despite all of his efforts, he becomes exactly what he has fought so hard not to be – another anonymous dead black man in the white man's world.

Both *Chambacú, corral de negros* and *El metro* are multidimensional novels that explore the impact of colonialism and imperialism on the formation of the post-colonial identities and histories in Africa and Latin America. The common element that links these together is the idea of place/displacement. Colonialism and imperialism radically changed the idea of place in their target areas by changing names, destroying and reallocating natural resources for economic profit and relocating people for political and economic purposes. The result was in essence a psychological assault on cultural identity. For Africans whose lands were invaded, although they still occupied the same geographical space, the place had changed. For others, they were forced to adapt to a new place because they were sold into slavery. The drastic change in place altered the sense of identity and as a consequence sent many in search of a new place in order to restore that identity. In *Chambacú, corral de negros*, Zapata Olivella juxtaposes Máximo, who takes ownership of Chambacú and who "sees himself as being responsible for raising the consciousness of his people, making them understand why they are poor, and making them realize that they can change their circumstances through their own efforts" (*Black Writers* 55), against José Raquel who rejects Chambacú and looks to other places in order to establish his identity. Although Máximo

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physically dies at the hand of José Raquel, it is the latter who is truly dead because he betrays his own culture for a foreign culture which no longer needs him. In *El metro*, Ndongo Bidyogo illustrates through Obama Ondo the demoralizing effect of finding out that one's identity is really false. Realizing that the mission in Yaounde, which defined who he was from the beginning, was actually a colonial construct that has superimposed itself on his native culture, Obama Ondo tries to create a sort of Eden, that is, untouched by colonialism. Unable to succeed, his search for place and identity commences only to end in tragedy. Both Zapata Olivella and Ndongo Bidyogo underscore the importance that place has in the creation of cultural identity and when that place is disturbed by outside forces, the impact can be devastating. Although the tragic deaths of the protagonists of both *Chambacú*, *corral de negros* and *El metro* are the latest casualties of colonialism and imperialism, the tone of the novels express optimism by stressing that their deaths serve to inspire the reader to continue the struggle:

La dobladora de tabaco podía cerrar los ojos a Máximo con cuatro puntadas de hilo, pues muchos ya los tenían abiertos.
... la voz firme, cálida y serena de su abuelo, el amado jefe Ebang Montuú, y le decía no tengas miedo, hijo: al fin has llegado al puerto de destino, y tu muerte no será un muerte anónima. (*Chambacú* 234, *El metro* 458).

Their sacrifice, which represents that of all who have lost their lives in the struggle, therefore, brings the Black man one step closer to claiming his rightful place and defining his identity in this postcolonial world.

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An Overview of Contemporary Afro-Brazilian Women's Narratives: Propositions of Analysis

by Dawn Duke

The denomination "Afro-Brazilian women's narratives" refers specifically to works written by women of African ancestry in Brazil who create a writing of consciousness, privileging in their own lives and also in their literatures an aesthetic committed to projecting and defending the Afro-Brazilian universe from a woman-centered perspective. Their production affirms a subjectivity born from within the very rubric of a complex historical process, fruit of heterogeneous afro-ethnic identity. They are writings mostly about women, dedicated to aesthetically unraveling and exploring a specific state of being, thereby promoting greater understanding and appreciation of their elaborate context. The initial battle against the legacy of an inherited silence, invisibility, and subordination is never abandoned, rather, with each subsequent narrating generation, that original marginalizing legacy is pushed further back in an attempt to make it disappear and to make way for constructs that rearrange or rethink perception of their role in history and culture. They challenge classical models of history and nation by reiterating a pride, glorification, and idealization of their body, their family, and their community.

Contemporary renditions from the early 1980s such as Marilene Felinto's *As Mulheres de Tijuapapo* (1982) up to and beyond Ana Maria Gonçalves' *Um Defeito de Cor* (2006) confirm the challenges this creative writing poses to the hegemonic structure of canonical writing, itself a product of a literary legacy that has excluded such renditions and against which they now seem to write. New literary trends inherent in this literature smoothly overturn previous doubts about creative maturity while endowing the woman writer with a new and powerful dimension that has deep implications for the idea of her role in the arts and in nation building.

What are the broad cultural spheres of reference that seem to drive and motivate this production? Writers have individual sources of inspiration, units of direct involvement or ideological interests, and agendas they support. They include black women's entities, lesbian and transgendered activism, Afro-Brazilian forms of spirituality, political parties, legislative agendas, theater, art, academia, and artistic circles. All emerge as spheres for navigation and articulation. Somewhat beyond the black and feminist activism of the 1970s and 1980s, the woman writer of today expresses the same concerns for justice, equal rights, end of poverty, and citizenship she learnt in her original period of black and women's movement militancy. What is different is a greater sophistication of articulation as a result of expanded literary and intellectual experience and greater international recognition. Further, writers now enjoy a more obvious presence within the spaces of power and an increased ability to shape and transform the spaces and issues that directly impact their ability to thrive and prosper. Today they produce a definitive discourse even as it may still continue to experience the complete continuum of (mis)representation ranging from being unknown, ignored, rejected, to receiving full recognition, appreciation, and distinction. Irrespective of its continuing existence upon the broad spectrum of irreverence and acclaim, this writing continues to be steadfast in its will to exist, insist on its legitimacy, and right to fame and fortune.

Our ability to generate literary appreciation of the legacy associated with a tradition of black women's writings in Brazil resonates with the need for a process of historical and literary re-situating. The expansion of the contemporary Afro-Brazilian woman's narrative has taken decades, indeed there is no doubt that twentieth-century

black writing in Brazil has been dominated by poetry, continually the genre that records the greatest success and the greater number of participating writers. Short creativity time, condensed language, immediate audience appreciation, the genre of preference among writers, and a smaller publication budget are some of the reasons the writers themselves give for the large volume of poems overall.¹ The situation with narrative writing is different. Writing and compiling a set of short stories or a novel could take years and there is no guarantee of publication or positive reception. (At the same time one might argue that the current atmosphere of ethno-cultural preference for diversity, minority rights, and black identity, within this current affirmative action era, might actually make today the best time for producing more elaborate writing). While there are no available readers that give an overview of the entire narrative production so far, the contemplation of such a possibility is by no means remote. The presence of such works in Brazil today can strategically justify such compilation, no doubt a valuable step within a cultural sphere that continues to operate on the basis of tokenism, especially when it comes to black and Indigenous female achievement and artistic production. This move would tremendously support the ongoing legacy within the black women's movement whose biographical research and configuration of famous black women within an ideology of resistance, including the first writers, serve to undercut classic renditions of the place of black women in history and society. These entities are well versed in challenging deterministic character sketches available well into the twentieth century in various canonical works. Within the realm of historical study, in order to re-think past representations, it proves valuable to dedicate attention to the women writers and contemplate their individual experiences as stimulus for creativity. Their ambivalent state of lettered privilege continues to rage battle with their sociological status of racialized inferiority within the Brazilian culture wherein to date the Afro-Brazilian woman (along with the Indigenous woman) continues to suffer the effects of marginalizing socio-economic status. Voicing this subjectivity makes the writer herself a distinctive strategy within the writing for it augments even more the notion of her difference as a writing subject while politicizing her text as defiance within a culture that retains a hierarchy of literary production. Textual strategies such as glorification or over-compensation are important for the way they augment distance from classical historical renditions of the black female character whose silence, objectification, sexualization or whitening suppress deny her visibility and influence. Within this process of literary re-positioning it becomes useful to adopt an alternative historical approach to writing, in other words, possibly make history a theme rather than a purpose; this resonates differently, opens up the possibility for inclusion of any narrative irrespective of when it was written. The end result is the construction of a literary discourse of historical representation that counteracts the effect of an apparent non-existence as an active producer prior to 1900.

The designing of a black woman-centered narrative materializes by virtue of an aesthetics of historical and ideological consciousness; making "history" the frame of reference produces interesting inter-connections. The narratives that speak to a historical positioning include Maria Firmina dos Reis' *Úrsula* (1859), Anajá Caetano's *Negra Efigênia: Paixão do Senhor Branco* (1966), Lia Vieira's *Chica da Silva – A Mulher que Inventou o Mar* (2001), Conceição Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicêncio* (2003), Miriam Alves and Maria Helena Lima's *Women Righting: Afro-Brazilian women's short fiction* (2005), Marilene Felinto's *As Mulheres de Tijucoapapo* (1982) and Ana Maria Gonçalves' *Um Defeito de Cor* (2006). They appear to lay claim to a discourse of afro-feminine elaboration of the past albeit each in a very distinctive way. Writing about the particular female subject today materializes out of an understanding of the unique long-term unfolding in Brazilian literature and culture associated with the

particular female protagonist. These works have broken through the construct of the silenced Other and re-routed that subjectivity to expose that character's complex internal personality. Additionally, inner textual structure has been totally modified to allow verbal emergence of that subjectivity totally devoid of any other form of institutional imposition that might distort her ability to produce discourse. Even as the process allows her to separate out of the crowd as it were, in no way does it divest her of contextual characteristics. She is a subject by virtue of infinite connects and disconnects. What is different here is the privileging of a diverse set of characteristics, specifically selected to surround her and support the total portrayal.

Úrsula (Reis 1859), *Negra Efigênia: Paixão do Senhor Branco* (Caetano 1966) and *Chica da Silva a Mulher que Inventou o Mar* (Vieira 2001) are interesting cases of the inescapable and disturbing nature of the subjugated enslaved female role. As black women's productions they circumvent the issues of black female historical portrayal, complicity, resistance, and aesthetic elaboration within the context of colonization and enslavement. The old slave woman's fate of death in *Úrsula* is sealed even as she is the source of abolitionist sentiment and glorification of Mother Africa. *Negra Efigênia* and *Chica da Silva* choose to identify her as the central figure in the original illicit interracial relationship between the white master and the black female slave that stands at the very heart of interpretations about the origins of Brazilian miscegenated culture. Caetano's circumstance of authorship seems lost in time.ⁱⁱ Oswaldo de Camargo suggests that it was a collaborative effort between Caetano and her partner. The introduction prepared by Eduardo de Oliveira confirms that the writer was "autodidata", or self-taught, and the novel represents her first venture into the world of Letters.ⁱⁱⁱ What drives a woman to produce a novel about the white male stronghold over the black female body well into the twentieth century is as important for discussion as is the contemplation of the literary place and value of such a work representative of a posture of self-depreciation culturally taught, now feeding the reactionary stance of invigorating discourse about the place of black women in society. This is Caetano's only work, published in 1966, a plot set around emancipation period. The main character, Efigênia is kidnapped and forced to marry a white plantation owner. The official ending of slavery on May 13, 1888 loses all historical power in this novel since the cruelty of the system remains untouched, undisturbed within the plantocracy structure, on the plantation site, behind closed doors, often, as the novel indicates, driven by the subtle authority of the *sinhas*, or wives of plantation owners. Physical punishment continues while, in Efigênia's case, everyone knows but no one denounces the union between *senhor* and *escravizada* (master and slave).

Similar critique might accompany the reading of *Chica da Silva*. Vieira's story on this famous slave woman is the only narrative about her done by an Afro-Brazilian woman writer, an action that complements the efforts by black women's organizations such as 'Criola' in Rio de Janeiro and 'Casa de Cultura da Mulher Negra' in Santos, São Paulo, to ennoble her name and legacy. The constant return to this fascinating story is discomfiting and encourages discussion around the improbabilities and original biases of historical discourse. Enthusiasm for the latter reproduces itself in television and film, ensuring within the national imagined image of self, her continuing widespread popularity especially in the realm of popular culture. Probably the most famous black woman ever known coming out of colonial Brazil, Chica's fate is sealed for she will forever be a referent in constant design and re-design, her body given over to the wills and fancies of each historical age that comes and goes. Vieira's storytelling joins the tradition of writing on the topic even as it will also merge toward the ongoing project within the black women's movement of compiling the names and activities of all the famous black women in Brazilian history.^{iv}

Carolina Maria de Jesus' *Quarto de Despejo* (1960), *Diário de Bitita* (1986), *Casa de Alvenaria* (1961), *Meu Estranho Diário* (1996), *Pedaços da Fome* (1963), and her numerous unpublished prose writings collected in a volume (Levine and Meihy 1999), along with Vera Tereza de Jesus' *Ela e a reclusão: o condenado poderia ser você* (1965), and Conceição Evaristo's *Becos da Memória* (2006) stand at the center of a discourse that presents itself as a writing from within the very difficult space of economic and social marginality. It is an expression characterized by deep agony attesting to the sense of hopelessness and entrapment that the narrating voice tries so hard to share. This is a literature about life in a variety of settings whether in the favela, in abject rural poverty, or another sphere of deprivation. The roots of this kind of writing are in the 1960s beginning with the rich and controversial legacy of Carolina Maria de Jesus who to date holds the distinction as the most prolific writer and whose *Quarto de Despejo* surrounds us with issues of sociological value and precarious literariness that continue to proffer interesting debate. The subsequent narratives within this genre that follow her lead are similar in the way their tone is revelatory, intent on humanizing particular human types so severely rejected within their own culture. Their spirit of Otherness makes it impossible for these texts to fit into any particular literary mould. At the same time they share a spirit of affirmation and profess to similar trajectories by virtue of the writer's background, the topic of impoverishment, and the issue of variegated narrating strategies.

Evaristo's *Becos da Memória* is absolutely profound in structure and implication and, following on the footsteps of Carolina Maria de Jesus' diaries, aligns well with a narrative from the slums. The legacy of black women writing from the perspective of the *favela* is not merely a rhetoric of poverty and marginalization. It serves the greater purpose of offering a deeper understanding of relationships of power and in-depth understanding of the possibilities and limitations of black female empowerment and economic prosperity within the social structure she has to navigate. This aesthetics of poverty creates tremendous unease in our field for it forces upon those of us who belong to the world of Letters reluctant recognition of personal prestige and privilege even as we elaborate discourses of emblematic support. *Becos* in many ways takes the Carolina Maria de Jesus' legacy forward by way of a symbolic reconfiguration of a state of tragic being, in this case a female child of the slums who longs to go to school and be a writer and who instead becomes the catalyst for one of the most sublime renditions of life in the slums of the 1950s. This otherwise depressive and inhumane sphere is made poetic by virtue of being transformed into the real, dynamic, and instant. The work feels its way through the world of a community unraveling its inner sense of self and presenting it in a way that engages the reader profoundly, altering forever the receptor's perception of the main protagonist in the process – the dweller therein. The occupants of that horrible space are like no other even as their dreams and aspirations confirm just how much they have in common with the rest of society. Officially characterized as *crônica* (chronicle), *Becos* truly proposes a new strategic approach, one that confirms the value of a deeper inner perception and interpretation perhaps made possible only by direct exposure and experience.^v Maria Nazareth Soares Fonseca confirms the interference experience lived plays in this writing. "Em *Becos da Memória*, Conceição Evaristo procura restaurar esses lugares em que a palavra viva circula, mesclada a outras linguagens que, ao mesmo tempo em que desvelam as "memórias subterrâneas", expõem-nas em suportes acessíveis somente aos que podem ler."^{vi}

A concentration of prose writing immediately beyond 1975 is available within the even-numbered anthologies of the *Cadernos Negros* series. The series is particularly interesting as a way of comprehending what over time has happened to women who are

writers and who have continued to support this [kind of] anthological production. *Cadernos Negros* has a particularly unique trajectory, one worth recording especially now that Esmeralda Ribeiro (along with Márcio Ribeiro) stands at the helm of this very successful venture as its principal organizer. What has the Afro-Brazilian woman writer achieved through this series? Would it have been possible otherwise? Her role as writer, the themes she chooses, her involvement in the design, printing and publication of the anthologies, her relationship with her male counterpart, and her view on issues of literary sophistication remain places of a gendered difference that, while they may vary from writer to writer, are important considerations long-term as they represent spheres of navigation and ultimately play a part in each writer's ability to attain fame and success.

There is no doubt that this particular literary legacy stands as valuable contributor toward the expansion of women's narrative. It registers as the longest self-sustaining publication in Latin America, an enduring legacy that in many ways has allowed its writers time to build careers. This decades-old publication enterprise confirms a legacy of commitment to the cause of black writing and has made it possible for those who continue to submit texts to perfect their artistry in prose and poetry. The single-authored writings that remain with them today are among productions from writers who have bloomed with the series. Sônia Fátima da Conceição, Maga, and Neuza Maria Pereira were the three women writers in a total of twelve writers to participate in the first collection of short stories, *Cadernos Negros 2 Contos* released in 1979. Celinha (Célia Aparecida Pereira), Sônia Fátima da Conceição and Geni Guimarães participated in *Cadernos Negros 4 Prosa* (1981), the only three women in a total of eighteen writers. Change came in the late 1980s for even as writers produced for the series many were driven to do move beyond the limitations of the short story narration and produce their own single-authored texts. In 1988 Esmeralda Ribeiro published *Malungos e Milongas*. Geni Guimarães launched *A Cor da Ternura* in 1988 and *Leite do Peito* in 1989, and Sônia Fátima da Conceição's *Marcas, Sonhos e Raízes* came out in 1991. At that time overall there was less female-authored prose than poetry. Sônia Fátima da Conceição, Esmeralda Ribeiro, Lia Vieira, Miriam Alves, Geni Guimarães, and Conceição Evaristo are the writers whose legacy converges on issues of race, gender, and writing during the first phase of the contemporary period.^{vii} *Cadernos Negros 16 Contos* (Barbosa et. al 1993) and *Cadernos Negros 24 Contos* (Ribeiro and Barbosa 2001) are the short story collections that have a majority of women writers by a very small margin.^{viii}

It is from 1993 that we observe in the short stories collections an improvement in the numbers of female-authored narrations in terms of percentages. These works are marked by the influences of their time. The advent of *Quilombhoje*, black movement activism, and a deep and lasting concern with the place of blacks in society accompanied by the ideals and enthusiasm of a black movement that modeled itself off of other such activism internationally meant that literary themes expressed concern about aspects of the community and the family. The narratives of the 1970s and 1980s are basic and direct, almost void of literary symbolism, stylistic manipulations, and certainly not given to complex elaborations. They represent the initial attempts at book-length writing by writers who at that time were perfecting the art of literary endeavor. The most sophisticated narratives came from Guimarães who stands out as the only prize winning writer of this period producing from the rural space. She is also known for her writing for children and her deep analysis of the effects of discrimination on the psyche of the child in the community, home, and school settings.^{ix}

Regarding the gendering of black narrative within *Cadernos Negros*, the case of Zula Gibi is equally compelling. Such presence inaugurates an openly black lesbian

literary voice in a space where concerns about the Afro-Brazilian condition takes precedence. One could argue in favor of such a move as a positive ideological thrust for a collection that has earned its value and distinction over time, as well as literary convenience, for such placement has served to cushion the socio-personal impact that accompanies such homoerotic artistry.^x Alves' (and Gibi's) intra-dialogue discussion in "Empunhando Bandeira – Diálogo de Poeta" (Alves 2002b) adds some clarification for it mirrors the debate introduced into the *Cadernos Negros* space. Alves, as the center, has to face off with Gibi whose arrival creates a new triple intersecting – black, lesbian, and female – provoking between the two voices (Alves/Gibi) an acute consciousness of their internal differences. At one level the two literatures can seem to stand against each other; at another, they will appear to dialogue in an atmosphere of reasonable co-existence. The original intentions of combating the adverse effects of invisibility, stereotyping, and relegation to unimportance remain as issues between the two voices, making this encounter a laboratory on the value and role of black lesbian writing within Afro-Brazilian literature and within gay Afro-Brazilian writing as a whole.

There is another kind of text that resides in that space in between literary and testimonial rendition; non-fiction and oral tradition serve as the preferred narrative types for resolving doubts about their capability in positions of power. Benedita da Silva's *Benedita da Silva: An Afro-Brazilian Woman's Story of Politics and Love* (1997) and Mãe Beata de Yemonjá's *Caroço de Dendê. A Sabedoria dos Terreiros-como ialorixás e babalorixás passam conhecimentos a seus filhos.* (1996) nourish the ideological mission of voicing and subject valuing. Textual formulations about politics and religion are strategic in arguments of feminine negotiations of public spheres of operation while their deliberate incorporation into this discussion benefits an advocacy of historical re-positioning. As producers of text, Silva and Yemonjá are instigators and designers of the politicized roles they inevitably play in these aesthetic representations of society.^{xi} This kind of text is intrinsically biographical but also much more since it brings to the forefront a narration at the intersection of politics and gender, myth and memory. Text becomes a space for verbal re-enactment and configuration of actual lived experience, worth re-living, and worthy as a new form of gendered historical discourse of achievement and leadership.

Maria Aparecida da Silva – Cidinha da Silva, Cristiane Sobral, Débora Almeida, Mel Adún, and Elizandra Souza (Mjiba) comprise the next/present generation of writers. While they do write narrative, Sobral and Almeida continue the legacy of black theater as playwrights, involved with stage, television, and film, as well as essayists and advocates of the black woman's cause.^{xii} *Uma Boneca no Lixo* (Sobral, performed in 1998) and *Sete Ventos* (Almeida, performed in 2010) are revelatory in their approach to issues of acting and discrimination. Even as they protest the lack of fair representation within the profession both actors continually formulate and design their own space that inclines towards the didactic in both speech and enactment. From ancestrality to HIV Aids, they target their community by blending the dramatic with the popular, an instructive combination of performing and teaching. Sobral teaches theater at a university in Brasília and has received awards for *Uma boneca no lixo* ('Prêmio de montagem' GDF 1998) and *Dra. Sida* ('Prêmio Ministério da Saúde' 2000). Her latest play is *Comédia do Absurdo* (unpublished).^{xiii}

Maria Aparecida da Silva writes using the name Cidinha da Silva and has two single-authored texts, *Cada Tridente em seu lugar* (2006) and *Você me deixe, viu? Eu vou bater meu tambor!* (2008). Cidinha represents the next generation of narrative discourse, born into consciousness by way of longstanding affiliation with the black women's movement, educated in the discourse of gender and negritude, and now prepared to move beyond that to create her own form of expression.^{xiv} Her words

indicate her sense of allegiance, desire for innovation, and individualistic creativity. When interviewed, she was asked the question “what major events in Brazilian history have continued to inspire and motivate you?” Her answer was; “Muitos autores e autoras negros principalmente numa determinada fase histórica, por exemplo, aqueles incluídos no livro *A Razão da Chama* de Oswaldo de Camargo, tinham uma perspectiva de reescrever a história brasileira na perspectiva dos negros, de construir uma história afro-brasileira. Eu não me sinto vinculada a esse momento ou essa necessidade. Como eu falei antes, eu gozo do benefício de ter tido muita gente que me antecedeu que fez uma série de coisas que eu não preciso mais fazer. Então eu sou muito mais livre para escrever agora. Sinceramente não tenho uma referência porque eu não sinto esta motivação para com a minha obra.” (Cidinha da Silva 2009). This sensation of *liberdade de expressão* (the freedom to write anything) takes this writing beyond the twentieth century adhesion to the cause, as women writers like Cidinha now feel free to move on, to perhaps dedicate their creative energies towards varying degrees of literariness. Arguably the question remains as to the contextualization of their writing and the legitimacy of the term “Afro-Brazilian literature” when referring to it. Even as Cidinha and others like her veer away from the style of a sociological nature to literary writing and a strong inclination to realism, her focus continues to be the black subject, whether textually mentioned or not. Her strategy of a certain rejection of open alliance with the cause in no way signifies an absolute divorce from the spirit of the literature.

Research and Teaching Strategies. Reflections

What are the strategies needed for a theory of black female aesthetics in Brazil? It is important to understand that in broad cultural terms the afro-feminine question allies itself with that of blacks generally in literary history. At the same time it is not easy to map her place textually which is the reason why it becomes interesting to maintain a certain distance from historical categories, periods, or guiding principles of analysis. Initially, so few voices have made it to publication status that setting their discourse in tune with historical literary periodizations might actually be doing them injustice. A good example is the single female authored narrative of the nineteenth century. Arguing Maria Firmina dos Reis as writing in Romanticism can only go so far, for the parameters of that genre limit literary strategies of gender that seek to produce a fruitful and long-term perspective of Reis’ significance in connection with the black female legacy in Brazilian culture.

On the other hand we can argue for conditional convergences both thematic and biographical even as these do not necessarily align in place or time. As writers they have not had access to the conditions of literary prosperity, nor have they had opportunities for accompanying, being a part of or enjoying their attained status of authorship and that all prestigious denomination that normally signals and confirms incorporation into the mainstream literary canon. The latter has always been closely allied with notions of nationhood. A case in point is Carolina Maria de Jesus whose numerous textual ramblings, inventions, and explorations will continue to create unease within the system for they defy categorization, are deeply disturbing due to a certain unpleasing literary form, and molest from a socio-economic point of view, for in no way can they be made to coincide with a discourse of nationhood that claims to be taking Brazil forward into a prosperous and industrialized modernity. Evaristo’s character Ponciá is a slap in the face of Brazilian post-modernity and the notion of harmonious national construction even as her symbolic discourse is precise in its molding of the time and spaces needed to project forth her character’s internal anguish.

The question of quantity comes into the discussion in a significant way for it is directly connected to concerns about cultural inclusion, editorial access, and textual

visibility. Biographical compilers have catalog and biographical summations of writers and works, indeed both Camargo's *O Negro Escrito* and Sousa's *Seleção Literária Afro-brasileira: Catálogo de Autores* confirm that the number of male writers trumps that of women writers every time. Here is a situation that undermines arguments in support of a case for black women's writings in Latin America on the whole, especially if the strategy up front is that there should ideally be a significantly high number of published texts, recognized by officialdom, and published by the esteemed presses of the moment. The delayed emergence of a reasonable number of works by black women's writings, rather than perceived as a literary handicap, should instead serve as an opening for theoretical analyses around the style of production of literature and current formats for the telling of literary history. Further, even as the delayed access to social legitimacy, citizenship, and education provide the rationale needed to explain the 21st century increased production, at the same time, history confirms that women have always been writing, not necessarily publishing. The various mechanisms of oppression and a total lack of recognition within the incumbent literary circles made notions of a literary school impossible and the elaboration of a historical panoramic view of black Brazilian female activity a 21st century academic achievement. Working the area prior to 1970 continues to be quite a challenge for it means to speak of silences, the silenced, and requires most attention in the literary sketches available in texts almost all of which are committed to other battles and interests.

With the expansion of creative writing among women of color has come the emergence of scholarly publications by the writers themselves. This is a tradition of writing in place since the 1970s as writers accompanied their poetic and prose renditions with reflections on writing, cultural invisibility, and black movement activism. The emergence of an incestuous intertextuality is to blame on the virtual non-existence between 1970 and 1990s of any kind of critical mass of material on the subject of black literature and nothing on black women's writings in Brazil. The critical theory in place today owes its birth and expansion to the writers themselves who, largely ignored by the lettered scholars and university academics, went ahead and reflected on their own and each other's production. Today, of course there is an expansive availability of studies available online and in print. The tradition continues as Evaristo, Alves, Ribeiro, Silva among others provide articles, essays, and conference presentations on a range of subject matters – affirmative action, black feminism, African literature, and politics of poetics to mention a few. There is a clear interconnectedness, an absolute consciousness of spirit when it comes to acknowledging the cultural specifics of afro-gendered subjectivity as well as creative urge.^{xv}

Where do we stand in terms of literary acknowledgement and organization of the subject area? The texts are in place as are the cultural frames of reference towards which the writings extend themselves, literally every possible direction and design that implicates the national black populace. Even though the volume of writings is contemporary this can be positive for as critical hindsight they enrich contemplations of the previous historical literary text and offer newer approaches to literary analysis. The pairing of *Úrsula* with her producer is a vital reworking, a needed strategy for Maria Firmina dos Reis in light of her contextualized repression as its creator, which was all she would have been offered at the time of her existence. To bestow upon writers the ideology of lettered status reinforces the ideals of their mission in history, even as it creates definitive distance between forms of demoralizing past status and the authority they now embrace as theirs by right.

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Notes

ⁱ Miriam Alves was among the first writers of the earlier *Quilombhoje* group to produce a single-authored poetic anthology. *Momentos de Busca* came out in 1983. As was the norm among writers at the time, Alves confirms that she edited, financed, and printed it herself.

ⁱⁱ In July 2004 and June 2009 in São Paulo I discussed this novel with Oswaldo de Camargo. He confirmed that it is one of the interesting and curious works in his library collection precisely because he knows very little about the writer.

ⁱⁱⁱ Oliveira, 11.

^{iv} Criola (2010), Furtado (2009), Rufino et.al.1986.

^v Evaristo's own childhood growing up in a slum in a single parent family surrounded by a large extended family played an important part in her ability to engage with the topic in a style that clearly suggests very intimate and personal knowledge of the sense of longing and abandonment responsible for the human comportment in this setting. (Information obtained in a discussion with Evaristo, November 2007, University of Tennessee).

^{vi} Soares Fonseca, 17.

^{vii} Also consult Emanuelle K.F. Oliveira, 190-206.

^{viii} This is because in *Cadernos Negros 16* (Barbosa et.al 1993) a short story was written by two women and Miriam Alves published as Zula Gibi in *Cadernos Negros 24* (Ribeiro and Barbosa 2001).

^{ix} Guimarães 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1988a, 1988b. Guimarães was very productive during the 1980s and 1990s also producing two anthologies of poetry, children's books, and various contributions to anthologies. She was awarded the *Prêmio Jabuti* in 1990 and the *Prêmio Aldolfo Aizen* in 1992 by the Brazilian Academy of Letters for *A Cor da Ternura*.

^x Alves (2002b,161). Zula Gibi's "Abajur" stands out among the short narratives. It was re-published in *Women Righting* (Alves 2005, 72-87).

^{xi} Benedita da Silva's *Dia Nacional da Consciência Negra* (1996) connects with her testimonial biography as its content confirms her allegiance with black activism as well as the general direction of her writing that over time continues to support her political agenda.

^{xii} Sobral and Almeida participate in the 'Forum Nacional de Performance Negra', an organization of black actors that brings together performers and writers from across the nation. The first Forum conference took place from May 30 to June 1, 2005 in Salvador Bahia. (Mello and Bairos, 2005).

^{xiii} Sobral (2009), Almeida (2010).

^{xiv} Cidinha da Silva (2003).

^{xv} Consult: Quilombhoje 1985; Cuti (Luiz Silva), Alves and Xavier 1987; Alves 1995, 2002, 2010; Evaristo 2007.

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A cidade de Salvador e o carnaval como mito e simulacro

by Ari Lima

Este artigo é uma decorrência do convite que recebi da Fundação Cultural Palmares, órgão vinculado ao Ministério da Cultura do Brasil, em fevereiro de 2010, de modo a colaborar nas discussões propostas para uma Pré-Conferência Nacional de Cultura. Naquela ocasião, foi-me solicitado desenvolver o argumento da cidade como espaço de produção, intervenção, diálogos, trocas culturais, garantias de direito e acesso a bens culturais. Neste sentido, para instigar o debate sobre a “cultura” e a “cidade” tomei a cidade brasileira que melhor conheço, Salvador, meu espaço de pertencimento e referência¹ fundamental, e sua festa momesca², nosso emblemático carnaval, que normalmente ocorre no mês de fevereiro entre uma quinta e uma terça-feira, como pontos de partida.

Inicialmente, tive dificuldade em atender a provocação feita, na medida em que aquela parecia solicitar a adesão a uma assertiva. Ou seja, senti-me convocado a aderir ao argumento de uma provável política cultural do Estado brasileiro que parece ter seu germe de sentido na compreensão da polis como espaço vocacionado à diversidade cultural, à pluralidade e justaposição de pontos de vistas, à equivalência ideológica e simbólica de sujeitos e produções culturais, à democracia. Não compartilho deste ponto de vista em relação às cidades brasileiras e particularmente em relação à cidade de Salvador. Compreendo que, por um lado, todas as nossas cidades-referência são espaços culturais multirreferenciados, porém nossa experiência de polis, de cidade, me parece um simulacro³ da noção de urbanidade que prevê como fundante o diálogo, a troca e o acesso equitativo a bens culturais. Por outro lado, é digno de nota que desde o ano de 2003, início da “era Lula”, com a chegada do ex-presidente Luís Inácio Lula da Silva e do Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) ao poder ocorreram iniciativas oficiais no sentido de conceber políticas públicas para a cultura que atendessem a diversos segmentos sociais e diversas regiões culturais do Brasil. Entretanto, apesar dos esforços, muitas vezes não se ultrapassou as boas intenções, os gestos protocolares ou as boas ações não foram devidamente concebidas e implementadas (ver LIMA, 2011).

No caso de Salvador, nossa experiência de cidade parece ter como fundante a contínua reprodução de hierarquias, sobretudo a racial, a exclusão socioeconômica, a repulsa a dissensão e ao conflito de opiniões e ideias. Enfim, fundante em nossa experiência de cidade é o autoritarismo e a pretensão homogeneizante que se manifesta em discursos oficiais e midiáticos.

Como se sabe, no Século XVI, a descoberta e conquista portuguesa do território que mais tarde receberia o nome de “Brasil” se deu através do futuro Estado da Bahia que em quase toda sua história teve como capital a cidade de Salvador. Segundo Thales de Azevedo (1969), num primeiro momento, os índios tapuias habitaram a região da futura cidade de Salvador. Em seguida, no início da colonização portuguesa, os índios tupis forçaram o deslocamento dos tapuias para outras regiões. No Século XVII, já conviveriam na cidade de Salvador índios tupis, portugueses, negros africanos escravizados, mestiços livres e escravos nascidos do cruzamento entre brancos portugueses, negros africanos e indígenas. Até o início do Século XVIII, Salvador era a sede, a maior e mais importante cidade da colônia portuguesa no Brasil. Deste modo, mesmo quando perdeu importância econômica e política, perdeu o posto de sede da colônia para a cidade do Rio de Janeiro, Salvador permaneceu no imaginário como uma espécie de mito de raiz do modelo de sociedade implantada no Brasil. Ou

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seja, em outras regiões, no Estado da Bahia e em sua capital Salvador permanece o sentimento e o argumento histórico de lugar onde tudo começou.

Chegado o Século XIX, é oportuna a descrição que a historiadora Kátia M. de Queirós Mattoso (1992) faz da cidade de Salvador. Segundo Mattoso, tratava-se de uma cidade dividida em dois grandes núcleos habitacionais, de administração e comércio. A Cidade Alta funcionava basicamente como zona administrativa e espaço residencial da elite branca. A Cidade Baixa funcionava como zona portuária, comercial e residência de brancos pobres, mestiços e negros. De um modo geral, Salvador era suja, mal iluminada, mal drenada, mal pavimentada, mal policiada. Por outro lado, era também uma cidade pródiga em praças arejadas, recantos bucólicos, praias de areia fina, centenas de fontes e poços, canteiros e jardins. “Somavam mais de vinte as esplanadas e praças onde a população podia se reunir por ocasião de uma festa (e como os baianos gostam de festas!)”. A rua era um lugar de comer e beber, quase nunca freqüentado por mulheres brancas “de família”, mas expressivamente composta por negras “ganhadeiras” ou negros que prestavam todo tipo de serviço manual ou braçal (p.437; 444). Além disso, afirma a autora sobre a Salvador do Século XIX:

O branco era sempre, em suma, um aristocrata em potencial, assim como eram nobres em potencial os grandes negociantes e os letrados de Portugal. (...) No outro extremo da escala social estavam os escravos. (...) O que importa sublinhar aqui é que, embora fossem dadas aos escravos oportunidades extremamente variadas de se libertar e as alforrias fossem freqüentes, elas não beneficiavam a maioria, e muito menos permitiram à maioria dos beneficiados uma ascensão fácil na escala social. (...) Entre os extremos representados por brancos livres e negros escravos – diferentes pelo estatuto jurídico, a cor da pele, as origens religiosas e culturais e as atitudes mentais – alocava-se uma massa heterogênea, composta de brancos, mulatos e negros de todas as tonalidades. (...) Era um agrupamento em que os indivíduos se ordenavam em categorias fundadas na cor – as confrarias religiosas são um bom exemplo disso –, mas também no ofício exercido e no prestígio social. O modelo de sociedade ideal cultivado nesse grupo tão heteróclito do ponto de vista das origens e dos graus de aculturação de seus membros era, como não podia deixar de ser, o proposto pelos brancos (MATTOSO, 1992: p.590-591).

No Século XX, anos 1950, novamente Thales de Azevedo afirmava sobre Salvador:

Em nossos dias, para os baianos mais modestos, a sociedade local compõe-se dos “ricos e dos pobres”. Os ricos são os brancos, os que “não pegam no pesado”, isto é, “os que trabalham com a cabeça”, os que usam gravata, os doutores, os empregados do Governo, os negociantes fortes; os pobres são os pretos, “os que suam” fazendo o trabalho manual e braçal, os humildes da terminologia política derivada da Ditadura. É a este último grupo que se costuma chamar “a gente do povo” ou simplesmente “o povo”; um indivíduo deste grupo é muitas vezes descrito no noticiário dos jornais como “um popular” (AZEVEDO, 1996: p. 170).

Para Azevedo, a cidade de Salvador acomodava duas ordens distintas de diferenciações, uma baseada em grupos de prestígio (cor) e outra baseada em distinções econômicas (classe). A articulação destas duas dimensões emprestaria caráter estrutural às diferenciações de cor, era um componente da estrutura social. Salvador, com uma sociedade de *status* (grupos de prestígio herdados do colonialismo escravista), assimilaria o ideal de uma sociedade de classes, sendo que a cor como indicadora do *status* permanecia como chave para esta passagem. E o *status* resultava de uma combinação de fatores como nascimento e tipo físico, que se deixam modificar, até certo ponto, pela fortuna, pela ocupação e pela educação.

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Mais recentemente Jacques D'Adesky (1997: p.312) argumenta que a ocupação do espaço público na cidade Salvador através da instalação de fontes ornamentais, monumentos, estátuas e bustos encontrados nas ruas, nos parques e nas praças atestam a existência de um corte social e de uma “ruptura étnica, uma vez que os negros são quase totalmente ignorados dessa forma de representação espacial”, o que pode ser entendido como uma falta de poder de autorrepresentação deste segmento social.

De modo equivalente, Osmundo de Araújo Pinho (1998-1999), em um estudo sobre a reocupação do Centro Histórico da cidade Salvador, o Pelourinho, argumenta como este “espaço de referência” traduz o que define como “Idéia de Bahia” ao narrar a realidade social cruel e violenta da cidade de Salvador como festiva e autoemulativa.

Convém dizer que por “Idéia de Bahia” entendo: 1º o “sentimento” de diferença que nós baianos temos em relação ao resto do país e do mundo; 2º que este “sentimento” é constituído a partir de narrativas específicas; 3º que estas narrativas condensam conteúdos positivos particulares; 4º estes conteúdos são, também, ideológicos – no sentido de que agem como “um mapa” para uma estrutura social tensionada por contradições; 5º que esta ideologia é base para a construção de um consenso político para a dominação, como é condição de reprodução de uma multiplicidade de bens simbólicos, negociados no mercado internacional da cultura (PINHO, 1998-1999: p.259).

A despeito do que já foi dito, entretanto, as narrativas dos órgãos oficiais, tais como a Emtursa, responsável pela administração do turismo municipal, a Bahiatursa, responsável pela administração do turismo no Estado da Bahia, o discurso oficioso de pessoas comuns, de publicitários, de personalidades locais, da mídia e artistas baianos que comercializam “Idéia de Bahia” continua a apresentar a cidade de Salvador como espaço de “profusão de alegria e diversidade cultural”, “terra de todos nós”, “preferência nacional dos turistas”. Abaixo segue um pequeno texto sobre o carnaval de Salvador, disponível no site oficial da Bahiatursa:

“Ah! Imagina só, que loucura essa mistura. Alegria, alegria é o estado, que chamamos Bahia. De todos os santos, encantos e axé. Sagrado e profano, o baiano é: carnaval...”. Hino maior do carnaval da Bahia, a música “Chame gente”, de Moraes Moreira, resume com perfeição; não apenas o espírito democrático, as belezas e a alegria incomparável da cidade de Salvador, mas principalmente, o frenesi sentido aqui todos os meses de fevereiro, durante a maior festa popular a céu aberto do planeta.

Dentro dos blocos de trio, na “pipoca” em meio à multidão, ou nos luxuosos camarotes, o folião viverá experiências transcendentais, que elevarão a sua adrenalina e contentamento a um limite nunca antes atingido. Nos seis dias de uma festa praticamente ininterrupta, os grandes nomes de nossa música estarão reunidos nos 26 km de ruas e avenidas da cidade, à bordo de seus trios e envolvidos por seus blocos, acionando as engrenagens desta imensa fábrica de sonhos (www.bahia.com.br/viverbahia/carnaval. Acessado em 20 de fevereiro de 2012).

E é justamente no período que antecede e durante a festa do carnaval que este discurso mais se prolifera. Neste momento, a cidade aparece como um simulacro urbano representado através de produções culturais e da criação de modos de circulação e acesso às mesmas que, por um lado, remete à cidade em seu cotidiano, mas por outro lado se descola deste mesmo cotidiano. A propósito, durante o carnaval de 2010, circulou na internet um depoimento do suposto inventor da *Axé Music*⁴, o músico baiano Luiz Caldas que afirmava: “*Axé Music* não é estilo musical é democracia musical”. Na entrevista, várias vezes o próprio Luiz Caldas, outros artistas e vários dos

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seus fãs lembraram o texto da emblemática canção de *Axé Music* composta por Caldas e Paulinho Camafeu há 25 anos:

Nega do cabelo duro
Que não gosta de pentear
Quando passa na boca do tubo
O negão começa a gritar
Pega ela aí
Pra quê?
Pra passar batom
De que cor?
De violeta
Na boca e na porta do céu
Na boca e na **bochecha**

Esta canção teve grande aceitação popular, por um lado, porém, por outro lado, gerou indignação na medida em que remetia à ridicularização e objetificação da mulher negra. Ocorre que desde a ascensão e consolidação da *Axé Music*, as letras das canções repetiram muitas vezes este discurso. Além disso, o texto na canção popular, executada no carnaval baiano, vem se reduzindo e muitas vezes se esgota basicamente em um refrão, exaustivamente repetido. Outras vezes, desde o apelo de um refrão ou de letras minimalistas, os movimentos de quem ouve são óbvios. Ou seja, aboliu-se a dança ou restringe-se a ação coreográfica popular em nome de um erotismo que repete o negro e a cultura afrobaiana como realidade objetificada e estereotipada.

Neste sentido, entre os anos 1998 e 2001, observei e estudei, em vários bairros periféricos da cidade de Salvador, o que se chamava de *ensaios de pagode* ou *pagodes*, uma variação baiana do samba. Num primeiro momento, o *pagode* não compunha o repertório de ritmos e canções executadas no carnaval de Salvador. Os chamados *ensaios de pagode* ocorriam fora do calendário do carnaval, eram produzidos e consumidos por uma população jovem, pobre e negra da cidade em territórios⁵ onde se performava a raça, o gênero e a sexualidade. A atitude performativa de garotas e rapazes se caracterizava por uma aparente informalidade no palco e na plateia, ao mesmo tempo em que demarcava territórios daqueles que permaneciam no palco, de rapazes heterossexuais, de rapazes homossexuais, de garotas e daqueles que apenas observavam na plateia. Havia uma aparente informalidade manifestada no vestuário quase sempre mínimo, ou se não mínimo, confortável, com poucos acessórios; na interação pela dança e olhares quase sem palavras. Essa aparente informalidade, entretanto, se diluía uma vez que todos estavam sempre muito preocupados com a aparência. Com a exibição de músculos, no caso dos rapazes, com a exibição ou delineamento de certas partes do corpo, tais como pernas, quadris, cintura, umbigo e colo, no caso das garotas, ou com a exibição de complexas coreografias e do uso do cabelo, nos casos dos “viados” – como popularmente são chamados os homossexuais – e dos rapazes heterossexuais que, em grupos, dançavam exaustivamente.

Os “viados” e rapazes heterossexuais, exímios dançarinos, eram minuciosos também na escolha dos tecidos e cores de roupas e acessórios em voga. Muito vaidosos, delineavam as sobrancelhas, pintavam e usavam fixadores de penteados nos cabelos. Além disso, essa informalidade se desfazia também quando os *performers* masculinos e heterossexuais, do palco, se dirigiam ao público, em especial às garotas com bordões conhecidos, ensaiados e reincidentes em apresentações de diferentes bandas de pagode: “quem gostou bate palmas!” “quero ouvir o grito das gatinhas...” “quero ouvir o grito dos homens...” “quem for viado levante a mão!”.

De fato, nos *ensaios de pagode*, a moda do vestuário e acessórios, as danças, a manipulação do corpo, o discurso sobre a raça e ideias de Bahia eram indicativos de uma “nova etnicidade”, baseada em marcas identitárias globalizadas e comodificadas, mas eram também indicativos de autoconhecimento e sentimentos étnicos e raciais compartilhados através da compreensão e reprodução de imagens e representações de si racializadas, de um discurso sobre a violência racial e de uma sexualidade que elaborava discurso sobre o feminino e, de modo particular, sobre o masculino negro.

Assim como em outras músicas afrodiaspóricas, também no *pagode baiano*, os homens, mais os hetero do que os homossexuais, permaneciam no centro. Ocorria também uma mobilidade de gênero de *pagodeiros*, através de uma *simultaneidade discursiva* (ver HENDERSON, 1994), quando diferença e identidade de gênero se relacionavam à diferença e identidade racial. Ou seja, a mobilidade de gênero e sexualidade realizada pelo masculino através das performances era suportada pelo feminino que absorvia – através da performance que seria normalmente associada às mulheres – homens negros, hetero e homossexuais, pobres, sub-escolarizados e sub-empregados. Deste modo, no *pagode baiano*, a masculinidade de jovens negros e pobres desarticulava certezas sobre o macho, porém reacomodava idéias sobre a raça, sobre o corpo negro, elaboradas pelo branco.

É importante observar que se a linguagem do corpo parece desempenhar um papel crucial na construção do gênero no Brasil (ver PARKER, 1991), para os negros, o papel desta linguagem é sobredeterminado em relação aos brancos quando se trata de compreender e elaborar a si mesmos. Normalmente, o homem jovem, negro, *pagodeiro*, heterossexual não possuía trabalho formal, tinha baixo poder de consumo, baixo nível de escolaridade e compensava a dificuldade de acesso às mulheres através do consumo do corpo ou contiguidade identitária ao “viado”, o que determinava, por um lado, sua emasculação em relação ao homem branco. Por outro lado, projetado e autoelaborado como falo animal, insertor e devorador, voltava hipóvirilizado em relação ao mesmo homem branco. Estas ideias se manifestavam não somente em construções simbólicas e/ou discursivas, em papéis e categorias sexuais, em letras de canções, mas também em performances conformadas através de hábitos de postura, movimentos corporais e vestuário.

Enfim, embora os *ensaios de pagode* em Salvador não fossem territórios exclusivos de rapazes heterossexuais, era um evento etnomusicológico bastante determinado por um ponto de vista masculino e heterossexual. A ênfase crítica no masculino heterossexual permitia pensar sobre a raça, através daquele que contextualmente era hegemônico, ou pensar sobre o poder do masculino, quando este era enfraquecido pelas vicissitudes da representação da raça. Permitia também constatar como a ironia, a ambiguidade sexual do *pagodeiro* heterossexual lhe autorizava a “ter um pouco de viadagem” desde que atualizasse um modelo hegemônico de masculinidade negra através da ritualização da violência, do sexismo, da homofobia e da dedicação ao falo.

A partir do momento em que o *pagode* alcançou grande aceitação popular e se evidenciou para o mercado da música e do carnaval como um bom negócio, houve um reconfiguração do mesmo de modo a que melhor se adequasse à lógica espetacular e ao modelo de sucesso da *Axé Music*. Uma evidência disso é a maior ênfase na performance individual de vocalistas e menos ênfase no trabalho coletivo de todos os músicos que compõem as bandas. Outro aspecto desta transformação é a ampliação do espectro de consumidores desta música o que acarreta um recorte novo de classe e cor e atenuação das ousadias comportamentais e inventividade nas letras de canções e ritmo.

Todas as vezes que isto ocorre a experiência com a música se estreita, os artistas de todas as tendências musicais são compelidos ao elogio e afirmação da *Axé*

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Music como o viés, por excelência, da criação e produção musical. Isto porque esta parece ser a única possibilidade de sobreviver no mercado e paradoxalmente diversificar o espetáculo do carnaval. Ou seja, as mais variadas tendências musicais acabam por aderir ao ponto de vista que toda música se resolve como *Axé Music*. De fato, apesar de se atribuir ao carnaval uma suposta cena de inversões simbólicas, de trocas culturais, hoje no carnaval da cidade de Salvador não se constitui o diálogo, não há intervenção nem troca cultural no sentido que normalmente os próprios músicos invocam quando utilizam a expressão *groove* ou o verbo *gruvar* em momentos de experimentação e criação musical. Há mercado e cada vez mais variações de mercado que exigem a repetição ou readequação de um formato estético bem sucedido comercialmente.

Vale a pena aqui remeter também à história do Grupo Cultural Olodum e ao seu impacto estético, político e comercial na cidade de Salvador e na cultura do carnaval. Há cerca de 30 anos, no finalzinho da década em que se nutriram efervescentes esperanças de transformação e sublimação da triste e dessemelhante realidade em que permanecemos, o Grupo Cultural Olodum estreou com a pretensão de “fazer cultura” e fazer a diferença para além do carnaval. Ocupou o estigmatizado espaço do Pelourinho que deixou de ser apenas espaço de pertencimento de prostitutas, criminosos e despossuídos e deu visibilidade à cultura produzida naquele lugar. Ali se percebia a intenção de que o quadro atual, já esboçado, viesse a ser inoculado ou ao menos interceptado por um novo sopro de esperança. Naquele momento, o Olodum estabeleceu uma nova clivagem no carnaval, elaborou um discurso étnicomusical que ultrapassou a referência mítica negroafricana. A negritude com o Olodum continuou sendo a revelação da beleza, da energia, da dignidade do ser negro, mas foi também colocada como uma questão política diante de públicos dispersos na diáspora, heterogêneos, negros e brancos. Além disso, o Olodum disseminou uma sonoridade original elaborada por músicos negros da cidade, o *samba-reggae*.

Acontece que com o passar dos anos, através da presença do Olodum no carnaval, garantiu-se um retorno simbólico e econômico daquilo que o patrimônio cultural negro expressa, mas por outro lado, garantiu-se apenas uma sobrevida institucionalizada desse patrimônio no carnaval. Isto porque, em cerca de 30 anos de existência do Grupo Cultural Olodum, constatamos os limites que uma produção cultural nestes termos enfrenta para redefinir a vida simbólica e material de uma grande massa de indivíduos negros. Ou seja, aqueles que fazem, aqueles que administram e aqueles que “curtem” o carnaval se responsabilizam insuficientemente, pela dimensão constitutiva do carnaval da Bahia, sua problemática particular, que é seu viés popular e participativo. Acredito mesmo que estejam convencidos que este carnaval, por si só, como ele hoje se estrutura, já se oferece como circunstância de elogio e promoção da participação popular ampla e diversificada, até porque é assim que os meios de comunicação, os formadores de opinião, artistas consagrados e os organizadores o divulgam.

Bom seria que além de produzir imagens e imaginário alternativos à norma vigente, entidades como o Olodum dispusessem também de um aparato econômico e tecnológico que permitisse um tratamento estético e político de outra ordem das imagens capturadas nas ruas e do imaginário produzidos e disseminados entre aqueles que fazem, que administram e “curtem” o carnaval. Ou seja, bom seria que uns agentes do carnaval pudessem falar para si mesmos de modo que outros pudessem também se entreter, os ouvir e, digamos, democraticamente, reorientar suas ações.

Enfim, a experiência do Olodum nos mostra que estamos diante de uma questão bastante complexa. A propósito, Milton Moura comenta o trabalho sobre o Olodum da pesquisadora Petra Schaeber:

(...) em Carro do Ano, Celular, Antena Parabólica: Símbolos de uma Vida Melhor? – Ascensão Social de Negros-Mestiços através de Grupos Culturais em Salvador – o Exemplo do Olodum (1999) [..] a] autora pergunta o que se ganhou com a diferenciação de alguns profissionais no âmbito da música afro-carnavalesca, lembrando que a diferenciação se traduz no ingresso dos artistas no consumo típico de classe média, não se verificando propriamente uma redefinição radical de sua posição social. Por outro lado, o surgimento dos blocos afro é colocado como um fator de contradição numa sociedade racista. Recorrendo a Bourdieu, Petra Schaeber contextualiza a situação dos artistas do Olodum como reformatação da posição social numa sociedade que vem mudando rapidamente:

O exercício de direitos não-materiais, como, por exemplo, a influência na vida política e cultural ou o exercício de cidadania, é indício da posição social – como a presença na mídia ou na vida pública. Entre o universo das condições sócio-econômicas e o universo dos estilos de vida, existem várias interdependências e são estas interações que definem a posição social (Schaeber, 1999:57-8).

Contudo, o que lhe parece mais importante continua sendo o fenótipo. A própria Negritude é o principal capital simbólico destes jovens e adolescentes. A autora sublinha os limites da ascensão destes artistas baseada no consumo de alguns itens emblemáticos. Quanto mais progridem, mais se espera deles que *se comportem bem*, ou seja, de acordo com os valores dominantes na sociedade; daí o capricho nos trajes, calçados e adereços. Isto não os exime, contudo, da discriminação. O prestígio alcançado frente aos outros negros e aos outros interlocutores e interlocutoras é especialmente apreciado. O perfil do jovem negro baiano bem sucedido como artista e macho parece o máximo a que almejam os tantos jovens negros baianos dispostos a corresponder a tal posto...

Aos efeitos desta pesquisa, interessa captar o que está subjacente à reflexão de Petra Schaeber e outros pesquisadores: a expectativa – ou, quem sabe, a cobrança – de que a ascensão dos afrodescendentes na cena midiática pudesse acarretar um maior reconhecimento social. Ou seja, a expectativa – ou esperança? – de que o Carnaval pudesse contribuir para modificar estruturalmente a sociedade baiana, no sentido de diminuir a desigualdade em termos de renda, de maximizar as oportunidades de realização da cidadania etc..., o que não se verifica (MOURA, 2001: p.191-192).

Vale ainda comparar dois modelos de carnaval no Brasil, o baiano e o carioca, que durante alguns anos polarizaram o debate sobre a democratização da festa momesca e os excessos gerados pela influência de interesses do mercado da indústria da cultura. Embora esta polêmica tenha se atenuado com a crescente mercantilização do carnaval baiano, na Bahia, o carnaval carioca sempre foi criticado pelo seu “excesso de teatralidade”, pela “mesmice” dos desfiles das escolas de samba. Na verdade, quem conhece razoavelmente o Rio de Janeiro sabe que embora a Riotur, empresa responsável pela administração do turismo da cidade do Rio, o governo municipal, o governo estadual e a mídia, sobretudo a televisiva, direcionem quase todos os esforços para os desfiles das grandes escolas, este carnaval não se restringe às imagens do sambódromo⁶ veiculadas pelas redes de televisão. As pequenas escolas, a farra dos clubes, as bandas - A Banda de Ipanema é digna de nota -, os blocos⁷ afro, o espaço do Terreirão também fazem o carnaval carioca. De fato, esta polarização na Bahia, em relação ao carnaval carioca, foi produzida e sedimentada pela mídia. Por outro lado, do ponto de vista da mídia - a televisiva sempre com mais responsabilidade - o carnaval baiano foi tido como um teatro ruim, pobre de imagens e sem inventividade, que tendia à pasteurização.

De fato, o carnaval baiano tende à pasteurização na medida em que há uma grande dificuldade de ocupação de espaço físico e visibilidade midiática para os blocos afro, os afoxés, as batucadas, os sambões, os blocos de índio e artistas emergentes que

não se adequam ao formato dos blocos e artistas famosos da *Axé Music*. Deste modo, o carnaval baiano veiculado na mídia também pode ser caracterizado pela mesmice e excesso de teatralidade uma vez que os artistas e blocos de trio da *Axé Music* executam um ritual muito parecido, cantam um repertório parecido e o público que se diverte nos blocos conduzidos por estes artistas tendem a homogeneidade no que diz respeito ao comportamento e um recorte de classe e cor. Ou seja, nos blocos afro, nos afoxés, nas batucadas, nos sambões, nos blocos de índios se concentram negros ou quase negros de classe baixa. Nos blocos de trio da *Axé Music* se concentram brancos ou quase brancos de classe média e alta. Aliás, há alguns anos atrás alguns jornalistas anunciavam as pessoas do primeiro grupo de blocos de carnaval como “gente animada” e, por outro lado, as pessoas do segundo grupo de blocos como “gente bonita”.

Então, democracia, espontaneidade e diversidade, pilares que formadores de opinião, promotores oficiais e a mídia baiana escolheram para polarizar o carnaval baiano contra o carnaval carioca, são argumentos falaciosos. Não existe democracia na distribuição de recursos e no espaço que a mídia oferece a cada um dos segmentos do carnaval. Só fura o bloqueio quem se adapta ao modelo hegemônico. Também quem tem mais dinheiro se diverte com mais segurança e consome mais de perto aquelas consideradas melhores atrações.

Uma última referência importante do carnaval de Salvador é a *Mudança*⁸ do *Garcia*. Esta talvez seja a última manifestação do carnaval de Salvador na qual se mantém aquele que seria o espírito do carnaval baiano propagado oficialmente. Na segunda-feira do carnaval, depois de uma manhã inteira concentrada no final do bairro Garcia - onde se bebe, se dança, se paquera, se comenta o carnaval e os mais bem enturmados comem uma feijoada na casa de amigos do bairro -, a *Mudança* sai em direção ao bairro do Campo Grande - palco importante do carnaval de Salvador - sem cordas e homens de seguranças. Vale quase tudo. Ou seja, vale todo tipo de bloco improvisado; passeio em cavalos enfeitados; as plumas, os paetês e turbantes dos travestis “plantados” em carroças puxadas por animais; os “viados” “montados” em fantasias inusitadas; os homens travestidos; a presença de intelectuais e artistas locais ou visitantes; crianças, velhos, pais e mães de família; brancos e negros; mascarados ou sujeitos de cara limpa e figurino trivial; vale também a performance de vocalistas anônimos que não sabem cantar uma canção sequer; sambões, som de metais e é claro, o protesto, a crítica bem humorada, ingênua e saudável ao governo municipal, estadual e federal. Obviamente, A *Mudança do Garcia* não tem grandes patrocinadores e a mídia dá pouca importância a esta manifestação.

Enfim, temos na cidade de Salvador e na festa do carnaval uma ascendência do mercado e da espetacularização midiática sem precedentes. Não por acaso, isto se intensificou na medida em que desde o início dos anos 1970, a música popular brasileira também sofreu uma forte e determinante influência dos interesses de mercado. Neste sentido, o crítico musical José Miguel Wisnik afirma que nos chamados anos 70 já vigorava a convivência tensa entre o modo de produção “industrial”, configurado pela atuação de gravadoras multinacionais, canais de rádio e TV, e o “artesanal”, configurado pela atuação de poetas-músicos subjetivos que se expressavam pela atitude lírica, satírica, épica e paródica. O crítico arremata seu argumento dizendo que “o segundo capítulo do tema “vazio cultural” na música dos anos 70, e que acompanha o da indústria cultural, chama-se “censura”. Esta vestiu-se a rigor ao longo desses tempos; no momento usa traje esporte” (WISNIK, 1979-1980: p.7). Desde então, bastou que a censura político-ideológica arrefecesse sua atuação, para que o mercado assumisse o seu lugar.

A ascendência do mercado e da espetacularização midiática que ocorreu e se agravou em relação à música popular brasileira desde o início dos anos 1970, atingiu o

carnaval baiano nos anos 1980. A propósito, Milton de Araújo Moura (2001) faz observações e apresenta dados muito importantes sobre o negócio do carnaval de Salvador. Diz este autor que

Seja porque o Carnaval de Salvador é um trabalho que envolve muitos milhares de indivíduos, seja porque este trabalho toma como substrato a representação da identidade da cidade e retoma continuamente essa representação, a discussão sobre a organização da festa não pode não considerar o Carnaval como a festa de uma cidade. O reconhecimento deste teorema se compatibiliza com a compreensão do Carnaval como organização também em termos de administração pública e empresarização. Seria ingênuo propor que a realização de um megaevento fosse deixado à espontaneidade. Em contrapartida, é desejável que este vetor se compatibilize com o caráter propriamente carnavalesco da festa. De certa forma, o produtor, o mercador e a mercadoria são o mesmo sujeito, contraditório e desigual. (...). Salvador é a segunda cidade brasileira mais visitada pelo turista estrangeiro. Para o Carnaval especificamente, o número de chegadas passa de 540 mil turistas em 1998 para 800 mil em 2000. (...) De acordo com os dados da Emtursa para 1998 e 1999, a participação do Carnaval na economia do município corresponde a 10% do PIB de US\$ 12 bilhões (para o mesmo período, a participação do Carnaval no PIB do Estado da Bahia é de 5%). O número de empregos temporários gerados cresce de 110.000 em 1998 para 123.000 em 2000, correspondendo a R\$ 322 e R\$ 495 milhões, respectivamente. Tais empregos dizem respeito à administração (inclusive de recursos humanos), iluminação, sonorização, serviços artísticos e suportes, hotelaria, segurança, venda de comidas e bebidas, coleta de sucata, montagem de instalações, decoração, condução e corretagem de automóveis, abrangendo ainda o apoio a setores do serviço público como o Juizado de Menores, a vigilância sanitária, o Corpo de Bombeiros e a polícia. Inclui-se aí, também, o próprio pessoal contratado pelos blocos: *cordeiros*, supervisores e coordenadores de segurança, motoristas, responsáveis pela manutenção, alimentação e saúde, bem como o corpo de artistas contratado para o cortejo e seus suportes. (...) Temos ainda um setor especialmente importante aos efeitos da *televisência*: o pessoal ocupado na cobertura da grande festa. Em 2000, o Carnaval de Salvador alcançou 81 hs de transmissão televisiva no exterior, sendo 5 hs pela Rede Bandeirantes (para 50 países), 60 hs pela TV Portuguesa e 16 hs pela Rede Globo Internacional (para 185 países). A cobertura pela televisão local e nacional cresceu de 66 hs em 1997 para 190 hs em 2000. Neste último Carnaval, a transmissão local foi de 64 hs (34%); a nacional, de 45 hs (23%); e a internacional, de 81 hs (43%). No mesmo ano, a cobertura em rede do Carnaval de Salvador foi de 45 hs, enquanto o Rio de Janeiro teve 31 hs; São Paulo, 17 hs; e Recife/Olinda, 3 hs” (MOURA, 2001: p.193; 194-195).

Portanto, o que, até então, temos é uma realidade imaginária da polis, fundada na espetacularidade das festas e da presença da gente negra da cidade dançando, cantando, servindo, transformando sua própria degradação social em mercadoria, bem simbólico e apelo midiático. A saber, temos uma cidade predominantemente negra, do ponto de vista racial, muito diversificada em sua configuração cultural negra, branca ou mestiça, mas que hoje se traduz todo o tempo em carnaval e mercadoria de suposto caráter popular, democrático, mestiço. Em nome do povo, pelo povo, para o povo (leia-se povo negro), a carnavalização, a espetacularização e a mercantilização do cotidiano se consolida na cidade de Salvador na medida em que é vitoriosa a perspectiva que apaga a esperança e os sonhos de muitos que tiveram o privilégio de sonhar e cultivar outra realidade cultural. Sonho esboçado na proposição de um carnaval menos submetido às demandas do mercado constituído por grandes empresas, marcas e artistas que ocupam de forma ostensiva o espaço público, cerceiam a liberdade individual de circular e performar, concentram as atenções dos agentes prestadores de serviços públicos e dos meios de comunicação.

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Ou seja, a cidade carnavalizada, espetacularizada, simulacro, diferente do que afirmaria um autor como o Roberto DaMatta (1997) não é um rito sem dono, onde todos podem brincar e brincam como podem, onde todos podem se entrecortar e se relacionar. Não é também um rito descentralizado e inclusivo que faz desaparecer e dissolver o indivíduo. Ao contrário disso, o carnaval tem lei, não é exatamente uma loucura nem exatamente é do povo. Diferente disso, diria que a cidade carnavalizada e simulacro entende e dissemina o argumento que a ignorância de si mesmo, do outro, de sua própria realidade cultural – ao menos, durante o reinado de Momo –, é salvação, “é só alegria”, como se diz na cidade da Bahia, e que a lucidez do conhecimento, da criação, da dissensão e do conflito de ideias é dor e caminho atávico para a solidão cultural e existencial.

É preciso ainda dizer que a nossa cidade até se constitui como um espaço de produção cultural, mas não pode ser um espaço de intervenção, de diálogo, de trocas culturais e de acesso equivalente a bens culturais, porque continua impregnada de sua herança colonial e escravocrata. Fomenta a interação, a convivência de diferentes, mas abomina o diálogo e as trocas culturais. E não pode haver diálogo num contexto territorial onde as pessoas do discurso tendem a se colocar na condição de senhor e escravo, inferiores e superiores, abastados e despossuídos de riqueza material, mentes perversas e vidas roubadas.

De fato, o carnaval baiano, em seus “circuitos” pretensamente democráticos, está orientado por uma política cultural, por uma estética e um modelo de comunicação empresarial e privada que não ignora em sua totalidade o patrimônio cultural negro e os negros, “o povo”, até porque seria impossível fazê-lo, mas os despreza. Esta comunicação empresarial educa e disciplina a percepção, o gesto e o gosto estético não mais do folião, mas do consumidor, durante os 11 meses que antecedem o carnaval - através de telenovelas, telejornais, impressos, rádio, publicidade e espetáculos de grande porte, de modo que a massa negra permaneça complacente à negação de si mesma e antipopular. Assim, as imagens e o imaginário alternativos criados pelo Olodum, ao longo de 30 anos, aparecem hoje como um suspiro, “bonito de se ver”, mas são incapazes de impedir que esta triste e dessemelhante realidade do carnaval tenha se consolidado como norma. Enfim, nos próximos anos, me parece que uma tarefa do Olodum e de outros agentes contra-hegemônicos deva ser promover uma intervenção cultural no carnaval de modo que se mantenha sua dimensão festiva, mas se renove seu vigor político e estético.

Universidade do Estado da Bahia (UNEB)

Notas

¹Jacques D’Adesky argumenta que “(as) descontinuidades (espaciais) articulam nos indivíduos dois espaços singulares, formados, de um lado, por um espaço de pertencimento que especifica a posição do ator social e a inscrição de seu grupo de pertencimento em um lugar, e, de outro lado, por um espaço de referência que é a relação do aqui e do alhures que se configura em função da valorização ou desvalorização do espaço de pertencimento (PELLEGRINO *et alli*, 1983a, p.16 e PELLEGRINO *et alli*, 1983b, p. 29). (...) De fato, as representações coletivas participam da produção do espaço. Elas definem escalas de pertinência, como definem o tamanho dos fenômenos que o sujeito relaciona à sua existência, e ainda centralizam o espaço sobre um grupo social” (D’ADESKY, 1997:310).

² Momesca se refere à figura do Rei Momo que diz a lenda, na Mitologia Grega, era o deus da galhofa, do delírio, da irreverência e do achincalhe. Momo teria sido expulso do Olimpo por seu comportamento irreverente. Já na Roma antiga, por ocasião das saturnais, o mais belo soldado era coroado Rei Momo e tratado como honroso senhor, comendo, bebendo e se divertindo fartamente. Quando a festa chegava ao fim, o monarca era conduzido para o altar de Saturno e sacrificado. Morria o Rei Momo. No ano seguinte elegia-se outro. No Brasil, anualmente, as cidades onde se celebra o carnaval elege um Rei Momo que simbolicamente comanda a folia. Este rei, quase sempre um homem obeso, deve evocar a fartura, a farsa, a alegria e a irreverência que seriam características do carnaval.

³ Muniz Sodré argumenta que “(...) Sem a necessidade de uma realidade externa para validar a si mesmo enquanto imagem, o simulacro é ao mesmo tempo imaginário e real, ou melhor, é o apagamento da diferença entre real e imaginário (entre o “verdadeiro” e o “falso”). De fato, um certo imaginário, tecnologicamente produzido, impõe o seu próprio real (o da sociedade industrial), que implica um projeto de escamoteação de outras formas de experiência do real” (SODRÉ, 1984: 29).

⁴ Milton de Araújo Moura define *axé music* como “a interface de repertório musical e coreográfico que se desenvolveu basicamente a partir do encontro entre a tradição do trio elétrico e o evento do afro, que por sua vez recapitula a tradição da musicalidade negra do Recôncavo – antiga região, próxima a Salvador, onde foi impulsionada a economia escravocrata - em conexão com outras vertentes estéticas da Diáspora. Não se trata de um *estilo* ou *gênero musical*, pois não há uma unidade formal interna a esse denominador comum. Não se trata tampouco de um somatório do repertório de determinado tipo de artista ou grupo musical. É uma *interface*, no sentido de que recursos de composição e interpretação ou aspectos formais de diferentes grupos ou artistas são compatibilizados e/ou identificados entre si, criando-se então uma ambiência de que são mais emblemáticos alguns ritmos e coreografias, algumas bandas e intérpretes, sem que se tenha contornos precisos do estilo, como no caso do tango ou do jazz (MOURA, 2001: p.225).

⁵ O “território”, em Muniz Sodré (1988), compreende um espaço material ou subjetivo no qual um grupo social acumula e transmite bens físicos, simbólicos, memória ou competência técnica. Estes bens, espécie de patrimônio que escapa à lógica econômica, delimitam um território que se expande ou se contrai de acordo às necessidades de sobrevivência deste grupo social. Em Jacques D’Adesky (1997), o território é um espaço público com um traço relacional, é uma espacialidade culturalmente construída, uma estrutura *a priori* ou uma modalidade de organização das representações coletivas e do poder na qual o sujeito apreende os objetos e valores através de seu próprio posicionamento. Osmundo de Araújo Pinho (1998-1999) fala de lugares específicos, eventos-territórios, marcados pela distribuição de riqueza, poder e origem racial, onde a identidade racial se materializa de modo transitório e circunstancial e é recondicionada por efeitos da globalização e espetacularização do sentido.

⁶ O sambódromo é uma espécie de teatro de arena, projetado pelo arquiteto Oscar Niemeyer, construído especialmente para o desfile carnavalesco e espetacular das escolas de samba do Rio de Janeiro.

⁷ Tanto no Rio de Janeiro quanto em Salvador, o termo “bloco” distingue entidades carnavalescas que durante o carnaval desfilam com figurinos distintos, temáticas distintas e ocupam espaços restritos na rua demarcados por um quadrado formado por cordas puxadas por homens fortes, geralmente negros, ou por certa homogeneidade no comportamento de artistas e foliões durante o desfile. Blocos afros ou afoxés se distinguem fundamentalmente pela referência temática forte a cultura negra baiana,

carioca ou a referências culturais africanas. Além disso, executam ritmos trazidos ou recriados por africanos e descendentes durante e após a escravidão. Batucadas e sambões são grupos de samba sem uma ordenação muito rígida no que diz respeito a temas de desfile, indumentária ou perfil dos participantes. Os blocos de índio executam o ritmo do samba, mas surgiram inspirados nas histórias de exclusão e extermínio de indígenas contadas por filmes norte-americanos de faroeste (Ver GODI, 1991). Por fim, os blocos de trio são aqueles que executam o estilo *Axé Music* em um caminhão potente adaptado com palco para os artistas e uma sofisticada aparelhagem de som e iluminação.

⁸ Segundo Milton Moura, no passado da cidade de Salvador, “as mudanças dos ricos eram ocasiões solenes em que se podia ver a mobília, a prataria, as roupas das famílias mais aquinhoadas. Vizinhos e transeuntes detinham-se para ver entrarem ou saírem os objetos que consubstanciavam riqueza e prestígio – um grande cortejo, então! As *mudanças* do Carnaval eram o inverso disso. Levava-se à rua o que não prestava. De certa forma, o lixo era espetacularizado, o que liga a tradição das mudanças àquela do entrudo. Travestidos jovens e velhos eram glorificados sobre carroças puxadas por jegues e mulas. Boa parte dos bairros populares tradicionais levava suas mudanças durante o Carnaval; apenas o Garcia, por ser próximo do Campo Grande, chegava com sua mudança (ainda sem esse nome) até o centro. Era o Carnaval nos bairros, denotando uma territorialidade demarcada em termos propriamente geográficos” (MOURA, 2001: p.198)

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"When Trees Speak with the Tongues of Women: Eco-Feminism and Female Empowerment in Selected Afro-Mexican Folktales"

by Paulette Ramsay

It can be argued that the discourses of post-coloniality and feminism share intersecting theoretical trajectories, as they both aim to dismantle the damaging ideologies of patriarchy and colonisation which have both oppressed, stereotyped and marginalised different groups of persons.¹ This essay will draw on feminist criticism in general and on eco-feminism in particular, to form the theoretical frame of reference for this essay. I will examine some of the patriarchal assumptions and stereotypes, which underpin the ideological representations of gender and sexuality in selected Afro-Mexican folktales. Additionally, I intend to unveil some of the ways in which the stories simultaneously subvert several of these assumptions and stereotypes.

The folktales are taken from a collection of oral narratives entitled *Jamas fandango al cielo* (1993) from the Costa Chica de Guerrero, the area in which the majority of Afro-Mexicans reside in Mexico. *The Unidad de Culturas Populares* in Mexico compiled the stories in an attempt to increase an awareness of the presence of the African-Mexicans and to highlight their contributions to Mexican multi-culturalism. Individuals of varying ages have narrated the stories that have been recorded, transcribed, and published between 1990 and 1993 (Ramsay 8).²

Eco-feminism and Female Empowerment

Indeed, eco-feminist literary criticism has proved to be very useful in the analyses of the folktales presented in this essay, given that it shares some of the broad objectives of post-colonial criticism and other branches of feminism. One of the main objectives of eco-feminist literary criticism is to dispel the myths about nature, particularly as it relates to the way in which man (humankind) has, with an attitude of entitlement, dominated nature through ownership, exploration and excavation. This dominance is equated with the dominance of woman by man, in that nature has traditionally been seen as having an identity through its owner – man, the subject or humankind. In this construction of nature it is projected as "other" in the same way that traditional and colonialist approaches marginalize women. According to Gretchen T. Legler:

Eco-feminist literary criticism is a hybrid criticism, a combination of ecological or environmental criticism. It offers a unique combination of literary and philosophical perspectives that give literary or cultural critics a special lens through which they can investigate the way nature is represented in literature and the ways representations of nature are linked with representations of gender, race, class and sexuality (227).

Proponents of the theory are not by any means suggesting that nature is equal to woman or vice versa. On the contrary, no such equation is being advanced, but eco-feminists propose that nature can be regarded as a being with its own existence and its own reality, in the same way that woman has her own identity, which is independent of man. This assertion is further clarified by Susan Griffin's firm claim that:

Eco-feminism begins with the fact of natural existence. Even if nature cannot be entirely or accurately contained in language, eco-feminism aims toward the visibility of nature as a reality. With this approach one can begin to understand that the so-called social construction (exploitation, destruction) of nature is implicit and inseparable from the social construction of gender. The equation is not that women equal nature, but that by understanding how and why woman is associated with nature, one can decode many

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structures of injustice in Western society. The social construction of "race", for instance which is also justified by an idea of nature, cannot be separated from ideas of gender. And the reverse is also true (219 - 220).

The captivating folktale "Yoatzin," (*Jamas fandango al cielo* 71-74) poignantly underlines some of the metaphorical links between gender, race, class and representations of nature. The story begins with the image of the orphan (male) who comes of age and decides that he is now ready to hunt in the deep woods, including an area in which he has been brought up to fear: "le habían enseñado que ese bosque era prohibido para él" (71) / ("he had been taught that that part of the forest was forbidden"). But in true "macho," young, daring style, he decides to do so, and 'dispenses' with caution. The deer which he sees and targets as his prize ram transforms into a woman, then into flowers, back to a woman, then to a deer and finally to a woman again. It should not go unnoticed that her metamorphoses, transport her through both aspects of nature, – flora and fauna. At the same time, traditional stereotypes of the aggressive and strong male are simultaneously reinforced and undermined, as when it seems the youth will succeed in shooting the deer in a display of his great skill at using his bow and arrow, the deer emerges as a young woman peeping from a plant. Nature is therefore, presented as an equal actor and participant in this tale, speaking and acting.

The vulnerability of nature to man's hunting and exploration, is immediately signalled in these transformations, while the extent to which man's or male subjectivity is linked to the "dominating impulse of exploration" and hunting is also evident. The young male is imaged as powerful, and bold, graphically depicted as he is, with the weapon with which he threatens to end the life of a young deer. In other words, the power relations reveal the metaphorical links between gender and nature. The young boy/man has the ability and the weapon to use force to dominate nature. His show of *bravado* is soon undermined, however, as he discovers that, given his unfamiliarity with the forest, he needs the help of the woman to navigate his way around. However, the power positions soon become inverted as, despite his possession of treacherous weapons, the symbol of his might, he follows instruction after instruction from this deer/flower, turned woman. His helplessness is forcefully emphasized, as he depends on her vast knowledge of the seasons, the habits of the animals and everything that lives and occurs in the forest. He soon discovers that the instructions she gives to him are not just to emphasize his ignorance and his misguided attempts to conquer her in the forest, but also to lead him through a series of activities, which will result in the spell under which she has been placed for decades, becoming broken:

Se fue siguiéndola, siguiéndola, siguiéndola. Ya en su aldea andaban bu'cando al muchacho, jallaron la huella que pa'llá se había metido... Comió el fruto y siguió la cierva, llegó al lugar 'onde siempre la podía 'garrar, entonce' e'taba ella cansada, que ya no podía correr. Él la quiso amarrar como siempre lo hacía, pero se de'veneció y se fue inconsciente al *abi'mo*... Cuando de'pertó se vio en una *ciudad* y e'taba la cierva aco'tadita junto a él y también e'taba la mujer. Vio la cierva y vio a la mujer, dijo:

- Pero, yo parece que me caí en un *abi'mo* y 'ora e'toy en una *ciudad*.
- *Cumpli'te* ya con tu deber para desencantarme, porque nadie me quería venir a sacar, yo aquél que comiera el fruto tre' años me podía salvar, pero 'ora ya no soy un embrujó, soy una realida'y e'te e' mi pueblo, mi nación . ¿Tú qué prefieres, que te devuelva a tu nación o quedarte en la mía?

("Yoatzin," *Jamás fandango al cielo* 73)

He kept following her, following her, following her. In the village they were looking for the young man. They found the path that he had taken. He ate the fruit and followed

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the deer. He got to the point at which he could grab her, once she was tired and couldn't run anymore. He waited to grab her as usual, but she vanished and he fell and lost his consciousness. When he awoke he found himself in a city and there was a deer next to him and there was also the woman. He looked at the deer and he looked at the woman and said:

"But it seems like I fell into an abyss and now I am in a city."

"You fulfilled your duty to release me from a spell because no one wanted to save me... but now I am not bewitched anymore, I am a reality and this is my people, my nation. What would you prefer? Do you want me to take you back to your nation, or do you want to stay here with me?"

On one level, the story seems to lapse into a perpetuation of the notion that woman needs to be rescued and given an identity and meaning to life by man.

The same act of liberation which he performs, however, not only transforms her physically, but empowers her to declare her own existence – "soy una realidad y e'te e' mi pueblo, mi nación" / "I am a reality and this is my people, my nation" (73). So while on the surface, it seems that by having broken the spell, he gives her an identity, it is she who identifies herself, her ties to a place, and a nation. She unequivocally declares her recognition of her own experience of being and belonging. The act of speaking or voicing on the part of women has been characterized as an "articulation of agency," meaning that "women can speak for themselves, characterize their situations and experiences and define the various contexts and understanding of self. Moreover, her voice, her bold declaration of self, also rejects any misconceptions that she perceives herself as being locked away on the periphery of society. She declares in a voice that is both agentic and political, her understanding of self, place and belonging. Indeed, the woman's act of voicing/speaking her existence, simultaneously debunks the way in which nature is regarded as lacking any subjectivity, given its muted state, as here nature is presented as more than "inert matter to be probed and penetrated, but has metaphorical status as a speaker, a live, feeling subject" (Legler 232).

Moreover, the young woman's new status places her in a position of equality with the male. Her subsequent straightforward question to him highlights her acceptance of his right to the same social liberty, which she has now regained. In other words, she unquestioningly accepts that he possesses his own individual identity, his own place, and people. Consequently, her respect for his sense of belonging to his own people is conveyed by the question: – ¿Tú qué prefieres, que te devuelva a tú nación o quedate en la mía? / "What do you prefer, to return to your nation or remain in mine?"(73)

Ironically, his response suggests that he is the displaced, confused being, with the result that the contrast between male and female is compelling – she being 'self-certain, he, having no sense of home or belonging, as his pained retort reveals:

– ¿Pero allá que tengo? No tengo padres, ni tengo hermanos
y tampoco tengo mujer, si tu quieres yo me quedo aquí.

("Yoatzin," *Jamás fandango al cielo*
73)

"But what do I have there? I have no parents, neither do I have brothers and sisters, or a wife. If you want I will stay here."

Interestingly, the biggest overthrow of male entitlement, male self-certainness and dominance in the stories is achieved through her rejection of him. This rejection compounds his feelings of failure, since all his efforts to capture the deer, now woman, have failed and she now denies him the privilege of retaining her as the enviable prize.

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Her firm sense of self and autonomy are established as she rejects him for having no sense of belonging or connections to a place or people.

Their story poignantly dramatizes the situation of the liberator being rejected by the liberated, who now sees beyond the self-serving acts of rescue. They point, furthermore, to the ability of women to recover from a situation of oppression, to contest the patriarchal systems that they know, by evolving new and independent identities:

- Pue' aquí te quedará'. ¿Quieres matrimonio?
- ¿Cómo vo'a querer matrimonio, con quién?
La mujer enseñó a la cierva.
- ¿Qué yo puedo casarme con una cierva?
- Bueno, ¿qué tú no ibas siguiéndola? No me seguías a mí, la ibas siguiendo a ella,
¿no sufrí'te por agarrarla?
- Bueno, ¿y cómo me caso con ella?
- Cierra tu' ojo'.
- Cerró lo' ojo y cuando lo' abrió había desaparecido la mujer, sólo quedaba la cierva.

("Yoatzin," *Jamás fandango al cielo*
73)

"Will you stay here. Do you want to be married?"

"How am I going to marry, with whom?"

The woman showed him a deer.

"Can I marry a deer?"

"Well, weren't you following her?"

You were not following me, you were following her.

Weren't you trying to catch her?"

"Well, how do I marry her?"

"Close your eyes."

He closed his eyes and when he opened them the woman had disappeared and only the deer was there.

Her rejection is suggestive of an argument for the Afro-Mexicans to have some commitment to identify with their own people on the local level. The intimation is that while there may be a need to establish links and seek acceptance in the wider Mexican community, there is a need to understand and have a sense of connection to the local community. And so the contentious binary of opposition of indecisive woman / self-certain male, is disrupted to present the woman as the one who understands the significance of connection between identity, self and nation. She displays self-knowledge, knowledge of her true values and strength by showing that her identity does not depend on, or is determined by an androcentric consciousness. Despite the young man's initial presentation as the one who is desirous of dominating nature and woman, he emerges weak and uncertain, while she is empowered by the development of her autonomous identity and her connection to her nation.³

The declaration reveals further, that gender relations are important to constructions of nation. Undoubtedly, Mexico's omission of Afro-Mexicans from the national discourse on and construction of nation invariably ignores not just Afro-Mexican males, but also black females and their concerns. Moreover, perceptions and notions of masculinity and femininity are constructed within and supported by nationalist discourse about the non-existence of this ethnic group. Specific notions of manhood and womanhood, which are held in Mexico do not include the specificities of the realities of Afro-Mexican men and women. Yoatzin speaks and metaphorically counters and challenges the official position regarding her position as a citizen in her

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country. Indeed, citizenship is 'a multi-tier membership in a variety of collectivities – local, ethnic, national and transnational' (Yuval-Davis 69). Yoatzin's statement may, therefore, be considered as a subversive attempt to draw attention to the overt ways in which Afro-Mexican women and men are denied civil, political and social rights. It may even be interpreted as a dismissal of the nationalist agenda to dismiss Afro-Mexican men and women, and deny their very existence in Mexico.

Furthermore, it simultaneously derides any attempts to regard Afro-Mexicans in derogatory and dismissive terms. The undeniably firm tone and self-certain attitude speak to an unshakeable understanding of her rights, her status in a country which is her home and moreover, reveals a deep appreciation of the fact that "membership in a community... is bound together by enduring attachment" (Yuval-Davis 69). In other words, this metaphorical representation of an Afro-Mexican woman's definition of herself is integrally linked to her understanding of her place within the nation and of how national and ethnic processes help to define her and affect her position in Mexico. It is for this reason that she is unwilling to leave the place to which she is attached and committed, to go to a strange land. Her declaration then, is about who she knows she is, it is about entitlement and her place in Mexican collectivity. Yoatzin states categorically her understanding of the interlinking of gender, nation and female empowerment. Arguably the most powerful aspects of Yoatzin's declaration, is its underlining of the extent to which "men and women do not constitute homogenous categories (Yuval-Davis 116). In other words, she is fully aware that she is able to choose for herself and does not have to comply with the wishes of the young male, in the same way that he does not have to comply with hers.

The unraveling of the story, suggests a subversion of the masculinist ideology, which promoted colonialism in its intent to expand territories and control the inhabitants of the lands they appropriated. The young woman entices the gullible young man with ideas of marriage and later reveals that she has wrongly encouraged him just to teach him the importance of having an appreciation of his own place or village. Her reminder to him simultaneously suppresses his misguided regard of her as his possession and his attitude of entitlement which is similar to that displayed by colonialists in their agenda to encroach on and dominate other people and their lands. Indeed, feminism and its critique of imperialism are inevitable in the following exchange and reprimand:

- Yo seré tu esposa, bésame.
Al besarla se de'vaneció y de 'pertó en la orilla del río
abrazando el tronco de un árbol y preguntó:
- ¿'ónde e'tá mi mujer?
- ¿Cuál mujer? Tú no tiene' mujer ni tiene' familia.
E'taba' soñando. Te hechiza' te porque te acerca ' te mucho
a la tierra a 'onde no se debe pasar, tú te debe' quedar,
tú te debe' quedar en tu aldea.

("Yoatzin," *Jamás fandango al cielo* 74)

"I will be your wife, kiss me."

As he kissed her he vanished and woke up on the bank of the river
embracing the trunk of a tree. He asked:

"Where is my wife?"

"Which wife? You have neither wife nor family.

I put a spell on you because you came too close to the
forbidden land, you must stay in your village."

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The portrayal of the self-certain woman who emerges at the end of the story, renouncing his ambiguous confusion, but simultaneous imperious attitude, recalls and reinforces the processes of transformation she undergoes, before asserting her identity as woman – even offering, cynically or generously, herself to be his wife – highlights the importance of the process of becoming or self-invention in feminist criticism. According to Edward Baugh:

In the male-oriented tradition of Bildungsroman, the hero seeks to assert himself... there is never any doubt that he has a separate self, a privileged niche of selfhood. Woman cannot repose in any such sustaining idea. She finds herself in a world where her identity is determined for her by an androcentric consciousness. She is merely created, not herself a creator. She is in another feminist formulation, the text written by the male creative mind. She therefore has virtually to invent herself anew.⁴

(Baugh 3- 4)

Indeed, the female's "metamorphosis of self" forcefully advances a feminist view that woman can be released from the confinement and restraints imposed on her by those who invest in patriarchal notions, by becoming what she wants, and by creating new identities. The portrayal of the sense of independence, freedom and satisfaction the young woman seems to derive from being able to confound the male character, as she assumes different forms, is unmistakable as she leaves him, still trying to figure out where he belongs. This serves as a powerful rejection of male-imposed and biased constructions of what woman can do, or what woman is. Undoubtedly, the juxtaposition of the strong woman against the uncertain, insecure young man is ironic and striking.

The complexity of this folktale, arguably rests in its inherent contradictions because Yoatzin's supposed lack of self also places the young man as a victim of the young woman's cunning. In the same way that he attempts to dominate her, her attempts "to teach him a lesson" is tantamount to seizing an opportunity to dominate him, so we may, in fact concede to having a two way process of domination. In other words, she is not a "pure victim" in the situation, neither is he a "pure oppressor". They both may be seen as "deriving varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression which frame everyone's lives (Collins 287).

"Female Self-Construction and Survival"

"Juanquito el oso," is an engaging story, which immediately establishes the oppositional terms in which gender is traditionally regarded. The male provider and leader goes out to work everyday with strict instructions for his wife to follow:

E'te era un hombre que tenía su esposa, todos los días salía a trabajar, se iba muy temprano, a su esposa le encargaba que fuera en darle agua al caballo, pero temprano. También le decía que tuviera cuida' o porque andaba un animal peligro que era el oso.

(*Jamás fandango al cielo*, 86)

There was a man who had a wife. Every day he would go to work early, and would tell his wife she was in charge of taking water to the horse, but early. He would also tell her to be careful because there was a dangerous animal, a bear, walking around.

An unambiguous impression of the power positions in which males assign roles to the females, is presented through this narrative. Moreover, the patterns of binary opposition which reinforce these power positions representing woman/man include: provider / –

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receiver, instructor/follower, leader/led are fortified. This traditional ideological representation is further reinforced by the barbaric capture of the woman by the bear. The patriarchal suggestion of course, is that she is captured because she fails to obey the instructions of her husband or ruler who has commanded her to complete her chores early in order to avoid the bear:

También le decía que tuviera cuida 'o porque andaba un animal peligroso que era el oso. Ella así lo hacía, pero un día se le olvidó ir temprano y cuando se acordó ya e'taba cerca el oso, ella pue'se puso a gritar pero llegó el oso y le dijo: ¡Apúrate, vámono'!

(*Jamás fandango al cielo*, 86)

He also told her to be careful because there was a dangerous animal, a bear, around. She did so, but one day she forgot to go out early and by the time she remembered, the bear was near, she started to shout, but the bear simply approached her and said, "Hurry, let's go."

The woman's domination continues, as she is placed in the most oppressive situation in which she is under the complete tyrannical control of the bear. The story becomes an "allegory of the epistemic violence of imperialism," in its reflection of such exploitative male/female relationships of dominance and subjugation. The unfolding of this situation strikingly dramatizes the ways in which patriarchy functions as a system of unequal power, which requires domination and submission in order to function.

The woman's captivity sharply contrasts with the freedom enjoyed by male characters that go on a journey in other stories. They do so of their own volition. Indeed, in many stories in which the journey or travel motif is central, the men leave home for the purpose of self-discovery. Here, the woman is forcefully removed from the place she knows and is taken on a journey to become a slave to a savage, wild animal, and consequently loses her identity.

The parallel in the social construction of gender and nature is evident in the relationship between male/bear, woman/nature implied in the recognition of the bear as a predatory, ferocious attacker of other species in the natural setting:

Y que se la lleva a su cueva, en la que vivía él, ahí la metió y en la entrada le puso una piedra grande para que no se saliera sólo en la movía. Así se salía él a cazar, le traía carne, luego ella como no era animal asaba la carne para molerla y él no, así se la comía.

("Juaniquito el oso," *Jamás fandango al cielo*, 86)

And he took her to the cave in which he lived and put her in there. Then he put a huge rock at the entrance so that she could not move it and escape. Then he would go out to hunt, and bring her meat. But since she was not an animal, she roasted it to be able to eat it, but he ate his that way (raw).

There is no reciprocity between woman and bear, – it is a relationship of dominance, imposition, oppression and sexual violation. The plight of the black slave woman is poignantly played out in this gripping allegorical tale in which the female is deprived of freedom of choice and of control over her own physical body. Her repeated rape by the bear, the metaphorical representation of the violent dominating male, dualistically connotes the links between gender and nature/ecology. The same images of the destructive effects on the environment which the word conjures up, when used in relation to nature, are portrayed when it is used to refer to the sexual violation of woman. Susan Griffin provides support to this claim in her statement that:

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Unwittingly this metaphor [rape] suggests a profound connection between the social construction of nature and the social construction of woman. And simultaneously, it describes the desire to conquer and violate woman and nature and a less evident fear of both... (225).

Echoes of Slavery

The slave/woman/slave master relationship is also recalled in the determination of the woman to survive the horrors of her enslavement, while strategizing the terms of her freedom. Historical accounts are that the slave woman often feigned acquiescence by adopting a docile demeanor. Similarly, this woman in the folktale assumes an identity that keeps the bear believing that she has completely capitulated to her subjugation and this way, she keeps him unthreatened and unsuspecting of her quiet rebellion.

As in the case of the slave woman, the repeated sexual assault on her body by her oppressive "master" produces a child, – a hybrid – "half-man, half-bear" like the mulatto off-spring, who often was the result of the rape of black slave women, by white owners and overseers. Like the many black slave women recorded in history, she protects and nurtures her offspring, despite the nature of the relationship and the brutal figure of paternity responsible for the child. In meeting the daily needs of herself and the child, the woman displays quiet resilience and a strong will to survive the horrors of her imperialistic enslavement. In other words, she uses this "space of negation" as a "site of construction and preservation of self," quietly defying the bear's strenuous attempts to assume harshness, maleness and manhood through his subjugation of her. In her quiet and seeming acceptance of oppression, she also demonstrates what Paul Gilroy characterizes as a "double consciousness – a double vision which ensures that diaspora people are in two places at the same time and maintain a double perspective on reality" (Gilroy 205).

In other words, she is able to attend to the matters at hand, such as the chores assigned to her while secretly thinking of another life that she knows is possible. Furthermore, this "double consciousness/ double vision" empowers her in the forest where her daily labours bring to memory the servile female labour for which slaves were valued. Indeed, "the defeminism of the black female slave," is reflected in the brutal manner in which the woman is taken to inhabit a cave with a bear, become concubine, servant, cultivator and provider, and endure the harsh physical environment in the forest (Beckles 10). The birth of her son, vividly recalls the manner in which black slave women were not just repeatedly raped, but were forced to reproduce, so as to ensure the continuity of slavery (Beckles 8). In contrast to the slave woman/slave master situation, however, in which the black slave woman produced children to increase the labour crew, she produces a child who becomes the "generation of rebels" who eventually secures her liberation. He it is who comes to symbolize the answer to the Afro-Mexican's dilemma, of finding a way out of the continued oppression and the vestiges of colonialism. He eventually overpowers his father, the bear, the imperialistic colonizer, and gains liberation and independence for his mother. Her quiet collusion with the rebellious son is reminiscent of the ways in which slave women contested gender oppression, without launching any violent protests. This rebellious stance helps the young man to develop an attitude which helps to liberate their own consciousness from political structures of control and dominance.

Man/Nature, Man/Woman and Harmony

The importance of finding his fortune, for the male protagonist, serves as the main introductory point in the story, "Blanca Flor." In seeking his fortune, Juan seizes

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the opportunity to exploit the weaknesses of a vulnerable young woman. His ironic encounter with her, presents an opportunity for him to assert his natural inclination to dominate and control. Juan meets Blanca Flor, who is first disguised as a dove as she flies from a tree, along with a flock of her siblings. Their unexpected transformation is revealed by Juan's comments of incredibility:

-¡Qué bonitas palomas! Pero son gentes, cayeron como palomas y 'óra son gente."
(*Jamás fandango al cielo*, 76)

"What beautiful doves! But they are people; they fell as doves and now they are people."

The implication of him first identifying them as doves, is that he perceives them with all the metaphorical associations of docility and meekness, thus reinforcing his perception of himself as the dominant controlling agent in the situation. The eco-feminist position is sharply highlighted, as the parallel between the social construction of gender and nature is evidenced in Juan's immediate recognition of an opportunity to dominate, first nature, the dove and then woman, in swift sequence. He immediately devises a way to make the most beautiful of the doves/women vulnerable to his control:

...se desenvolvieron y *nomá'* hicieron turrin y ya eran unas muchachas bonitas, pero bonitas, de la' tre', la chiquita se llamaba Blanca Flor. Dice el muchacho:

-Le vo'a esconder la' *plumita* a la má'chiquita, e'tá bien bonita.
("Blanca flor," *Jamás fandango al cielo*, 76)

...they came back and barely made a sound "turrin" and turned into pretty young ladies, very pretty, of the three the youngest was called Blanca Flor. He said to himself: "I am going to hide the feathers of the littlest one, she is pretty."

In a swift act of deception, he strips her of her feathers and hides them just the same way man strips nature of its lushness and in eco-feminist symbolism, strips woman of her power, in order to have mastery over her. Deception then, is a useful tool in winning her confidence and enabling his plan to make her feel a need for him and facilitate his displacement of her. The woman, recognizing her vulnerability in her naked, featherless state, accepts his invitation to be protected, provided and cared for by him. His sense of power over her, is of course, greatly heightened by her display of her own sense of vulnerability and later acceptance of his offer:

Blanca flor se quedó sentada llorando, desnuda, llora y llora, ahí sentada. Al largo rato que se habían ido la' palomas salió él, pero ella no llegó a creer que él le había '*garra*' o la' *plumita*,' solamente él había llegado 'onde e'taba ella...
("Blanca flor," *Jamás fandango al cielo*, 77)

Blanca flor sat naked, crying, crying and crying. She just sat there. A long while after the doves had gone, he came to her, but she did not think that he had grabbed her feathers only that he had come to her...

In his home, an alien space for her, she quietly resists his efforts to redefine her and establish his construct of her identity. He does not return her natural covering, but instead, hides them with the complicity of his sister. Blanca Flor finds no joy in the clothes, – the new and unnatural covering he stipulates for her, and quietly embarks on

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a secret project of finding her own clothing. Her relentless search reveals her refusal to legitimate her capture and the choice of clothing dictated to her. It implies, too, the ability of woman to resist male tyranny, and to strategise the terms of her freedom. Her refusal to accept his choice of clothing, furthermore, suggests the rejection of patriarchy and the ideologies that regard women, not as individuals, but as objects which do not possess the ability to make choices for themselves.

The eventual recovery of her original clothing/feathers allows her to fly away. The physical flight of the bird/woman symbolises the ability of woman to develop her own independent spirit. Additionally, the ease with which she moves from being woman to bird, emphasises the ability of woman, to become whatever is necessary for her to escape or survive oppression. Juan, ironically, does not regard her as being capable of taking control and sees her only for her beauty. Implicit in this attitude, is the way in which nature is often considered more for its decorative function, rather than for the utilitarian and its right to exist as a living, agentic subject. Flight facilitates self-assertion and boldness, so that when Blanca Flor allows herself to be re-sought and brought back to his land, the terms of agreement and partnership are different. She is no longer being beguiled into thinking that she needs Juan to save her from a desperate situation, but they agree to work together in a mutual situation of need and willingness to support each other. Their new relationship promotes a new paradigm for males and females to relate to each other within a frame of mutual respect, self-certainty and recognition of how each has a contribution to make to ensure harmonious and productive interactions and relationships.

Conclusion

Through the application of feminist criticism, we have seen that the social construction of nature is linked to or reflective of the social construction of gender. It has allowed us furthermore, to explore the tradition of male dominance as well as colonial practices of domination and the ways in which maleness is tied to the control of nature and women. Nature is therefore depicted in several ways which symbolically explore several patriarchal ideologies as objectionable. The metaphor of trees speaking symbolises the way in which women are able to articulate agency and self-construction. Moreover, it allows us to see, too, that nature like women, can rebel against violence, oppression/rape and move out of entrapment to establish an autonomous sense of identity and reject imperious power and patriarchy. Arguably, it speaks to the inter-connections that exist between humans and nature.

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Notes

¹ For more on this assertion, see Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Garth and Tiffin, Helen (Eds.) *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 2005.

² For more on the ideological framing of the folktales, see María Cristina, Pérez. "Introduction," *Jamás fandango al cielo. México* Dirección General de Culturas Populares. 1993. 19 – 26.

³ See Yuval-Davis for her theorizing of the intersection between gender and nation. 70-79.

⁴ Baugh's is here drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's elaboration in *The Second Sex* of the Sartrian thesis of man's insistence on establishing himself as self and woman as other.

See Baugh's article, "Lorna Goodison in the Contest of Feminist Criticism." *Journal of West Indian Literature*. 4(1) (1991): 1 – 13.

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**Dlia Mc Donald Woolery, *La lluvia es una piel*
(San José, Costa Rica: Asesores Editoriales Gráficos, 2010). 48 pp.**

Reviewed by Manuel Apodaca

Hay libros que te atrapan desde las primeras líneas que lees; líneas magnéticas hábilmente dispuestas en un escenario decorado y preciso. Esto pasa cuando uno lee los primeros versos del poemario *La lluvia es una piel* de la costarricense Dlia Mc Donald Woolery,

*Siempre me gustó la lluvia y nunca pude dejarla ir.
De niña me sentaba en el lado oscuro de la ventana
para escuchar su llegada,*

Al instante uno percibe el encanto de la poesía y una historia que está por empezar, entonces te dejas ir con la autora en su río suave y musical. Sin embargo, el poema al que me refiero no es exactamente el primero, si seguimos un orden cronológico, sino el que está al final de todos y reproducido además en la contraportada. El libro intencionalmente ha sido dispuesto como objeto artístico y visual, luciendo en la portada la foto en sepia de una bella adolescente negra ataviada al estilo de los años 40s del siglo XX. De ese modo, el poema de la contraportada es cierre y apertura a la vez, como la cinta de Moebius, poesía que se abre al infinito.

La poesía suele venir acompañada de grandes sorpresas o de grandes decepciones. Las sorpresas nos llegan con los aciertos emanados de la imaginación y el sentimiento del poeta a través de las palabras y el ritmo —en este caso, un torrente incesante como el que deja fluir la poesía de Dlia—. Las decepciones proceden del encuentro con la realidad obtusa y corta que no se parece en nada a la creación artística. En este sentido, estoy de acuerdo con Borges cuando afirmaba que la imaginación supera la realidad. En verdad, la obra literaria, y la obra poética en particular, son resultado de la imaginación creativa. La realidad, la experiencia viva del autor, son la materia prima de su creación, por eso el artista, más que recrear la realidad, la reconstruye por medio de su imaginación y sensibilidad, y en ese proceso, mente de algún modo. El dominicano Marcio Veloz Maggiolo refrenda esta idea en su obra *La memoria fermentada* cuando afirma: “Todo imaginista, todo novelista, todo poeta, todo creador de mundos imaginarios es un mentirosos sutil” (200:10). La poesía, en tanto creación, surge ya investida de otra realidad y se despliega sobre un plano superior al de lo burdo y cotidiano. Su nacimiento viene desde el fondo de un mundo socavado que anhela ser revuelo y destello. Con frecuencia, como la mayor parte de la literatura, encalla sobre hechos biográficos, los cuales trastoca y embellece. Otras veces la poesía disloca los géneros canónicos revistiéndolos de amalgamadas apariencias en las que lo narrativo y lo biográfico forman el entramado temático, el contenido, la idea, o como quiera llamársele, pero engalanados con las vestiduras lucientes de la metáfora y la imagen poética. Tal es el fondo de *La Lluvia es una piel*, una vida, una experiencia poetizada.

Al leer los 78 poemas que constituyen este poemario de Dlia Mc Donald Woolery, volvemos a los orígenes, a la infancia y los recuerdos, pero esta vez, a la matriz nutricia de una joven afrocostarricense. Este tercer libro de poemas de Mc Donald es y no es una autobiografía. Lo es en tanto que ahí están los ancestros, la madre, el padre, los hermanos, las tías, los abuelos, en fin, la comunidad entera en cuya piel se han lavado leyenda y realidad de los inmigrantes jamaquinos que poblaron Puerto Limón para luego desplazarse a la ciudad, habitarla, domeñarla y poder decir:

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*Nosotros;
llegamos a San José cargados
de ceremonias y silencios
y nos fuimos a vivir a un barrio. (16)*

Habitaron el centro de la ciudad, ahí donde viven los “*morenos de raza*”, como dicen sus vecinos. Dlia Mc Donald relata su vida en poesía. La reconstruye y adorna, al igual que sus tías quienes, “*Por las tardes construyen vestidos,/ e ilusiones de los retablos de la colchas*” (23).

Mito y realidad se entretajan en sus versos. El eco de relatos fantásticos que la oralidad afinaba en la lengua criolla de abuelas y abuelos dejó en Dlia una fascinación por los dioses antiguos, los que llegaron con los primeros africanos al Caribe y poco a poco fueron adquiriendo personalidad y rasgos distintos, “los dioses Samunfos y Obeath”, los Loas del Panteón Vudú. “*Señores que gobiernan la tierra,/ en tiempos de lluvia*” (13). Con palabra precisa y rítmica la voz poética va deshojando su vida. Su nacimiento se torna mítico, “*momento/ en que el misterio y lo divino/ se repartían los reales*” (12). Ella reconstruye su pasado como una profecía sin tiempo, juego de espejos en el que gusta mirarse y ser mirada. También su infancia la remonta al mito y como una Medea postmoderna crea su propio pastiche:

*Desde niña...
ya era bruja.
Y ya,
practicaba el ritual
de llamar a los duendes
e invocar la lluvia
con ceremonias de risa y alegría. (13)*

La lluvia es el otro personaje, la silenciosa interlocutora que se complace en la piel “hechizada” de su devota. Lluvia-testigo, fijación genética entre madre e hija: *La niña tiene la expresión serena de la lluvia* (9) y la madre “*es una negra con la piel como lluvia nocturna de aguardiente y canela*” (19). La poeta establece el ritual de comunión con la lluvia a través de sus recuerdos y vivencias. Con ella, el cielo, el mar, los ríos, conforman el entorno mágico de un paisaje selvático y tropical donde la humedad y la lluvia son mensajeras constantes de evocaciones pasadas, de historia y de silencios.

Sin duda, el acierto más encomiable de Dlia Mc Donald es su afirmación de la negritud como mujer afrocostarricense y latinoamericana en general. Como bien lo expresa Dorothy Mosby en su obra *Place, Language, and Identity in Afro-Costa Rican Literature* (2003), Dlia Mc Donald “es, por sí misma una mujer negra con un conocimiento claro y definido de quien es y qué es lo que se ha propuesto hacer: escribir, pero no lo hace desde el fondo del ideario contemporáneos del escritor pasional, sino comprometida consigo misma y con su propio diseño de palabra” (*La coleccionista de Espejos*, blog, 8 Feb. 2011). En verdad, Dlia se afirma desde un principio como lo que es:

*Nací negra,
porque soy el sol.
Nací de agua negra,
Mar tranquila
brujería de huesos*

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en el andar. (10)

Su familia, sus ancestros y sus descendientes son negros: *En casa,/ los negros somos de papel y aleluyas, / y guardamos el make'a tell you/ en una canasta con sombrero/* (24). Ser negro en la familia es enfrentar el dilema entre el mundo de los ancestros y el de los vecinos de color diferente. Un mundo de intercambios lingüísticos y culturales. El criollo limonense se mezcla con el español; tal convivencia no libra de pérdidas, y ellos lo saben. Pero se conserva el ritmo de vidas milenarias, ritmo heredado en el baile y la música a flor de piel, en los huesos y en la sangre: *Mi tribu/ es una canción:/ un negro que camina bailando,/ donde sólo el relámpago rompe la noche* (25).

Tal afirmación es una ruptura también con viejos esquemas raciales, donde lo que en otras partes de la diáspora africana en Latinoamérica y El Caribe llaman “moreno”, “de color” y otros eufemismos, en Mc Donald es llanamente negritud, a la manera de Aimé Césaire, de Zapata Olivella y Nicolás Guillén. De este modo, *La Lluvia es una piel* se convierte en una ojeada poética a la historia y los mitos de los Afrolimonenses en Costa Rica, quienes en el siglo XIX llegaron desde Jamaica y otras islas del Caribe para trabajar en los rieles del ferrocarril y se establecieron en la Costa Atlántica. Hoy en día, la población afrodescendiente supera a la población indígena del país. Ellos están orgullosos de haber logrado conquistas sociales importantes, como el ser reconocidos como grupo étnico en la categoría “Afrocostarricense o negro” en el censo de población nacional de 2010.

En Agosto de 2012 tuve la oportunidad de viajar a Costa Rica como ponente en el Congreso Bienal de la *Afro-Latin American Research Association* (ALARA) que se llevó a cabo en San José. Ahí tuvimos el honor de conocer y convivir con lo más granado de los escritores y escritoras afrocostarricenses: Quince Duncan, Eulalia Bernard, Carol Brito, Franklin A. Perry y por supuesto, Dlia Mc Donald. Escucharlos fue un baño refrescante por los logros obtenidos en el terreno de las artes, las letras y la cultura en general. En pocos países del continente, con excepción de los Estados Unidos, los afrodescendientes han logrado una posición de respeto y reconocimiento como en Costa Rica. Y esto se debe, más que nada, a la labor cultural que realizan sus escritores, artistas y activistas negros. Sin duda, *La lluvia es una piel* de Mc Donald forma parte de esa herencia cultural y artística y pone de manifiesto una vez más la sensibilidad, el amor y la perseverancia que habita en sus pechos.

En este sentido, Dlia se ha prestado a ser portavoz, imán, sensora de las voces no sólo de su familia, sino de la comunidad entera de donde procede. Sobre todas las cosas ella reconoce y revive el entorno geográfico y cultural del cual proviene. En la sección III del libro, Limón es el motivo del fluir poético:

*En vacaciones
Íbamos a Limón,
en medio
una algarabía de colores;
y el sol,
con sombrero
de cocoteros, nos alcanzaba
en las curvas bajas... (26)*

Puerto Limón, cuna y camino, evocación del ferrocarril y el viaje, *Todo el ancho del Sol/ con nosotros viajaba/ y en los túneles/ nos amanecía/ despacio* (27). El viaje es recuerdo que conduce al origen; con él llegan las imágenes poéticas y el viaje a

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la semilla se paladea en los versos: *Dulce melcocha de verdes,/ goteando desde el cielo:/ las piedras/ se están peinando el cabello con la lluvia* (29).

El puerto, indudablemente, no puede existir sin el mar, como el mar sin el cielo. El puerto y sus cofradías, sus negocios oscuros, tributarios, le dejan además los sonidos del mar, como el más bello recuerdo que vale encomiar:

*Sonidos del mar,
arrullando un pueblo
de corales dormidos
por el eco profundo de las olas
sobre el tambor del tajamar. (34)*

Dlia se deleita en las palabras y ellas le devuelven la música y el sentido después de estrujarlas y jugar a que es niña otra vez, recorriendo los caminos que abrieron sus ancestros entre el valle central y la costa. El lenguaje entonces cobra importancia, es arrullador y meloso en las canciones que salen de la radio; bullanguero en la salsa, narrativo y columpiante en el calipso, burbujeante en las voces de los vendedores ambulantes. Ese lenguaje le permite crear y recobrar momentos idos, como en el poema número 11 de la Tercera Parte. “*Cada parada es un baile de Calipsos,/ los negros chepines,/ estamos alegres con nuestra fiesta de sonrisas, / y al tren suben los vendedores atropellando los anuncios: pan bon...pan booon, lleva lleva pan bonnnnn... pescao, pescao fresco y rondon.... Pescao, 15 cents y usted comer el mejor rondon del puerto... 15 cents y no haber mejor,/ etc.* (30). Esta inclusión de los pregones populares en la poesía culta de Mc Donald es una acrobacia lingüística, el punto de contacto entre los dos extremos de un todo. Aquí, el lenguaje vernacular se une al lenguaje culto de la poeta, ambos son dos cuerpos distintos y el mismo, los asemejan la pureza y la profundidad; su esencia es la misma, integración absoluta, poesía.

Herencia y memoria deja al lector la poesía de Dlia Mc Donald Woolery, y el saber milenario de los pueblos negros. Ella es heredera de una tradición de videntes, trajinantes, músicos, artistas, curanderos. Mitos y ritmos ahora acrisolados en la voz de esta joven talentosa y sutil que hoy por hoy es una realidad de las letras costarricenses.

University of Southern Indiana

**SAMBO BO: Poemas Afro-Uruguayos de Juan Julio Arrascaeta,
(Irma & Rosa Arrascaeta Hernández, Uruguay 2011.)**

Revisado por Cristina R. Cabral

SAMBA BO: Poemas Afro-Uruguayos es un libro publicado en Uruguay por las hijas del escritor afro uruguayo Juan Julio Arrascaeta (1899-1988) en el año 2011. Esta primera edición del poemario incluye poemas creados a partir del año 1910 que fueron recopilados por el autor durante la década de 1970. Junto a estos, la edición recoge algunas opiniones de la prensa, colegas y amigos sobre el impacto causado por las primeras composiciones líricas del autor; también se incluye un breve ensayo de Arrascaeta sobre el origen y la historia de las *comparsas de negros*ⁱ y *lubolos*ⁱⁱ en el Uruguay. Como parte de su contribución al acervo cultural uruguayo Arrascaeta también escribió unos cuadernos sobre sus antepasados y un vocabulario africano de 3,000 palabras.

Juan Julio Arrascaeta pertenece al grupo de escritores cuya obra aun no ha sido explorada en intensidad por parte de la crítica literaria a pesar de su larga trayectoria, tanto en la literatura, como en las organizaciones sociales y culturales afro uruguayas. Sus poemas fueron publicados mayormente en revistas y periódicos de la época pertenecientes a organizaciones afro; cuatro de ellos fueron musicalizados y presentados al público por un conocido grupo de música popularⁱⁱⁱ. En el año 2000 el poema *Samba Bo* es incluido en uno de los libros de texto del último grado del programa escolar. Algunos de los poemas de *Samba Bo* fueron presentados en las antologías de Ildefonso Pereda Valdez (1929), y de Alberto Britos (1990), así como en *Afro-Uruguayan Literature* (2003) de Marvin Lewis el cual destaca la afirmación de la negritud y resistencia como características sobresalientes en los textos seleccionados en su estudio. Lewis ubica al autor junto a un grupo de poetas afro uruguayos que durante el siglo XX crean sus composiciones siguiendo la misma línea de pensamiento de sus predecesores y pioneros afiliados al periódico *La Conservación* “*where the basis for contemporary Afro-Uruguayan poetry is established*” (81)^{iv}.

En el prefacio de *Samba Bo* el autor expresa que su intención primaria no fue escribir poesía, declarando que sus versos carecen de la “métrica, retórica y pulimento de los poetas del siglo de oro” sino de “cantar la pureza de mi raza”. Por lo que, a través de sus versos, Arrascaeta irá informando al lector sobre las vivencias de los africanos y sus descendientes en el Uruguay antes y después del colonialismo; vivencias que fueron compartidas por los africanos y su descendientes a lo largo del continente americano “en las estancias castellanas, fazendas portuguesas y algodones de América”. Esta labor didáctica del poeta se dirige a la sociedad en su conjunto con la finalidad de recuperar la historia del negro en las *Américas* rescatando del olvido hechos y circunstancias no incluidos en las historias oficiales de los países, y mucho menos en los textos canónicos de los autores del siglo de oro español. Tal vez es en base a esta característica de la obra de Arrascaeta que en 1947 Mario Leguizamón Montero en un breve artículo se refiere al autor como “el poeta negro” (86)^v destacando la lírica y espiritualidad contenida en sus primeros versos, a la vez que anuncia su consagración literaria una vez que el poeta se adueña completamente de las clásicas formas rítmicas y métricas. Britos también refiere al autor como “El poeta mayor de la raza” (37).

En varios de los poemas de *Samba Bo* se destacan diversos recursos literarios tales como: regionalismos, africanismos, onomatopeyas y jitanjaforas, que recrean el lenguaje bozal de los negros durante la época colonial y antes de que los mismos adquiriesen la correcta pronunciación del idioma español:

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*Samba...bo / Samba... be / Samba a catamba / Catamba... ye/ Tate queto mi Yimbitol/
No llore, dejate lava/ Tene la bamba chucha/ Mana no te va a bautiza/ ... (Samba Bo:
1-8)*

En el ejemplo se advierte la amplia presencia de vocablos del lenguaje bozal que recrean no solo la semántica del lenguaje del negro colonial sino la rítmica y musicalidad del mismo. Esta característica de la lírica de Arrascaeta fue compartida en la época por otros autores en el Uruguay y en el resto de las Américas influenciados por la poética de Nicolás Guillén ((1902-1989) y las vertientes negristas. Arrascaeta se apropia de estos elementos vanguardistas que plantea la poética afro hispana de la época definiendo el carácter social de su obra, en cuanto a la recuperación de la historia de su pueblo y la reivindicación de la cultura afro uruguaya.

La temática de *Samba Bo* es amplia destacando distintas circunstancias de la vida cotidiana del afro uruguayo. Algunos poemas evidencian un tono confesional y refieren a la vida personal del poeta. Entre estos “A mi madre” donde la voz poética evoca un doloroso momento en su infancia ante la sorpresa y el vacío dejado por la muerte de su madre; o “La Ronda” donde la voz revive el dolor provocado ante la muerte de su hija. La memoria de su hija, Deolinda Hilda, es también homenajeada en “Cantos” verso breve incluido como dedicatoria del poemario.

Otros versos son de tipo histórico y refieren a distintas circunstancias en la vida de los esclavos. En ellos se rememoran algunos de los oficios desempeñados por los mismos como en “El vendedor de mazamorra” y “Canción de la niña lavandera”. Otros versos evocan los sentimientos de los niños esclavizados como en “La Muñeca” donde una niña expresa su deseo de tener una muñeca que sea negra como ella, pero que no llore ni sea esclava. Las inocentes venganzas tomadas contra los amos son recreadas en “La Negrita”. La tuberculosis fue una de las grandes enfermedades que enfrentó la sociedad uruguaya en las primeras décadas del siglo XX la cual causo muchas muertes en la comunidad afro, por lo que esta sirve de tema de inspiración en “La Costurerita”; mientras que “Esclavitud” aborda el tema de la fe religiosa como única esperanza del esclavo de obtener una vida mejor. “Tangore” reivindica la participación del negro en las guerras civiles de post-independencia. El tema de la pérdida del amor es recreado en “Cabecita Loca”, poema ausente de elementos bozales escrito en clásicos cuartetos de rima consonante. “Consuelo” redefine el concepto del cielo como última morada donde los afro uruguayos muertos también tocarán el tambor. “Ansiedad” aborda la temática del mestizaje en forma comprensiva aunque dolorosa dada las circunstancias violentas donde generalmente ocurría la toma de mujeres negras por parte de los blancos. El tema de la igualdad en términos humanos a pesar de las diferencias de privilegios producto de las diferencias raciales es abordada en “Balada de los dos ángeles”, poema que comparte algunas similitudes con el clásico de Guillén “Balada de los dos abuelos”. El nacionalismo uruguayo es recreado en “Mi bandera” sentimiento que trasciende diferencias sociales y raciales, las cuales son exploradas en “Balada del Pan Nuestro”. Finalmente cabe mencionar el infaltable homenaje al barrio tradicionalmente afro uruguayo en “Barrio Reus” el cual en Navidad resplandece de luces, colores y del sonido del tambor.

Samba Bo es un poemario didáctico e ilustrativo del devenir de la comunidad afro en la historia del Uruguay. Su publicación abre al lector en general una muestra representativa de la obra de uno de los poetas más importantes de la comunidad afro a partir de las primeras décadas del siglo XX. Dicha obra expone el crecimiento literario de Juan Julio Arrascaeta a través del tiempo, y comparte muchas de las características semánticas y estructurales que la literatura latinoamericana destacó en poetas como Nicolás Guillén y Langston Hughes, entre otros. No podemos culminar una revisión de *Samba Bo* sin hacer referencia a Richard Jackson el cual establecía el poder y la

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autoridad del “texto negro” en base a la experiencia que el mismo refleja y representa, y otorgando al lector y al crítico oportunidad de ampliar sus conocimientos sobre la riqueza cultural, social y literaria contenida en las extensas comunidades afro en Latino América.

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Notas

ⁱ Las comparsas de negros eran grupos de africanos y sus descendientes uruguayos que recorrían las calles principales de Montevideo en la época colonial disfrazados y tocando sus tambores durante la época de carnaval. De acuerdo a Arrascaeta la primera comparsa de negros fue “La Raza Africana” que salió por primera vez en el carnaval del año 1867. Actualmente las comparsas están integradas mayormente por uruguayos blancos y mestizos y su aparición representa la celebración más importante del carnaval.

ⁱⁱ Las comparsas de *lubolos* eran grupos de jóvenes blancos disfrazados y pintados de negro que parodiaban a las comparsas de negros. De acuerdo a Arrascaeta la primera comparsa de lubolos apareció en Montevideo en el año 1874 y obtuvo gran suceso.

ⁱⁱⁱ Información incluida en la breve biografía de Arrascaeta presente en *Samba Bo* donde consta que cuatro poemas del autor fueron musicalizados por el grupo uruguayo de música popular “Grupo Vocal Universo”.

^{iv} Junto a Juan Julio Arrascaeta son mencionados por Lewis los poetas Carlos Cardozo Ferreira, José Roberto Suarez, Pilar Barrios, Virginia Brindis de Salas y Cristina Rodríguez Cabral.

^v “Juan Julio Arrascaeta poeta negro...” breve texto escrito por Mario Leguizamón Montero el 20 de noviembre de 1947 e incluido al final del poemario *Samba Bo*.

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Women Warriors of the Afro-Latina Diaspora

editado por Marta Moreno Vega, Marinieves Alba e Yvette Modestín
(Houston: Arte Público Press, 2012.) 234 pp. \$24.95 (paperback).



revisado por Samiri Hernández Hiraldo, Ph. D.

El libro *Women Warriors of the Afro-Latina Diaspora* es parte de una iniciativa relativamente reciente de dar voz a la experiencia afro-latina de forma sistemática y en todas sus dimensiones. Dicha iniciativa ha sido sumamente necesaria si tomamos en cuenta los más de 150 millones de afro-latinos/as entre los 540 millones de habitantes latinoamericanos (Aquí hay que tomar en cuenta la complejidad, variantes e irregularidades en los existentes sistemas clasificativos étnico/racial/de color de piel).

La iniciativa ha estado representada por organizaciones tanto académicas como comunitarias, páginas de Internet, programas o especiales filmicos y televisivos (Cabe destacar la serie de PBS, *Black In Latin America with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.* y la serie *Afrolatinos: La historia que no nos contaron*) y publicaciones de revistas y libros. Más significativo es que *Women Warriors of the Afro-Latina Diaspora* responde al continuo vacío en cuanto a la experiencia de la mujer afro-latina se refiere. Ésta necesidad surge del hecho de que lo que hay escrito de la experiencia afro-latina, en su mayoría es desde la perspectiva del hombre (Aún así no debemos asumir o dar por sentada ésta última.).

Una de las más importantes y obvias contribuciones del libro es que está escrito en un estilo accesible al público en general. Además el libro es un compendio de experiencias divididas en históricas, personales y personales contemporáneas. Las mismas son aportadas por mujeres de países hispano-parlantes como Costa Rica, República Dominicana, Panamá, Perú, Puerto Rico, Venezuela y de países no hispano-parlantes como Brazil y Haiti. La exclusión de otras experiencias, como por ejemplo la afro-uruguaya y la afro-cubana, se entiende si se toma en cuenta los límites que aveces enfrenta un proyecto de ésta naturaleza.

Através de los varios capítulos son palpables las diferencias y similitudes en las experiencias de las autoras. Sin embargo son las similitudes las que nos permiten generalizar para efectos de un mejor entendimiento y acción política sin caer en la superficialidad y/o sobre-simplificación. Todas las autoras experimentaron discriminación y racismo de manera muy personal, abarcando lo emocional y lo físico según lo relatan las autoras Lara y Moreno Vega. Ellas al igual que las demás autoras, en su momento pudieron conectar sus experiencias con la de familiares, miembros de su comunidad y hasta fuera de su país. De ahí la expresión de que todas ellas no sólo continúan inmersas ("grounded") en sus comunidades, sino también comprometidas ("committed") con sus comunidades y más allá (pg. ix).

Los retos que éstas mujeres enfrentaron, tarde o temprano influenciaron su desarrollo académico, profesional, espiritual y político (para muchas de ellas no cabe la distinción) al grado que le llevaron a optar por el tema o la causa afro-latina; Laurent-Perrault dejando el tema ambiental y Modestín la carrera de jugadora de tennis. En el caso de Alba y Williams, su afiliación y liderato en religiones de origen africano parten de una profunda afirmación étnico/racial y un compromiso con el bienestar holístico de la comunidad afro-latina.

En su rol de líderes comunitarias o de organizaciones con enfoque racial o afro-latino, las autoras reconocen ciertos avances en las áreas del conocimiento de lo afro-latino, el reconocimiento de la todavía existente discriminación y racismo (aún dentro del tema fememino o la causa feminista, como lo acierta Rivera Lassén), y en la celebración de la cultura popular. Sin embargo, todas reconocen que todavía hay mucho por hacer no sólo porque los problemas y retos continúan, sino también porque "sí se

puede." De ahí la diferencia entre el ser "libre" y el ser "liberada" elaborada en el poema de Carillo (pg. 18). De ahí la frase tan esperanzadora de Campbell, "Éstos son buenos tiempos, tiempos de luz" en su poema "Frente al siglo nuevo" (pg. 201). De ahí el barquito de papel que no se deshace sino que viene al encuentro, en el poema de Rivera Lassén, "A Jane Doe," (pg. 119-120).

Algunas de las autoras insisten que no basta con desarrollar el activismo sino que hay que también enfatizar cierto tipo de activismo. Me parece que el activismo al que las autoras en conjunto se refieren es uno que primeramente destaque las distintas caras de la discriminación, el racismo y la injusticia en general según se manifiestan internamente como nos los recuerda Camacho Parra o entre los mismos afro-latinos/latinas, según lo comenta Laurent-Perrault. El propuesto activismo debe tomar en cuenta la discriminación y el racismo según se manifiesta en países de origen a diferencia de los Estados Unidos (Moreno Vega) o cuando se es parte de dos países de origen, como lo han experimentado Alba y Laurent-Perrault. Las autoras también se refieren a un activismo que en su quehacer, valore el ejemplo de aquellos que día a día luchan apesar de la discriminación y el racismo sin ser reconocidos. Ésto muy bien nos lo recuerda Moreira quien fue positivamente influenciada por el ejemplo de entereza de su madre y Penha -Lopes, por el ejemplo de lucha de su abuelo.

De acuerdo a Laurent-Perrault, un activismo efectivo indiscutiblemente debe moverse más allá de los mitos de celebración y el exotismo y según Reinat-Pumarejo, más allá de la resistencia pasiva a los sistemas clasificativos/representativos. La representación debe ser segura y concreta al igual que las oportunidades educativas y económicas (Williams pg. 218). Aquí cabe destacar la importancia del estudio y la investigación ("to study rather than being studied" según Penha-Lopes, pg. 98) para dar luz a datos e información comprensiva y lo más completa posible como lo ha hecho Williams. Penha-Lopes creyó necesario viajar al país de origen como parte del requerimiento investigativo.

Por otro lado el recorrido activista de Moreira en Brazil nos enseña que aunque las perspectivas macro e inter-organizacionales son sumamente importantes para el activismo político, el mismo se vuelve inefectivo (quizás no inmediatamente pero con el tiempo) sino viene desde abajo, desde la base, desde los marginados o los más afectados. Puedo entender por la experiencia de Moreira en Brazil, que lidiar con problemas o causas específicas (pg. 64) en muchos casos no muestra ser lo más efectivo, pero creo que ésto debe tomarse caso por caso. Aquí me vienen a la mente los problemas de salud y ambientales que enfrentan los afro-latinos/latinas (sin ser los únicos) y que cada día estendemos están sumamente relacionados. En mi experiencia personal de activismo ambiental, creo que el darle prioridad o manejar un problema sobre el otro depende de la situación. Pese a cualquier punto de vista estratégico, tampoco debemos imponer prioridades. Si alguien cree que boicotear el canal hispano Univisión por la exclusión de personas, especialmente mujeres negras, es importante, debemos por lo menos respetarlo. Como nos recuerda Moreno Vega de forma directa y como afirman las experiencias de todas las autoras, todos continuamos formándonos.

Hubiese querido escuchar más sobre el proceso de identificación afro-latina. En mi caso, mi piel es de color "blanca" y mi pelo ondulado. Mi padre es de piel "blanca" pero mi madre es de piel oscura. Por ésto y por la textura "kinky" de su pelo ella muy bien podría pasar como negra en los Estados Unidos. La piel de mi hermano es también oscura. ¿Entonces, soy afro-latina? Cuando escribí mi libro sobre parte de la experiencia de los negros en Puerto Rico algunos creyeron que pretendía ser negra y que por lo mismo no podía en realidad hablar del tema.

El activismo directo es sumamente importante, pero también estoy segura que otros lectores al igual que yo hubiesen querido escuchar más sobre el activismo que día

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a día se manifiesta apesar de la discriminación y el racismo y de forma particular en la vida de las mujeres quecasi nadie conoce, por ejemplo ese que me enseñó Doña Lydia en mis estudios en el pueblo de Loíza en Puerto Rico. Ella no sólo renunció a los tratamientos del pelo por razones de orgullo étnico y racial, sino que también iba por las calles enseñando a las mujeres a manejar mejor su dinero y las ayudaba en el proceso de registrarse para la escuela. Ella terminó su grado universitario ya entrada en edad.

El libro en sí es una forma de escuchar las mujeres más que *de ellas*. Esperaba más y/o de forma más directa, como las autoras, *como mujeres*, han experimentado la discriminación y el racismo y como *como mujeres* lo han transcendido. Aún así el libro es un testimonio vivo de los avances en la causa afro-latina y racial, de lo que se sigue haciendo, y de lo que todavía falta por hacer. Sin duda es también un testimonio de las variadas formas, muchas de ellas coincidiendo, de la lucha *contra* la discriminación, el racismo, y más aún, *en favor* de la igualdad y justicia de las mujeres, las familias, las comunidades, y la humanidad. Es así y sólo así que "nos negamos a morir" (Campbell, pg. 204 con mi énfasis en plural). ¡Aché!

Florida State University

Touré, *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?: What It Means to be Black Now* (New York: Free Press, 2012). 288 pp. \$16.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by Sonja Stephenson Watson

Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness? What it means to be Black Now by hip-hop cultural critic and author Touré, is an analysis of what it means to be African American in a post-Black, Obama era. In the text's foreword by Michael Eric Dyson, the incendiary critic explains the phenomenon of post-Blackness, a tenet that the text embraces and attempts to foreground. Dyson utilizes President Barack Obama to explicate post-Blackness and surmises that he is "rooted in, but not restricted by, his blackness" (xiii). Dyson further extrapolates that post-Blackness "doesn't signify the end of Blackness" but instead signifies that "we're over our narrow understanding of what Blackness means" (xvii). Dyson's foreword provides the sole theoretical foundation for Touré's work. Touré formulates post-Blackness employing his personal experiences as well as a series of interviews that he conducted with 105 "prominent Black people" including politicians, visual artists, recording artists, writers, and academics (12-13). Although the text espouses post-Blackness, it does not advocate a post-racial identity politic construct. While post-Blackness as Dyson and Touré assert embraces the diversity of black identity politics, "post-racial" signifies the end of racism which neither author embraces or supports.

Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness? is comprised of eight chapters which intercalate the author's personal experiences with mainstream views on being Black in America. The title of the opening chapter, "Forty Million Ways to Be Black," stems from a tenet that interviewee Henry Louis Gates, Jr. utilizes to express the multiplicity of Blackness. Simply put, since there are forty million African Americans, there are forty million ways to be Black. The title also challenges Black authenticity which for many is rooted in a finite number of ways to be Black and American. In fact, Touré's very text challenges this cultural paradigm. Moreover, born in 1971, Touré's own personal experiences with Blackness were shaped by the hip-hop movement which came to light during the 1980s. Thus, the chapter turns to the hip-hop movement to convey how this multiplicity has shaped and transformed generations of Blacks, artists, and music. While hip-hop in its infant stages overwhelmingly presented a uniform body of rappers who reflected the urban and often poverty stricken environments from which they came, the movement has morphed into something that embraces the identity politics of new millennium rapper Drake as well as the predominately white suburban audiences who currently shape the market.

Chapter two, "Keep it Real is a Prison," utilizes the popular expression "keeping it real" as a metaphor that simultaneously limits Black individuality and impedes diversity within the Black community. Keeping it real signifies not only an attitude but actions that can "trigger the loss of one's Blackness" (19). These actions according to the author range from having a white girlfriend to golfing. Touré appropriates the metaphor of "keeping it real" to discuss Black identity and authenticity and how the nation has moved from a Civil Rights era to a post-Civil Rights one. Touré forms part of the latter generation and thus relies on others to express racial identity politics and constructs that resulted from the Civil Rights movement. Blacks who were a product of the Civil Rights era lived in "warlike conditions" which led to a compacted identity construct that sought exclusively to combat white racism. Meanwhile, the post-Civil Rights generation did not rally around a single enemy and

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thus express their racial identity in a manifold of ways. In fact, the post-Civil rights generation fashioned a new racial identity construct that was rooted in but not restricted in Blackness. This post-Black identity politics led artists such as Ligon and Thelma Golden to embrace a new art form in the late 1990s that was steeped in race but not bounded by it. Touré argues that their 2001 post-Black art show in Harlem called "Freestyle" fashioned post-Black identity thought. These artists according to one of the text's interviewees simultaneously advanced the concept of post-Blackness and paved the way for the election of President Barack Obama. Other examples of post-Blackness in the artistic realm include Rashid Johnson's 2003 artistic piece "I Talk White" which challenges Black authenticity on the one hand, yet speaks within the tradition by utilizing non-standard English on the other. As a post-Black artist, Johnson is free to assert his Blackness how he chooses.

"The Rise and Fall of a Post-Black King" (Chapter three) explores the ascent and demise of Dave Chappelle, an African American comedian who rose to fame with his own comedy series, *Chappelle's Show*, on the network *Comedy Central*. *Chappelle's Show* arguably "is the clearest example of post-Blackness ever seen on television" (58). *Chappelle's Show* subverted longstanding racial metaphors, tropes, and discourses through satire and parody. An example of this is a sketch titled "Clayton Bigsby" in which the central character, a blind African American man, is ironically racist towards other blacks because he is blind to his own racial identity. Unbeknownst to him, he too is African American. Bigsby, who is treated as white by those around him because of his appearance and blindness, appropriates the racial epithets of white supremacists. *Chappelle's Show* further parodies the nation's obsession with diversity and racial quotas by having a "Racial Draft" (similar to the NFL draft). Chappelle's racial draft is as ambiguous and arbitrary as racial classifications in the United States. Each racial group drafts members. For example, the racial ambiguity of Tiger Woods is put to rest when African Americans draft the golfer as a member of their race. After he is drafted, Woods is elated that he "finally has a home." Thus, the show in post-Blackness fashion parodied the nation's quest for diversity and multiculturalism and signifies that racial classifications are arbitrary and ludicrous. However, the abrupt ending of *Chappelle's Show* compelled by Chappelle's departure despite a 52 million dollar contract with *Comedy Central*, point to the pitfalls of post-Blackness. In his efforts to subvert and dismantle racial stereotypes, Chappelle began to wonder if he was in fact promoting them. Chappelle left the show during the taping of the third season and fell from the limelight. Thus, post-Blackness has its consequences.

The text's fourth chapter, "Shut up Touré! You ain't Black!," is a personal account of the author's experiences with Blackness growing up in an era that demanded Black authenticity. Touré grew up in a middle-class white suburban community in Boston and attended a prestigious private school from first through twelfth grade. As a youngster, Touré learned to negotiate his Black racial identity politics and to "perform Blackness." He performed one way at his predominately white school and another in all Black settings. Touré's Blackness would be challenged once he entered Emory University. During his freshman year, the author formed friendships with his white dorm mates, and ultimately spent more time with them than Black students. An incident however would change Touré's social network and compel him to participate in prescribed Black activities. In short, an African American female student by the name of Sabrina Collins alleged that white students had written "N.... Hang" on the wall of her dorm room. Although Touré would later learn that the allegations were false, this

incident compelled him to join his Black brothers and sisters to fight against racism on campus. Touré began performing Blackness: he sat at the Black lunch table, he got involved in Black student organizations, and he went to Black step shows, all rites of passage that marked Black authenticity. However, the freshman year that Touré had spent socializing with whites had marked him and caused others to question his Blackness. At an all-Black party, a football player yelled at him, "Shut up Touré! You ain't Black!" After this episode, Touré wrote a piece for the school newspaper attacking the linebacker for questioning his racial authenticity. Touré was beginning to appropriate a post-Black racial identity and develop as a writer and cultural critic. However, he realized early on as a young writer that his Blackness limited the types of pieces that he wrote. As a young African American male, editors wanted him to write about Black subjects and Touré was clearly someone who was not constrained by Blackness even though he was clearly shaped by it.

Chapter five, "The Most Racist Thing that ever Happened...", explores several interviewees' experiences with racism and challenges the concept of a post-racial society. Touré reminds the reader that for him post-Blackness does not signal the end of racism or white supremacy. As members of the Civil Rights and post-Civil Rights generation, the interviewees provide examples of their personal experiences with racism. These examples range from getting passed over for job opportunities to less qualified white applicants to being followed or eyeballed in a department store, which are forms of modern racism and difficult to prove. Modern racism is difficult to define because often it is not even seen. An example would be a decision made behind closed doors about a job position, a home loan, or even the availability of a home in a select neighborhood. Touré contrasts these examples of modern racism with blatant examples that the interviewees experienced during segregation: police brutality and the Ku Klux Klan. Members of this generation also experienced other forms of racism including: being denied the use of a public library, being denied proper medical care, or being told that you are not good enough for a certain career. However, African Americans who experienced forms of modern racism were just as likely to suffer because it was unexpected. Touré provides the example of an occurrence that Derek Conrad Murray experienced in the 1980s. Murray's father was a hospital administrator who moved the family to an all-white community in Seattle, Washington. During a church service that they attended in their community, the Murrays were told by a fellow parishioner who used racial epithets to leave. For a young Derek, this episode proved heartbreaking because it was unexpected due to his father's social status.

The title of chapter six, "The Blacker the Berry the Sweeter the Juice, but Nobody wants Diabetes", appropriates a popular phrase in the African American community as a metaphor for the trials of tribulations of being Black in the United States. Interviewees discuss the toll that blackness takes on African descendants. Thus, Blacks feel inner turmoil when images in the media perpetuate stereotypes about Black criminality. However, various interviewees noted that what united Black descendants in the past such as white oppression and the Civil Rights movement does not necessarily resonate with the current generation. It remains difficult to codify Blackness in a post-Civil Rights era and especially in the new millennium. Thus, "keeping it real" is no more an exclusive marker of Blackness than being a product of the ghetto. However, one's Blackness is continuously challenged. In the post-Black era, Black authenticity is interrogated just as it once was in the past. In certain environments, Black authenticity comes into question when one "acts white," gets good grades or even lives in the suburbs. Signifying the title of the chapter, the interviewees also discuss the impact of

colorism in the Black community and the perception of whites. Dyson discusses the impact of his light skin on opportunities that he has attained. Melissa Harris-Perry concurs noting that she benefited from her light skin in both the Black and white community. Likewise, Alvin Poussaint reminds us that dark-skinned Blacks are often victims of racial prejudice within their own communities.

"How to Build more Baracks" (chapter seven), discusses how modern Black politicians negotiate Blackness in the political arena. Similar to President Barack Obama, rising Black politicians such as Harold Ford, Jr, Cory Booker, and the like present themselves as politicians who happen to be Black. As a post-Black era politician, one represents the entire community as opposed to the Black one and must "wield blackness in a non-threatening way" (180). Many of these politicians shaped their intellectualism at Ivy League schools which helped them negotiate their Blackness in an elite white world. Touré reflects upon his own negotiation with Blackness and recalls how he constantly sought white approval in high school and questioned his peer interactions. Surprisingly, despite this inner turmoil he never questioned his intellectualism or believed in the "myth of white mental superiority" (179).

The last chapter, "We are Quintessential Americans", notes the progress of the nation linked to the election of President Barack Obama but also the ambivalence that many Black Americans feel towards it. Many Black Americans have a love/hate relationship with America. This love/hate relationship is equally marked by the United States' torrid racial past and treatment of its Black citizens as well as the changing nature of the Black experience. Thus, while many Black Americans long for Africa, there is a distancing of this imagined, unknown past and a realization that it will never come to fruition. Touré recognizes that even when some Blacks as himself "return to Africa" their experience is euphoric yet disappointing because they realize they do not completely belong.

Who's Afraid of Post Blackness? is an attempt to define what it means to be Black in the 21st century. While the text succeeds in providing salient examples of what it means to be post-Black for a multiplicity of African Americans, it falls short in a sound theoretical framework of the discourse. While it defines post-Blackness at various moments in the text, it fails to root the discourse in salient theory such as critical race theory. While Dyson's foreword foregrounds the text, an introductory chapter utilizing critical race theory would root Touré's racial and cultural assessment of post-Blackness. Furthermore, because the text is based on Touré's personal experiences as well as a number of interviews that move between the past and the present, it lacks cohesiveness. As a non-academic, Touré's text lacks the theoretical and cultural foundation to delineate and define post-Blackness. However, as a hip-hop cultural critic he gets something right in his approximation in illustrating this phenomenon from a personal and generational perspective which characterizes a new era in the Black American experience!

University of Texas-Arlington

(Re)Considering Blackness in Contemporary Afro-Brazilian (Con)Texts
de Antonio D. Tillis
(Peter Lang, 2011). pp. 196, \$30.00

Reviewed by Susana C. Fuentes

Com artigos que inauguram novos caminhos para formulação de uma negritude no Brasil no contexto da contemporaneidade – Antonio D. Tillis apresenta a antologia *Re(Considerando) a Negritude em (Con)Textos Contemporâneos Afro-Brasileiros*.¹ Em estudos da diáspora africana, culturais e interdisciplinares, os autores ali reunidos deslocam-se à luz dos estudos de gênero, etnia, música, teatro, literatura, filme, e estudos da religião. Em sintonia com discursos pioneiros nos estudos brasilianistas no cenário internacional, o livro apresenta o Brasil num contexto regional e global, (re)pensando fronteiras literárias e culturais numa perspectiva transatlântica e interamericana. Num mundo globalizado, imaginários da negritude aparecem na ambivalência de um patrimônio que ainda se apresenta como constante descoberta. Questões que se tornam visíveis pela análise crítica permitem avançar no debate sobre o Brasil contemporâneo. Linhas invisíveis delineiam um Brasil diferente, que se revela para além das fronteiras como até então a nação se queria representada.

Em *(Re)Considering Blackness in Contemporary Afro-Brazilian (Con)Texts* – publicado pela editora Peter Lang originalmente em inglês – os autores/pesquisadores proporcionam um olhar inovador e transdisciplinar sobre os diferentes (con)textos brasileiros, e fornecem uma compreensão da epistemologia da negritude no Brasil, contribuindo de forma inédita para o avanço do discurso nacional sobre o tema, e – o que é extremamente interessante para o estudo internacional – traz esta perspectiva conectada ao diálogo transnacional. É uma proposta marcada pela singularidade de se ter um pesquisador professor, Chair da cadeira de estudos Africanos e Afro-Americanos do Dartmouth College e que ao mesmo é pesquisador Fulbright ligado ao Brasil, como organizador (e provocador) do livro. Projeto cujo desenho parece acompanhar e coroar seu trajeto de parceria e intercâmbio com pesquisadores em centros de pesquisas em Institutos de Letras de diferentes estados brasileiros, com a formação de simpósios em congressos internacionais, visitas de professores estrangeiros, e mesmo na forma de diferentes encontros com membros da comunidade acadêmica e seus grupos de trabalhos em interação com bolsistas PIBIC e com alunos dos cursos de Mestrado e Doutorado². O evento de Lançamento de seu livro *Manuel Zapata Olivella e o “escurecimento” da literatura latino-americana*³, organizado pela EdUERJ e o Centro

¹ (Traduções minhas do original para o português). TILLIS, A. D. (ed.)
(Re)Considering Blackness in Contemporary Afro-Brazilian (Con)Texts. Peter Lang:
New York, 2011.

² Vide “Identidade Cultural Negra na Literatura das Américas: Hibridismo, Discurso, Performance”, para o XII CONGRESSO DA ABRALIC 2011 – “CENTRO, CENTROS: ÉTICA E ESTÉTICA”, realizado de 18 a 22 de julho de 2011, na Universidade Federal do Paraná, em Curitiba, Paraná. Coordenadores Prof. Dr. Antonio Tillis (Dartmouth College), Profa. Dra. Maria Aparecida Andrade Salgueiro (UERJ/FAPERJ) e Prof. Dr. José de Paiva dos Santos (UFMG).

³ Com a palestra “O trabalho crítico de Antonio Dwayne Tillis”. Participantes da mesa: Prof. Dr. José de Paiva dos Santos (UFMG), Profa. Dra. Ana Beatriz Gonçalves (UFJF)

de Estudos Interculturais do Escritório Modelo de Tradução Ana Cristina Cesar, no Instituto de Letras da UERJ, representou o fortalecimento do acordo Internacional firmado com o pesquisador de Dartmouth, concretizado no produto específico da publicação da tradução de livro de grande relevância para os estudos interculturais.

Tratando-se dos artigos reunidos na antologia em questão, é importante destacar que o trabalho crítico de Antonio Dwayne Tillis em torno de uma Afro-Latino-América, aliado a seu percurso internacional em relações com o Brasil/Afro-Brasil, possibilita lugar estratégico para compor e organizar o estudo que coloca o Brasil em um novo espaço geográfico, no centro de discussões transnacionais e cosmopolitas. Numa abordagem interdisciplinar, à luz dos estudos culturais, a questão de identidade nacional e racial ganha uma discussão abrangente, com análise crítica do Brasil da metade do século XX aos tempos atuais. Um Brasil que se apresenta através da literatura, da religião, da produção de filmes e vídeos e da produção teatral, assim como das manifestações antropológicas e culturais em contextos contemporâneos. Ao mesmo tempo em que se apresenta multiétnico para o cenário internacional, o Brasil, na perspectiva dos autores nesse livro, está em constante negociação interna com a negritude. Remarcações constantes fazem o presente dialogar com o passado, com a herança negociada a duras penas.

À primeira vista, pode suscitar estranhamento traduzir o termo original – *blackness* – para *negritude*. Porque este último já viria imbricado de significantes de uma história própria construída até o presente, no panorama brasileiro. Mas se nos referirmos a negritude em relação ao termo *darkening* – *escurecimento*, que aparece no livro de autoria de Antonio Tillis acima referido, recentemente traduzido e lançado no Brasil, começamos a definir um novo olhar. Em *Manuel Zapata Olivella e o “Escurecimento” da Literatura Latino-Americana*⁴ – na tradução de José Paiva dos Santos, também quem apresenta a obra na edição brasileira, lemos:

Um dos aspectos salientados pelo pesquisador ao longo de *O “escurecimento” da literatura latina-americana* é [...] a necessidade de dar visibilidade e voz ao segmento afro-latino das Américas e da diáspora em geral. (Tillis, 2012, p.10)

Na antologia em foco, portanto, o termo negritude ou *blackness* não deve ser lido sem que se estabeleça relação com escurecimento – *darkening* – um substantivo que além do seu lugar inovador e abertura de significados é formado a partir de um verbo, uma ação, algo ainda não terminado, ainda em processo. Por isso, voltemos ao título da presente obra: é imprescindível trazer à palavra *negritude* o verbo que a antecede. Assim, afastemos a lente, abrindo o plano próximo – em vez de “blackness” somente, “(re)considering blackness”. Isso é: *revendo* a negritude. *Reconsiderando*. Assim, algo novo se anuncia: *reconsiderar*, retomar o exame de uma questão tendo em vista novas possibilidades. Ao mesmo tempo, considerar, colocar em pauta, ver, incluir. Algo novo se coloca em movimento. E a palavra negritude ganha de volta sua abertura, um espaço de negociação para mover a cadeia de significantes por ela evocada.

e Profa. Dra. Maria Aparecida Salgueiro (UERJ/FAPERJ), em 10 de maio de 2012.

⁴ TILLIS, A.D. *Manuel Zapata Olivella e o “Escurecimento” da Literatura Latino-Americana*. Trad. de José de Paiva dos Santos. EdUERJ: Rio de Janeiro, 2012.

O Brasil à luz do escurecimento, onde a negritude não se separa das vozes que compõem ou narram a nação, mas vem como autocelebração, como memória e como futuro de um componente africano que se insere no contexto contemporâneo brasileiro. Em *(Re)Considering Blackness in Contemporary Afro-Brazilian (Con)Texts*, o título do livro, em seu enunciado condensado/multiplicado pelo uso de parênteses, se abre a várias formulações. Algo é incluído no debate, e mais do que isso, é reconsiderado na discussão. Textos e contextos se interpõem, incluindo no texto o lugar de onde se fala. E afinal, aqui uma pergunta aparentemente simples, mas de grande importância: quais serão esses (con)textos afro-brasileiros na contemporaneidade? Se o título não se fecha nele mesmo, pode infinitamente suscitar várias considerações: “Afro-Brazilian / Blackness”, uma “negritude /afro-brasileira”? Termos que se unem pela cor em comum das letras na capa do livro em redundância provocada, pois esta dupla aproximação, *blackness* e *Afro-Brazilian* nos remete à existência de outras negritudes, partes multiplicadas de uma Afro-Latino-América. Um componente africano que não é mais África, mas uma Afro-América do outro lado do Atlântico. E o hífen mais do que uma barra é um corte, uma incisão na própria estrutura, e não um anexo. No contexto contemporâneo, vem como fundamento, fundação, alicerce. Na abordagem proposta pela obra em questão esse “escurecimento” vem (re)significar o componente em negociações entre culturas, redimensiona as leituras e releituras dos espaços afro-brasileiros e suas passagens, nas intermediações entre grupos culturais distintos num mundo dito globalizado. Contra absolutismos étnicos, ou oposições binárias, negritude importa aqui como um significante aberto – “an open signifier” (Gilroy, 1993, p.32), afirmando representações sempre diferentes em relação a um outro, diferenças que se estabelecem internamente mesmo numa unidade. Assim, ao invés de uma essência racial, importa apresentar um rizoma de culturas em diáspora, de acordo com o que desafia Paul Gilroy.

Desse modo, os primeiros passos para recorte de uma cultura Afro-Brasileira seriam buscar a gênese no próprio Afro-Brasil, do mesmo modo que a produção afro-americana teria sua matriz na própria Afro-América. Os caminhos do discurso pós-colonial e pós-moderno que dialogam no livro apresentam cidades, deslocamentos, percorrem uma América Latina que se torna Afro-Latino-América, com a polifonia de vozes de um Atlântico Negro (Gilroy) que não tenta recuperar um passado diretamente de uma matriz africana, mas sim daqueles que já atravessaram o Atlântico, com a produção de novas culturas em outros espaços geográficos. Assim, em diálogo com novas produções teóricas, nas releituras dos espaços geográficos e suas passagens, o Afro-Brasil do livro escava novos contextos. As teorias pós-coloniais ali presentes permitem que não se veja como um bloco anônimo a questão étnica/racial, mas sim como cadeia rizomática. Como foi dito aqui, não somente a raiz africana, mas raízes que se estabelecem a cada relação na diáspora – numa diferença que se estabelece sempre outra, em relação com um outro novo e diferente, em interlocução, igualmente, com o que Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie chama de “diáspora literária”: “We must discover ‘diaspora literacy’ and, through it, strengthen our similarities through our differences and our inalienable historical common origins and experiences” (Davies and Ogundipe-Leslie, 1995, p.16). Um espaço literário diaspórico, enfim, onde a experiência estética da criação vem celebrar o próprio lugar a partir de onde se cria.

Com abordagens de teorias da crítica contemporânea tal qual o pós-colonialismo, cada artigo traz a possibilidade das novas narrativas estudadas avançarem contra a corrente de pressupostos eurocêtricos como a inevitabilidade do progresso, da civilização, e a hegemonia da história narrada sob um prisma cronológico. E saírem da

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palidez para o escurecimento, da obscuridade para a densidade, com vozes que se apresentam em nuances de sombras e luminosidades. Assim, nos estudos culturais a memória cultural oficial dá lugar à produção de memórias, à experiência estética, a novos espantos para produção de narrativas. Em lugar de hegemonia e exclusão, novas vozes se apropriam das palavras e passam a nomear as coisas.

Antonio Tillis, no artigo para a revista *Palimpsesto*, do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, denominado “**Haiti and Post-Colonial Allegory in Manuel Zapata Olivella’s Changó, El Gran Putas**”, destaca um dos pontos levantados por Linda Hutcheon, em *A Poetics of Post-Modernism*⁵:

‘(...) her view that the postmodern is “fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political,”(Hutcheon, 3) which enables a “rethinking of history” in terms of the representation of a singular truth arguing that therein lies implicit “truths.”’⁶

Em, seguida, apontando questões pós-coloniais de raça, etnicidade, exploração, opressão, racismo, luta social, resistência e composição da etnia⁷, Tillis refere-se aos editores de *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*⁸ para colocar em evidência a “narrativa simbólica” do discurso pós-colonial, capaz de subverter a narrativa canônica tradicional. Segundo eles,

allegory is a ‘symbolic narrative’ in which the major features of the movement of the narrative are all held to refer symbolically to some action or situation (...), a ‘post-colonial’ allegory contests and disrupts the narrative assumptions of colonialism, such as the inevitability of ‘development’, of ‘progress’, of ‘civilization’, the dominance of chronological view of history, the Euro-centric view of the ‘real’. By reinforcing the fact that ‘real’ events occupy various horizons of meaning, post-colonial allegory becomes a common strategy of resistance in post-colonial texts. (Ashcroft et al., 9-11). (Tillis, 2005)

Essa situação se apresenta e se desdobra sob as lentes da pós-modernidade no livro organizado por Tillis. Onde a margem aparece e se revela sem exotismo, abrindo-se o campo de uma “estética negra” que leva em conta os parâmetros de uma produção com referências desta mesma produção, em sua pluralidade. Assim a margem transborda, rompe amarras e linhas ou rótulos. A Afro-Latino-América pode surgir na

⁵ HUTCHEON, L. *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 1990.

⁶ **Palimpsesto - Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da UERJ**
at: www.pglettras.uerj.br/palimpsesto/num5/dossie/dossie5_haiti.htm
Volume 05, ANO 5, 2005.

⁷ “issues of race, ethnicity, exploitation, oppression, racism, social struggle, resistance, and ethnic composition” (Tillis, 2005).

⁸ ASHCROFT, BILL et al. (editors). *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995.

contracorrente de uma estética naturalizada onde o cânone se apresenta neutro pelas estratégias das forças dominantes.

Como escreve Maria Aparecida Andrade Salgueiro, no artigo “Literature, Written Art and Historical Commitment: From Cadernos to Conceição Evaristo”, primeiro capítulo do livro, a noção de cânone vem ela mesma sendo discutida:

At a historical moment when ‘globalization’ is still much talked about, when nationalist rebellions and struggles succeed, when the very notion of ‘nation’ according to traditional parameters is strongly questioned, it is not surprising that the notion of ‘canon’ is also being challenged. (Tillis, 2011, p.9)

O artigo de Salgueiro é pioneiro em delinear fatos e pontos intrínsecos aos Estados Unidos e ao Brasil no surgimento de uma atenção voltada às literaturas afro-descendentes. A autora nos informa também, de que modo a produção literária afro-brasileira passa a ter visibilidade nos Estados Unidos e entre os afro-americanos. No Brasil, Salgueiro ressalta a importância dos *Cadernos Negros*⁹ para a visibilidade da literatura negra. Autores de vários estados brasileiros publicaram nos *Cadernos*. E ali se deu o surgimento de vozes negras femininas que se fortalecem incessantemente no movimento para uma literatura expressiva de autores afro-brasileiros. Maria Aparecida Salgueiro escreve:

As representatives of a women’s movement of literary expression, Black women writers seek to rescue names forgotten by literary history and encourage the appearance of new ones, as in the expression of emotions suppressed, silenced, oppressed, for centuries. (Tillis, 2011, p.14)

No artigo, a autora ressalta que as escritoras negras acabam por levantar dilemas comuns a diferentes indivíduos na sociedade, independentemente de raça ou gênero. Se a apresentação de como este caminho se deu nos Estados Unidos é significativa, temos com seu artigo um panorama esclarecedor e inédito na comparação/contraste com o caminho no Brasil. Diferentes pontos entre lá e cá se cruzam, seja pela interseção, seja pelo distanciamento. São apontados autores e autoras que foram esquecidos e depois recuperados, assim como os que despontam no cenário contemporâneo. O compromisso com o resgate histórico, redefinindo o discurso oficial do que é ou não digno de registro, evidencia uma ação reveladora de material riquíssimo num trabalho arqueológico de garimpo de relíquias do passado e reinvenções do presente.

“Cross Readings: Mestizaje, Transculturation, Hybridism, and Creolization” é o título de artigo de Eurídice Figueiredo. “Leituras cruzadas: *Mestizaje*, Transculturação, Hibridismo, e Creolização”. Paisagens de deslocamentos estão presentes desde o próprio título do artigo, quando aponta nos conceitos elencados a condição nômade: leituras cruzadas, desafiando diferentes tempos, territórios e campos de estudo. A crítica da mestiçagem no Brasil é reconsiderada pelo filtro do termo em espanhol, escolhido pela autora do artigo. O termo *mestizaje*, aponta ela, tem sua razão de ser. A opção por não usar o termo em português, *mestiçagem*, ou em francês, *métissage*, implica em discutir a ideia para além da esfera da simples miscigenação. Na literatura, o conceito de *mestizaje* importa na medida em que reúne a possibilidade de

⁹ CADERNOS NEGROS. São Paulo: Quilombhoje.

convívio entre línguas diferentes na mesma tessitura narrativa. E o convívio de duas culturas, na contaminação entre línguas. A transculturação narrativa, no convívio também entre a tradição escrita e a oral, impurezas linguísticas, com as múltiplas migrações de minorias visíveis ou não caucasianas no centro mesmo dos impérios do ocidente.

Conceitos de *mestizaje*, hibridismo, transculturação, relações transculturais e interculturais são explicados e explorados nesse artigo para depois, de modo bastante surpreendente, apontar para um cenário ao revés: no contexto atual, esses conceitos não são mais exclusivos de uma América Latina e Caribe, mas a realidade de um processo mundial, que remodela a consciência hegemônica. Com esses conceitos, começamos a estudar a formação de uma nova consciência, com mudanças profundas: “profound changes at the Center of the great Western empires that had so far seemed immune to a process so characteristic of Latin America and the Caribbean” (Tillis, 2011, p.61). E Eurídice Figueiredo refere-se a Ulrick Beck, que anuncia uma “Brasilianização do mundo” – “Brazilianization of the world”. Se o futuro irá pertencer à *mestizaje*, o Brasil entra aqui como símbolo das transformações globais. Segundo Gloria Anzaldúa¹⁰, citada no artigo na referência a Beck, *la mestiza* cria uma nova consciência, na quebra de paradigmas e no modo de apreensão do mundo e de si mesmo. “By creating a new mythos – that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave – *la mestiza* creates a new consciousness” (Tillis, Idem).

Em “Posthumous Memories of Slavery: Blackness and Machado de Assis”, Eduardo de Assis Duarte chama atenção no título para o que se confirma no subtítulo: o autor de *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* em sua relação à negritude. Como de fato atentar para a importância de se reconhecer a questão da etnia no escritor brasileiro mais conhecido na comunidade científica internacional? Eduardo de Assis Duarte descobre onde o próprio autor – Machado de Assis – se insere nessa busca e dá forma – e cor – a suas personagens. E revela a memória da escravidão – numa (re)constituição do que se queria apagado. No artigo acompanhamos como Machado de Assis retoma a mancha da escravidão e macula o discurso hegemônico de sua época ao colocar-se ao lado de seus irmãos afro-descendentes. O escritor retoma tempos do Império, escreve “Pai contra mãe” e aparece fora do compasso de uma época pós Abolição da Escravatura no Brasil que se esforça em apagar a mancha nacional da escravidão. O artigo aponta como o texto reconstrói a memória da escravidão, na figura do narrador identificado não com a classe social que ele critica, mas sim com os irmãos vítimas do sistema escravocrata. E mostra como o conto desafia a voz que tenta atenuar o processo violento da escravidão no Brasil. No conto, cabe lembrar, pai e mãe não são respeitáveis membros de uma mesma família, como o enunciado pode sugerir, em velada ironia. *O pai* é um caçador de escravos fugitivos, sem condições de sustentar o filho que acabara de nascer. *A mãe*, uma escrava em fuga pelo desejo de que seu filho nasça em liberdade. O preço da salvação de uma criança é o preço da liberdade da outra, e optando por não ouvir suas súplicas, o caçador devolverá a escrava a seu senhor. Traçando uma história de vozes e contra-vozes, Eduardo de Assis Duarte contrapõe a ficção de Machado a conclusões de teóricos e historiadores, e continua por apontar o olhar machadiano para a situação social e existencial do negro, antes, durante e depois da campanha abolicionista. Vários são os contos citados neste novo contexto.

¹⁰ ANSALDÚA, G. *Borderlands/ La frontera: The new mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1999.

Não apenas Machado de Assis é escurecido, mas o seu texto o é. Nuances e relevos surgem na escavação – ou na nova alquimia.

Em “Echoes of Africa in the *Pontos* of Umbanda: From Afro-Brazilian to Brazilian” de Ana Beatriz Gonçalves, encontramos na democracia racial um “mito” que esconde os mecanismos do preconceito – e vemos como políticas de amansamento podem ocorrer nas relações do candomblé com a identidade nacional. Como Tillis aponta em sua introdução ao livro, vários pesquisadores concordam que o conceito de democracia racial nasceu de um processo racista e patriarcal na tentativa de apresentar a América Latina, especialmente o Brasil, como se fossem organicamente não discriminatórios na sua política racial evolucionária. Ana Beatriz Gonçalves analisa e traz exemplos desses mecanismos, quando atravessa *pontos* de umbanda, e traz contribuição singular para a discussão das formas da religiosidade na cultura negra em seu entrelaçamento com a identidade nacional.

À luz da interdisciplinaridade, representações do corpo aparecem em “Performing Time, Performing Memory: Africa and Blackness in Brazilian *Congado*” de Leda Martins. A autora estabelece o corpo como sítio da memória. Explora festividades do Congado, e a experiência dos rituais. Manifestações religiosas ou artísticas são discutidas na relação dos passos em harmonia com a música, a dança, as canções, as vozes dos membros da comunidade. Na forma como tudo isso materializa o corpo de cada membro da comunidade. Também com Marcos Antônio Alexandre, em “Forms of representation of the Black Body in Performance”, somos apresentados à transcrição dos mitos na cena, na busca por uma tessitura cênica que trabalha a unidade também pelo viés da forma – as diferentes expressões do corpo – a dança, a música, a presentificação do imaginário, a energia no ato da cena na representação dos orixás, onde se vivencia a experiência da cultura brasileira. Os orixás, os elementos da natureza resignificados e incorporados pela performance do corpo. De que modo a coreografia tange a memória coletiva do corpo. O culto do Candomblé, revivido na cena, conecta não apenas espaços terreneis e das divindades, mas constrói a ponte com o público no encontro em cena. Encenação que não apenas informa, mas se atualiza na experiência estética. Com rituais e festividades, nas manifestações de culturas de massa levadas para o palco italiano, o autor estuda espetáculos onde, além do ato mítico e ritualístico, ou da valorização do corpo negro na performance, é a memória como fonte de expressão da vida que sobressai. E nisso tangencia o ponto apresentado por Leda Martins em seu artigo: o corpo é a instância artística na qual a memória se revela.

Como apresentar a negritude sem o caminho do estereótipo? É o que o conjunto dos artigos reunidos no livro em questão oferece, e com isso coloca o Brasil no foco de uma discussão contemporânea que atualiza os discursos da nação sobre a sua origem, suas marcas de identidade e, sobretudo na questão brasileira, sobre os seus mitos de democracia racial. Tillis neste livro assinala o fato de que o discurso de origem no Brasil é marcado pelo paradigma (discutível) de democracia racial, com os antigos pressupostos de que esta é uma nação onde não há o preconceito racial e onde está ausente a discriminação em relação à raça.

Neste livro, (re)considerando a negritude em (con)textos afro-brasileiros contemporâneos, volta-se para o reconhecimento da negritude com seu legado histórico. E igualmente, a negritude como voz presente a partir do esforço (e não de um dado orgânico e natural) em convocar essa presença. Na construção do espaço literário diaspórico, o corpo se reinscreve e vozes se formam a partir de onde falam, porque é um resgate de memórias ao mesmo tempo em que é a produção de identidades – o olhar

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se detém até que algo apareça e se inscreva no corpo, no espaço geográfico, nos objetos, na escritura, onde antes era o silêncio. Com ênfase na polifonia, conforme assinala Paul Gilroy: “*the polyphonic qualities of black cultural expression*” (Gilroy, p.32), algo se produz. No espaço antes silenciado, o não dito ganha força, e o próprio silêncio se converte em ritmo, pausa, o espaço necessário de vazios. Não mais a imposição do silêncio – a palavra calada, mas a composição com o(s) silêncio(s) – a palavra articulada.

Além dos acima citados, a antologia reúne artigos científicos que primam pela mesma vertente de ineditismo no tema e diálogo com a crítica contemporânea. É de se notar que todos vêm apontar pistas dessa interlocução já no enunciado, como vemos em “Tradition, History and Spiral of Time in the Samba de Roda of Bahia”, de Ari Lima; ou “Poetry in the Middle of the Street, in the Middle of the Sea: Notes on Ritual and Aesthetics of the Cantopoeta in the African-Brazilian Culture” de Edmilson Pereira de Almeida; ou ainda em “Noise Literature and African-Brazilian Narrative in Cidade de Deus”, por Adécio de Sousa Cruz. São títulos que chamam atenção para si, como característica de uma tensão literária ali presente, como também no artigo de Jorge Nascimento que encerra a antologia: “Cultural and Racial Consciousness: The «calling» of Racionais MC's”.

Nas últimas páginas da antologia, as minibiografias dos autores: um time pioneiro de pesquisadores brasileiros que ali se encontram advindos de uma pluralidade de áreas, aqui já elencadas, como o teatro, a literatura, o cinema, a música, os estudos da religião, gênero e etnia. Organizada em dez capítulos, e com introdução de Antonio Tillis, esta obra traz uma contribuição significativa para os pesquisadores nas áreas de estudos sobre o Brasil, América Latina, e estudos da diáspora africana, com ênfase nas vertentes de estudos interdisciplinares e dos estudos culturais.

Em sua introdução, o livro também discute como a construção da negritude no Brasil é repleta de contradições, e revela uma nação que continua a *lutar contra* os efeitos, e ao mesmo tempo *explorar* os efeitos da negritude como marca nacional de identidade. Uma ideologia que responderia à globalização – em sua curiosidade cultural das representações do “outro”. A representação e o conflito acompanham as ambivalências desse espaço geográfico que aparece como o “outro”. Como resposta a uma curiosidade cultural internacional, uma espécie de “marketing” da nação provocaria um “turismo cultural”. Referindo-se principalmente a algumas regiões do Brasil como o Nordeste e especialmente à cidade de Salvador na Bahia, Antonio Tillis apresenta recortes de um “marketing” cultural produzido por uma competição econômica.

Nesse livro, enfim, apresenta-se um Brasil mais integrado à América Latina; a partir de um Atlântico Negro fronteiras são negociadas, as cidades sob suas perspectivas oferecem novo recorte geográfico. Onde esquinas, ruas, ganham contorno na escrita das vozes que habitam não o país somente, mas as cidades. Nesse sentido, evoco uma conhecida melodia. Na mescla de poetas de tempos e territórios diversos, os versos de Jorge Mautner em parceria com Gilberto Gil desafiam olhares sobre o Brasil. *Outros viram*, chama-se a canção. E os versos, nos tempos atuais ora desafio, ora desabafo, no mundo globalizado podem ser encontrados nos canais e páginas da

internet¹¹. Maiakóvski, Rabindranath Tagore, Stefan Zweig, “o que eles viram, outros viram também: que a humanidade vem renascer no Brasil”. O que esta canção hoje nos diz, ou falta dizer? Ou *quem* falta nela dizer também? Que outros, ainda? Identidades aparecem e vozes passam a ser ouvidas e abrem caminhos para novas reflexões.

No cerne dos artigos científicos presentes no livro em pauta, os diálogos profícuos com o pós-modernismo e teorias da crítica contemporânea possibilitam aos territórios das imagens um reposicionamento. E às vozes silenciadas, uma reconciliação com a narrativa. A palavra expressa, impressa, se faz ouvir.

O livro reúne, desse modo, em consonância com o que já anuncia no título, estudos de narrativas e de uma imaginação literária afro-brasileira em novos contextos e representações que rompem a barreira de uma aura de “natural” conferida ao poder hegemônico. Com artigos que se concentram na questão da identidade étnica e racial de um escritor canônico como Machado de Assis, passando pela *performance* da negritude como meio de sobrevivência política e cultural, e por estratégias capazes de desvendar os mecanismos de poder e suas formas veladas de silenciamento do *outro*, do “diferente”, Antonio Tillis abre caminhos para que a literatura afro-brasileira dialogue num contexto que se amplia cada vez mais.

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¹¹ GILBERTO GIL, JORGE MAUTNER. *Outros Viram*.

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From: Ghana, puedo cantar lo que soñaste

Anatomía de un lirio

Toda está relación
se mece en mi canción
con alegría

Pues pretendo soñar
tu anatomía.
Belleza sin igual como ese lirio.
Que sabe conquistar hoy
Mi delirio

Tus curvas delicadas
Por promesa a las hadas de la danza
Conquistas mi alma hoy
Y mi esperanza

Anatomía
Como la ciencia que busco
cada día
Como el contacto del cuerpo
Es alegría
Y esa definición de tus músculos son
Anatomía

Anatomía
Donde el lirio y tu pasión
Afectan mi lógica y razón
Paea eata bella inspiración
Y su armonía

Fisiología es tu interior
Marchando al ritmo del amor
Y aunque palpita el corazón
Por la alegría...

Sístole y diástoles
Ahora son solo el compás de una canción
Por que te siento mía

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Cantares desde Accra

Mi mujer y mi patria se llevan bien
Ella se siente cubana y yo también

Cuba es cultura y sabiduría
Y se que mi mujer vive así cada día

Mi mujer y mi patria se llevan bien
Ambas tienen la fuerza de un tren

II

Mi mujer tiene una risa sutil y hermosa
No quiero que la utilice por cualquier cosa

Su belleza u su modo de sonreír
Siempre apuntan aun sueño del porvenir

Mi mujer y mi patria se llevan bien
Cuba es muy Afro y ella también

Los Cubanitos en Ghana

Tienes el Río las Casas en la mirada
La solides del mármol en tu palabra
Y esa esperanza cierta entre Accra y la Habana.
Hablas de Batabano y tu ritmo murmura
Isla grande

Vieja expresión de Pineros,
de Cubanos
de Tuneros Pineros

Cubanito

Hay un África que viene y va entre nosotros
Mis aburlos Ghaneses o Africanos
No dejaron secretos para dar la mano
Mis abuelos de Nigeria
Dejaron un sonido como cosa etérea...
Ese secreto de hablar con tambores
De mandar mensajes que asombrarían
A virtuosos actuales

Cubanito caramba cubanito
Tu educación en cuba
Marca la pauta...
Ahora tu tocas tambor
y también flauta
Sabes de la armonía y el misterio

PALARA

Y entre Accra y La Habana
Un hombre serio

Cubanito, compadre, cubanito
La clave cubana, te resulta un hito
Y guardad con orgullo de saber tu gloria...
Pues cargaste con Cuba en tu memoria
Mientras miras al mar en lo infinito

Yo también sobre viví

Cita... y mostraban con orgullo la pieza de ropa
Canadá, España, Italia, EUA, Alemania.
Yo también sobreviví...
La selva esta allí...
Tranquila y majestuosa
Íntimamente su artificio Angosto.
Promete reflexiones de verano.
Placeres intimistas bajo techos de guano.
Senderos que convocan
Ala ventura.
Por que amamos esta tierra
Por que soñamos esta paz
Y hacer alguna locura de vez en cuando
Como cruzar la selva sobre puentes.
Un tonto me pregunta del temor
Y si acaso este me ha asediado.
-Escribo versos y hago cuentos-
Nunca tengo temor
Pero si tengo cuidado.

Como cantarte ahora

Dedicado al Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois

Como cantar a la distancia fría
de los años pasados...
Si tu eres presente.

Como verte doctor ente doctores...
Desde el honoris causa
Con que Accra te recuerda.

Tu llegas desde Harvard
Muy notreamericano
Buscando la raíces
de una madre Haitiana
Que guarda sobre Ghana
Lejanas cicatrices.
Hacen falta tres vidas
Para vivir como viviste,
Para soñar como soñaste.

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Tus artículos laberínticos
Como las obras de Picasso
Hacen hoy un símil
Con la tela de araña
Pintada sobre tu tumba
Fecunda y creadora
Como los intelectuales que te visitan.

Que letanía extraña compulsa
Mi escritura para cantar ti vida y obra.
Cual es el canto interminable
Que puedo estar en todo Accra.
Este canto que comienzo contigo
Y me involucra
Y me arrastra
Y me conmueve.

Cuántas opulentas ciudades
Cantarían por tu estancia.
Hay tumbas útiles como semillas
Hay tumbas necesarias como el agua.
Hay tumbas duraderas como las Piedras...
Essa se hacen para aquellos que no caben allí
Y se quedan haciendo arte,
Y se quedan haciendo ciencia.
Y se quedan desde la vida útil u prospera
Con los que no mueren nunca.
Cuántas universidades quisieran el agua
De tus místicos saberes.
¿Porqué me llamas y me buscas?
¿Para cantar este reto que late en mi sangre?
Yo sé que puedo cantar lo que soñaste.

Yo Traigo

Traigo la música insólita de las Antillas
Y vengo armonizar conciertos de tambores.
Un sortilegio intrepido me invita a unir las almas.

El concierto en Randy Weston
Dice África
El concierto de J.H. Kwabena Nketia
Dice África
La danza -Souloworks- Cuando recuerda
Danzando en la ventana...
Dice África.

Ahora yo sé que dicen los tambores.
Veo la vida y obra de DuBois
Rompiendo todas las distancias
Y todos los silencios

PALARA

Ahora la música del verso
convoca otro concierto.
Centenares de artículos
Cantan desde la soledad de los armarios.
Unen letra con letra
Unen ciencia con ciencia
Para decir verdades.

Ahora yo sé que dicen los tambores.
Tantas voces no quieren errar
Tantas voces no pueden mentir
Tantas voces no pueden estar equivocada.
Esas voces Dicen
África -Do, mi, la, do...

***The Publication of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association
(PALARA) invites submissions for the Fall 2014 number***



PALARA, a multi-lingual journal devoted to African diaspora studies published annually by African and African American Studies at Dartmouth College, is now accepting submissions for the Fall 2014, Number 18 edition. *PALARA* is multidisciplinary and publishes research and creativity relevant to diaspora studies in the Americas and Equatorial Guinea in West Africa. Manuscripts should conform to the latest style manual of the individual discipline and may not exceed twenty-five pages in length. Submissions are to be sent electronically to the editor of the journal. It is our policy to have all manuscripts anonymously refereed; therefore, please omit any identification of authorship from the typescript. The submission should be accompanied by a contact file which lists all pertinent information for the author and submitted manuscript (name, university affiliation, rank, contact information, and title of submission). We are especially interested in receiving submissions from colleagues in the social sciences.

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