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PALARA

Making Visible the Invisible: Reading African American Tropes and Anti-Hegemonic Articulations in José Bernardo Couto's *La Mulata de Córdoba*

by Daniel B. Arbino

José Bernardo Couto's nineteenth-century short story "La Mulata de Córdoba" (1836) reflects the Romantic era by interweaving folklore and legend to give voice to a national character. Yet in an era in which nationalist discourse promoted criollos, mestizos, and whitened mulattos as anti-colonial heroes, Couto's protagonist is a strong mulatta entrenched in an African-based cosmovision whose agency provides a counterdiscourse to two historical moments when Mexico's nationalist discourse focused on whitening the race and Eurocentrism.¹ Herein I argue that Couto's story is a valuable contribution to Mexican literature for its vindication of the mulatta character, raising the profile for an African presence in Mexico, and simultaneously dismantling center/periphery models of culture. Furthermore, its use of magic prefigures Cuban author Alejo Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* while conveying anti-hegemonic and hemispheric articulations. My aim is to demonstrate, using a postcolonial theoretical framework, multiple moments in which the story subverts nationalist discourse. As a result, the text promotes the importance of dynamic, hemispheric networks in understanding the history of the African presence in the Americas. Finally, I will problematize Couto's representation of La Mulata. Although Couto is progressive in casting a mulatta as the heroine in the story, he presents her as a magical character, thus relegating her to a stereotype.

Whereas Luis Leal and Lola López Martín argue that "La Mulata de Córdoba" is an anti-colonial text (15 and xxvi, respectively), I argue that the short story is best thought of in a broader, anti-hegemonic nature through multiple readings of this short text that is commonly withheld from canonical Mexican literature. Couto's story relates the magical events around a nameless mulatta from Córdoba, Veracruz during the Mexican Inquisition, an extension of the Spanish Inquisition. In the story, the Inquisition imprisons her in Mexico City for a number of years, apparently for practicing witchcraft. One day she decides to use her witchcraft to escape jail. Rather than leave quietly, she decides to make a spectacle of her escape. She draws a small ship on her cell wall using coal. She then asks the guard his opinion of the ship, to which he responds favorably that it only needs to sail away. La Mulata takes his suggestion to heart, and using her powers, transports herself and the ship to the Pacific Ocean; hours later she allegedly arrives in the Philippines as news of her escape spreads through colonial Mexico.

"La Mulata de Córdoba" was originally a synecdoche of the story "Historia de un peso," which as the name implies, relates the story of a Mexican coin. La Mulata has a small role at the beginning of the story when she uses her magic to bring the peso to life, giving it voice. Because Couto bundled the two stories under the name "Historia de un peso" he does not attribute a racial signifier to "La Mulata" until 1898. The absence of a racial marker has, in turn, prompted others to look to later authors' adaptations as more relevant to the study of the African presence in Mexico.² I disagree with their

assertion. In the vein of Jorge Luis Borges' commentary on camels in the Koran, Couto need not explicitly distinguish Afro-Mexicans to confirm their presence in the society in which Couto grew up, as I will show.³ As the legend of La Mulata was already popular at the time of Couto's publication, explicitly attributing a racialized signifier to her would be unnecessary. Moreover, Couto's use of what he perceives to be African diasporic tropes (magic and trickery) articulates her African-derived identity.

Subverting Nationalist Discourse

The most salient way that Couto's text subverts nationalist discourse is through the use of a mulata protagonist who actively engages and resists hegemonic power. More popular nineteenth-century publications, such as those of Francisco Pimentel, Gabino Barreda, Justo Sierra, Julio Guerrero and Andrés Molina Enríquez all promoted the mixing of Spanish and Indigenous heritages as an official discourse. At the end of the nineteenth century, authors such as Emilio Rabasa, Federico Gamboa and José López Portillo y Rojas continued this ideology (López Lozano 87-8). José Vasconcelos would eventually coin the term *mestizaje* in the twentieth century to describe it. In other areas of culture and politics, two of Mexico's heroes from the War of Independence (1810-1821), Vicente Guerrero and José María Morelos y Pavón, were whitened of their African heritage and presented as mestizos. In his book, *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero, Mexico's First Black Indian President* (2001), historian Theodore Vincent writes that Vicente Guerrero was Mexico's first Afro-Mexican and indigenous president (8-9). Perhaps Guerrero's greatest contribution was the Plan de Iguala, which established full citizenship for Mexicans of African descent. At the same time, he also abolished racial categories which in some respects, aided in the erasure of Afro-Mexicans from the national imaginary. In regards to José María y Pavón, Sagrario Cruz-Carretero argues that "Es entendible porqué José María Morelos y Pavón, líder de la guerra de independencia, decretara la abolición de la esclavitud y del sistema de castas en 1824, siendo él mulato y directamente afectado por este sistema segregacionista" (19). For both men, their racial background clearly played a role in their politics and yet it has only been within the last fifteen years that their racial background has come to light. In agreement with Cesáreo Moreno, the erasure of their African heritage reflected a larger polemic: "The disappearance of Afro-Mexicans from official history, and the eventual negation of Africa's sizeable contributions to Mexico was consistent with the onset of a Mexican national identity, which began after Independence" (76). In short, nineteenth-century national discourse attempted to eradicate the Afro-Mexican body in favor of a mestizo identity. For that reason, Couto's short story is such a timely and defiant text since it was written within fifteen years of the end of War of Independence and within seven years of the official abolition of slavery.

Couto's use of a mulata likely has to do with the author's origins. Born in Veracruz, a Mexican state on the Caribbean coast, Couto undoubtedly had contact with Afro-Mexicans in a way that writers from other parts of Mexico may not have. Couto's parents were one of the most successful and significant tobacco-growing families in Orizaba, Veracruz (Acle Aguirre 167).⁴ The area had a large Afro-Mexican population at the turn of the eighteenth century and the "free" population largely worked on tobacco farms. Their presence was also notable in the town's socioeconomic sector, with some Afro-Mexicans owning property and achieving a certain sense of economic status ("Introducción" 20). His relative was Don Ignacio Couto, "defensor de los esclavos y quien antes de la Independencia abogaba por su abolición" ("El nuevo orden" 198). In one particular case, Ignacio Couto helped Cirilo, a runaway slave, gain

his freedom (*Esclavos negros en las haciendas* 158). Couto's "La Mulata de Córdoba," wherein Couto gives representation to someone of African descent, has a direct relation to the environment in which he grew up as well as his extended family's own dedication towards abolition.

To that end, the fact that La Mulata is from Córdoba, a small town in Veracruz, reinforces the importance of location in that Couto's story connects nineteenth-century Mexican literature to its Caribbean neighbors through the mulatta heroine: mulatta and mulatto heroes abound in contemporary works like Cuban Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841), Puerto Rican Alejandro Tapia y Rivera's *La cuarterona* (1867), Brazilian Aluísio Azevedo's *O Mulato* (1881), and Cuban Cirilio Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1882). Interestingly, Couto's "La Mulata" differs from these aforementioned texts in that the latter all denounce the racial discrimination wrought by the institution of slavery that was present in their societies at the time of publication. Since Mexico abolished slavery in 1829, Couto's theme does not center on this racial discrimination. On the other hand, the author's intention was to undo center/margin binaries by giving voice and agency (however problematic it was, as I discuss below) to a marginalized sector at a moment when the national imaginary attempted to silence it. Since, as Luis Leal rightly points out, La Mulata symbolized opposition to the Spanish colonial government during the sixteenth century Mexican Inquisition (15), Couto successfully inserts a person of African descent as an early proponent of anti-colonialism. She serves as a reminder of their contributions to Mexican independence while ensuring a historical presence within the new nation. Similarly, Couto disrupts the promotion of the mestizo (Spanish and Indigenous) as national character.

Through its use of magic, Couto's short story also takes umbrage with positivism, a philosophy of science that Auguste Comte introduced in the nineteenth century. Mexico, much like the rest of nineteenth century Latin America, welcomed this philosophy as a symbol of modernization, order, and progress after often-brutal wars for independence, civil wars, and foreign interventions. The philosophy's basic tenants focus on scientific knowledge while discounting metaphysics and mysticism as antiquated. According to Comte, humankind passes through three stages: the first is theological (supernatural beings are responsible for all phenomena), the second is metaphysical (a transition state in which abstract forces and veritable entities replace supernatural beings), and the third is positivism (knowledge through empirical evidence) (72). Positivists reject religion as being pre-scientific. In fact, under the influence of positivism, nineteenth century Mexican president-turned-dictator Porfirio Díaz referred to his cabinet of advisors as "científicos," or scientists. Yet positivism also deals with race. According to Meri Clark, "racial theories were central to many positivists' prescriptions for social and political form" with *mulatos* being reproached for bad temper and conceit as a result of their multiracial background (63). "La Mulata de Córdoba" counters positivism by lauding the use of African-based religions and magic so that scientific knowledge is useless because it is unable to explain La Mulata's abrupt escape from the jail and the ship's transformation from drawing to real. Rather than promoting the popular philosophical discourse, Couto challenges it by suspending reality, time, and space. López Martín, in concordance, writes that "El cuento de hadas y el cuento fantástico acusaron muchas veces el influjo de la brujería y de las supersticiones. Las supersticiones no desaparecieron ni con la Ilustración ni con el positivismo. Al contrario, pervivieron en la conciencia popular y se canalizaron en la literatura y el arte" (xxv). She continues, "la fantasía y el valor popular se resistieron al

despotismo de los virreyes" (xxvi). Although her comment is valid, it is reductive in only considering the colonial period. Superstition, mysticism, and metaphysics, here prefiguring *lo real maravilloso*, still have a valuable role in nineteenth-century Mexican society for explicating that which is empirically unexplainable. That role is specifically to advance an Afro-Mexican counterculture in opposition to positivism as a hegemonic ideology with aims to eradicate it.⁵

One interpretation that strengthens Mexico's African heritage, commonly called "the third root," is by reading the text through the framework of the trickster character. In his seminal text *The Signifying Monkey* (1988), Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that signifyin(g) "articulates the black tradition's theory of its literature" (xxi). Signifyin(g), spelled that way to distinguish it as African-derived, is a form of expression that plays with words to weaken hierarchies and open up multivalent meanings. According to Gates, the cultural expression can be traced back to the Yoruban deity Esu, although it is now found prominently throughout the Americas where displaced Africans were able to secretly practice and pass on their religious beliefs. Often identified as a messenger God and a God of the crossroads, Esu is known for his ability to outwit and deceive others to ensure his survival. "La Mulata de Córdoba" closely follows the trickster trope, whether it was Couto's intention or not. The similarities "attest to shared belief systems maintained for well over three centuries, remarkably by sustained vernacular traditions" and "testify to the fragmented unity of these black cultures in the Western Hemisphere" (Gates 4). The deception in the text works on three different levels. First La Mulata, despite being famous for her witchcraft, willingly remains a prisoner for many years. Her complacency makes her appear debilitated and incapable of resisting the Inquisition. Meanwhile, the prison wardens, as well as the Inquisition Tribunal in general, use her perceived weakness to assert their power. In the following case the prison guard affirms patriarchal authority while doubting the woman's intelligence: "-Mala mujer; contestó el gravadoso guardián, si supieras cuidar tu pobre alma como sabes hacer otras cosas, no darías en qué entender al Santo Oficio. A ese barco sólo le falta que ande..." (374). Rather than escape quietly, La Mulata engages the prison guard: "Pues si usted quiere...él andará" (374). Like a trickster, she allows him to flaunt his power before undermining it. In so doing, the wordplay becomes both humorous and critical in nature. Following the trope of Gates' trickster, La Mulata destabilizes order while participating in a culturally improvisational performance of Signifyin(g) (Maguire 104). Using her witchcraft, La Mulata outwits the guard to make a spectacle of the Inquisition and colonial authorities before achieving her freedom. Witchcraft is a particularly useful tool of subversion. As James C. Scott notes, "Witchcraft is in many respects the classical resort of vulnerable subordinate groups who have little or no safe, open opportunity to challenge a form of domination that angers them" (144). As a woman of African heritage, la Mulata is doubly marginalized. Yet because she is unwilling to renounce her African-based beliefs and because she refuses to submit to patriarchal authority, La Mulata is a fundamental agent of change.

The second way that trickery works in the story is at the authorial level because Couto, a *criollo*, participates in an Afro-Veracruzian trickster tale. The folktale, seemingly passed down orally for generations, reaches a different audience through its written publication and therefore, unsettles the Eurocentric bias that pervaded Mexico in the late nineteenth century. Couto, in an effort to relate a folkloric story of magic, writes an ethnographic-like work that rivals Lydia Cabrera's *Cuentos negros de Cuba* (1936) in its ability to provide hope and optimism to a peripheral group in the face of oppression and further marginalization. He provides a unique case of a strong Afro-

Mexican female protagonist that would not be duplicated until the publication of the Mexican Revolution novel *La negra Angustias* by Francisco Rojas González in 1944. Additionally, the orality of the story speaks to its subversive behavior. The narrator immediately decentralizes the author by acknowledging that he took the story from “el vulgo,” or the masses (373). Likewise, the namelessness of La Mulata ensures that any mulatta female can be a threat, precisely because any mulatta *was* a threat during colonialism. In a colonial era in which Spaniards and *criollos* maintained racial categories to ensure their superiority, the mulatta, who is by definition both Black and White, upsets and threatens these very categories. What is more, orality ensures her legend. The fact that news of her escape circulates around Mexico increases the possibility of subsequent acts of subversion and/or revolt. By that same token, the audience that Couto reaches also participates in the legend’s longevity and continuation. This longevity and deauthorization is all the more evident if we consider subsequent adaptations such as “La mulata de Córdoba” by Manuel Ramírez Aparicio in *Los conventos suprimidos en méjico* (1861), *La hechicera de Córdoba* (1869) by Aurelio Luis Gallardo, “La mulata de Córdoba” by Luis González Obregón in *Época colonial, México viejo* (1891), “La Mulata de Córdoba” by Heriberto Frías in the newspaper *El Imparcial* (1897), and “La Mulata de Córdoba” by Vicente Riva Palacio in *Tradiciones y Leyendas mexicanas* (1922).⁶ Finally, in 1948 Xavier Villaurrutia wrote both a theater piece and an opera titled *La Mulata de Córdoba*.

Couto’s version had a resurgence in 1882 followed by another in 1966 with its inclusion in *El cuento veracruzano (Antología)* (1966). These two editions were important in that they vindicated Mexico’s African heritage in historical moments of attempted erasure: first during the presidencies of Porfirio Díaz and Manuel González Flores and second with the cultural revolution of the 1930s – 1960s, that promoted a glorified indigenous past and a mestizo present (Fuentes 461).⁷ It was shortly after the Mexican Revolution that José Vasconcelos defined *mestizaje* and in his prominent political roles as Secretary of Public Education (1924), Director of the National Library of Mexico (1940), and Chair of the Mexican Institute of Hispanic Culture (1948) that he disseminated his ideology with great success. Elena González notes that “When Vasconcelos used the term [*mestizaje*] to describe and unite all Mexicans, he linguistically denied the existence of Mexico’s Afro-Mexican population...Over the course of decades, this linguistic denial became a cultural denial and effectively barred any public discussion of race in Mexico” (166). In “La Mulata de Córdoba” author and audience provide an alternative to Mexico’s national character. The anthology itself participates in the promotion of Afro-Mexican heritage by depicting the short story on the cover of the publication (see figure 1). The boat that La Mulata drew is in the background whereas in front of the boat stands an androgynous person of African descent. S/he wears a short afro and his/her only facial feature are eyes. Although the portrait is certainly reductive, if not dehumanizing, it adds another layer to the story’s general tone of resistance. Either male or female can rebel. Herein lies the third source of trickery. The fact that this one and a half page story is the first in the anthology and occupies the cover is in itself deceiving: it suggests that the rest of the anthology will present other Afro-Veracruzán tales when that is not the case. In fact, “La Mulata” is the only short story with an explicit Afro-Mexican protagonist. The misdirection put forth by editor Luis Leal is similar to La Mulata herself: the story, anthology, and figure are at the crossroads of Mexico, the Caribbean, and Africa. Likewise, the story, anthology, and figure are part of a larger whole: in La Mulata’s case, an anti-hegemonic sentiment contests Vasconcelos’ version of *mestizaje* in which the African race, which he declares is inferior, eventually blends into a whitened ideal (21, 27). In the text and

anthology's case, Couto and later Leal intend to integrate peripheral African heritage into Mexico's national imaginary. In agreement, González notes how "it was also in the 1960s that Mexico finally began to recognize Africa as *la tercera raíz*, its 'third root'" (182). By featuring "La Mulata de Córdoba" in his anthology of Veracruz literature, Leal participates in moving Mexico beyond the mestizo as the national body. Because the text offers multiple readings, it can be interpreted in opposition to various hegemonic forces ranging from colonialism, the Catholic Church, positivism, *el Porfiriato* (Porfirio Díaz's presidency), and post-Revolution *mestizaje*.

magic Imagia

Beyond National Boundaries, But Still Restricted

From Couto's perspective, the most strategic way to draw attention to Mexico's "third root" was through the use of magic. In fact, "La Mulata" is in many ways a precursor to Cuban Alejo Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* and the more popular Latin American literary genre, magical realism.⁸ Particularly, Couto incorporates magic into a historical account to explain La Mulata's escape. Alejo Carpentier uses a similar tactic in his canonical novel *El reino de este mundo* (1949) to tell how Mackandal also uses magic to rebel against the French. In one particular scene his Haitian compatriots believe that he transforms into a dragonfly to avoid being burned at the stake.⁹ In both *El reino de este mundo* and "La Mulata de Córdoba" magic expresses an anti-colonial, anti-European sentiment. In regards to *lo real maravilloso*, Carpentier states that:

...lo maravilloso comienza a serlo de manera inequívoca cuando surge de una inesperada alteración de la realidad (el milagro), de una revelación privilegiada de la realidad, de una iluminación inhabitual o singularmente favorecedora de las inadvertidas riquezas de la realidad, de una ampliación de las escalas y categorías de la realidad, percibidas con particular intensidad en virtud de una exaltación del espíritu que lo conduce a un modo de «estado límite» (10).

Both authors employ *lo real maravilloso* to promote an American identity that breaks from European constructs of reality.¹⁰ Magic henceforth becomes a New World cultural element that colonial authorities cannot understand or prepare for. In both works magic occasions the colonizers' demise and the subjugated groups' unification. As a predecessor to Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso*, "La Mulata" serves as an important foundational text for Carpentier's project. As such, the short story again proves to be a vital connection between Mexico and the Caribbean. Furthermore, it demonstrates a larger American identity when factoring in Caribbean witch Tituba who Arthur Miller features in his historical play *The Crucible* (1952) about the Salem witch trials.¹¹ A comparison of La Mulata, Tituba, and Mackandal indicates a hemispheric exploration of the place of African-derived cultures in national literatures. On the one hand, Haiti identifies as a Black Republic. The vindication of Mackandal expresses their national discourse (as a man and as a maroon leader) and thus he has appeared on Haitian currency. As in "La Mulata," Tituba's subaltern identity as a woman of color separates her from society and makes her a likely target for authorities that are anxious to assert their power. While both have been subjects of legends and research, neither La Mulata nor Tituba has reached a similar relevance as Mackandal. In fact, the Mexican legend of La Llorona, which in its various manifestations reinforces an indigenous-Spanish society, often takes priority over La Mulata de Córdoba. Her prominence further reinforces the attempted erasure of Mexico's African past. Unlike La Mulata, Tituba cannot escape, but the witchcraft that she teaches the White children of Salem metaphorically transforms them from colonial subjects to an American identity steeped in magic. The mark that Tituba leaves behind articulates societal change, even if the

change is due to religious and racial anxieties. La Mulata, Mackandal, and Tituba affirm their African American identities while altering the New World's political landscape.

Couto, Carpentier, and Miller all manipulate these three historical African American figures for their literary projects. In all three texts, the authors present a limited view of these figures, opting to focus on their magical elements. Although their projects are different, the way that the authors manipulate the historical figures are strikingly similar. For that reason I will return my attention predominantly to Couto and "La Mulata de Córdoba." In agreement, Luis Leal states that "le atrajo [a Couto], como a otros románticos, lo legendario y lo popular, y a ello se debe que halla dado expresión literaria a un tema que pertenece al acervo folklórico: la escapatoria mágica" (15). The authors' limited depiction further exotifies and others an already marginalized group, essentially conflating their Blackness with magic. The result is a stereotypical Black sorcerer/sorceress whose image pervades Western cultural production as seen in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1623) through Sycorax to the Hollywood films *The Skeleton Key* (2005) through Mama Cecile and Papa Justify and *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (2006) through the character Tia Dalma. The Black sorcerer/sorceress is always portrayed as exotic, apart, and cunning yet paradoxically shallow. The authors seldom provide insight into their lives, instead using them to add excitement to the plot. Carpentier's decision to focus on Mackandal and vodou while omitting the more religiously conservative Toussaint L'Ouverture from his "chronicle" on the Haitian Revolution in *El reino de este mundo* is a prime example.

Couto's telling of "La Mulata de Córdoba" lacks depth, leaving the reader with more questions than answers. How did La Mulata become imprisoned and why would she let it happen? Why did she remain a prisoner for many years as opposed to escaping immediately? Was it just to make a mockery of the Inquisition? And why does she flee to Manila? Her choice to go to the Philippines is particularly perplexing. Adding the Asiatic-Pacific element certainly further exotifies La Mulata, however the Philippines, both at the time of Couto's publication and the Inquisition, were a Spanish colony. One would have to assume that Spanish authorities would pursue La Mulata in Manila as in Mexico. That is to say, she has not found refuge. Is her aim then to continue her rebellion in the Philippines? If that is the case, then her opposition must continue from outside Veracruz and Mexico as a whole. Her absence would therefore problematize Couto's attempt to integrate the Afro-Mexican into the national character because La Mulata, as part Afro-Mexican, now finds herself both literally and figuratively outside the nation. As someone outside of the imagined community, the Afro-Mexican's marginalization abounds. Bridget Christine Arce points out that the use of the Afro-Mexican character "allows for the writer to create [a protagonist] who is larger than life; however, it is through this very notion of exceptionalism that black consciousness and contributions to Mexican culture have been all but effaced" (*La negra* 1100). Additionally, the relegation of La Mulata to the colonial past prevents her from being part of the present. "La Mulata's blackness, and blackness in general, lay only in the discourse of this one character that belonged to another era" (Jiménez Ramos 91). Mexican discourse in which the Afro-Mexican is referred to as the third root implies its comparative lack of importance in Mexico's ethnic hierarchy. Arce agrees that the Afro-Mexican presence is reduced to "legends, witchcraft, and myth" (*Troping* 230). At the same time, her absence from Mexico gives privilege to diaspora over geo-political boundaries, putting her in dialogue with a larger African diasporic identity.¹² La Mulata is important precisely because her persecution is similar to other

African Americans who were expected to renounce all cultural difference in favor of an assimilated Western ideal during the colonial period.

Conclusion

Couto's "La Mulata de Córdoba" is a foundational text to discuss Mexico's African presence within a national literature. Though Couto's treatment of La Mulata reduces her to a stereotype, the Veracruz author's choice to use an Afro-Mexican rather than an indigenous, criollo, or mestizo gives early representation to Mexico's third root. The story's appearance shortly after Mexico's independence from Spain and its subsequent reappearance after the Mexican Revolution suggests an ongoing reminder of the group's marginalized presence within the nation. By giving voice to La Mulata, Couto shifts a subaltern person to the forefront of anti-hegemonic resistance, a motif that repeats in subsequent adaptations as well as in *La negra Angustias*. What is more, the text figures prominently within a literature of the Americas. Not only does it put Veracruz, and by extension Mexico in dialogue with the Caribbean and Brazil, it also shares commonalities with *The Crucible*, a United Statesian text. Through the use of trickery, orality, and witchcraft, Couto advances an American identity that breaks away from Mexico's colonial predecessors and later hegemonic institutions. Carpentier's famed *lo real maravilloso* follows a similar trajectory. "La Mulata de Córdoba" provides an early example of a *letrado* (and subsequent *letrados*) attempting to integrate Afro-Mexicans into the national character while participating in a larger and independent American identity.¹³ The legend has maintained a discernibility for African-derived Mexicans so that, although their presence continues to be marginalized, there is a growing recognition in Mexican history (Yanga the maroon leader, the underground railroad that went from the U.S. South into Mexico), anthropology (the work of Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán) and cultural production (films such as *Angelitos negros* (1948) and *Negro es mi color* (1951)). In turn, these historically invisible peoples are increasingly visible both in Mexico and throughout the Americas.

Centre College

¹ By "criollo" I refer to someone of Spanish descent who was born in the Americas. "Mestizo" refers to a person of indigenous and Spanish descent. Finally, "mulatto" refers to someone of European and African descent.

² See Marisela Jiménez Ramos (94) and Guadalupe Mejía Núñez.

³ I refer to the following quote: "He encontrado días pasados una curiosa confirmación de que lo verdaderamente nativo suele y puede prescindir del color local; encontré esta confirmación en la Historia de la declinación y caída del Imperio Romano de Gibbon. Gibbon observa que en el libro árabe por excelencia, en el Alcorán, no hay camellos; yo creo que si hubiera alguna duda sobre la autenticidad del Alcorán, bastaría esta ausencia de camellos para probar que es árabe. Fue escrito por Mahoma, y Mahoma, como árabe, no tenía por qué saber que los camellos eran especialmente árabes; eran para él parte de la realidad, no tenía por qué distinguirlos; en cambio, un falsario, un turista, un nacionalista árabe, lo primero que hubiera hecho es prodigar camellos, caravanas de

camellos en cada página; pero Mahoma, como árabe, estaba tranquilo: sabía que podía ser árabe sin camellos. Creo que los argentinos podemos parecernos a Mahoma, podemos creer en la posibilidad de ser argentinos sin abundar en color local" (270).

⁴ The other three were Córdoba, Teuxitlan, and Zongolica.

⁵ The story's anticlerical tone might seem to lend itself to positivist philosophy. Indeed, Fortino Corral Rodríguez contends that "el relato muestra la intolerancia y el despotismo de la institución clerical a la vez que se reprime de emitir el juicio correspondiente" and that this questioning of the Church makes the legend "especialmente atractiva para la ideología liberal y explica en parte su incorporación a la cultura letrada en este período" (112). However, Couto was in fact in favor of the Church as seen in his *Discurso sobre la constitución de la Iglesia* (1857). This story could be read in opposition to the Church's overreaching power.

⁶ Riva Palacio did not publish his collection of short stories until 1922. However, it is likely that he wrote his version of "La mulata de Córdoba" prior to 1891 as González Obregón refers to it in his version.

⁷ I mention the presidency of Manuel González Flores because he was president of Mexico when Couto's "La Mulata de Córdoba" was re-published in 1882. Like Díaz, González Flores had a eurocentric vision for Mexico: he renewed relations with Great Britain much to the dismay of Mexican citizens and welcomed Italian immigrants to work in industrial and agricultural colonies.

⁸ For other "fantastic" stories from Latin America that preceded "La mulata," please see the Cuban short stories "Raro ejemplo de un sonámbulo" (1790) and "Carta verídica sobre un maravilloso fenómeno" (1791).

⁹ I refer to the chapter "El gran vuelo."

¹⁰ I use "American" here in a hemispheric sense that unites North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean.

¹¹ Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé later vindicated Tituba in her historical fiction, *Moi, Tituba Sorciere* [I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem] (1986) in which she appropriated Tituba as a revengeful and angry Black slave.

¹² Couto attempts to address this open-ended conclusion in the accompanying story, "Historia de un peso." Therein La Mulata returns to Mexico, where she lives clandestinely without doing harm to any Christian ("Historia" 374)..

¹³ I use the term *letrado* in reference to Ángel Rama's seminal text *La ciudad letrada* (1984). *Los letrados* were learned men and women who served as the leaders of the new Latin American nations in the nineteenth century. Often they utilized their intellect and writing ability to serve as legislators, lawyers, educators, and above all, as leaders for a largely illiterate populous.

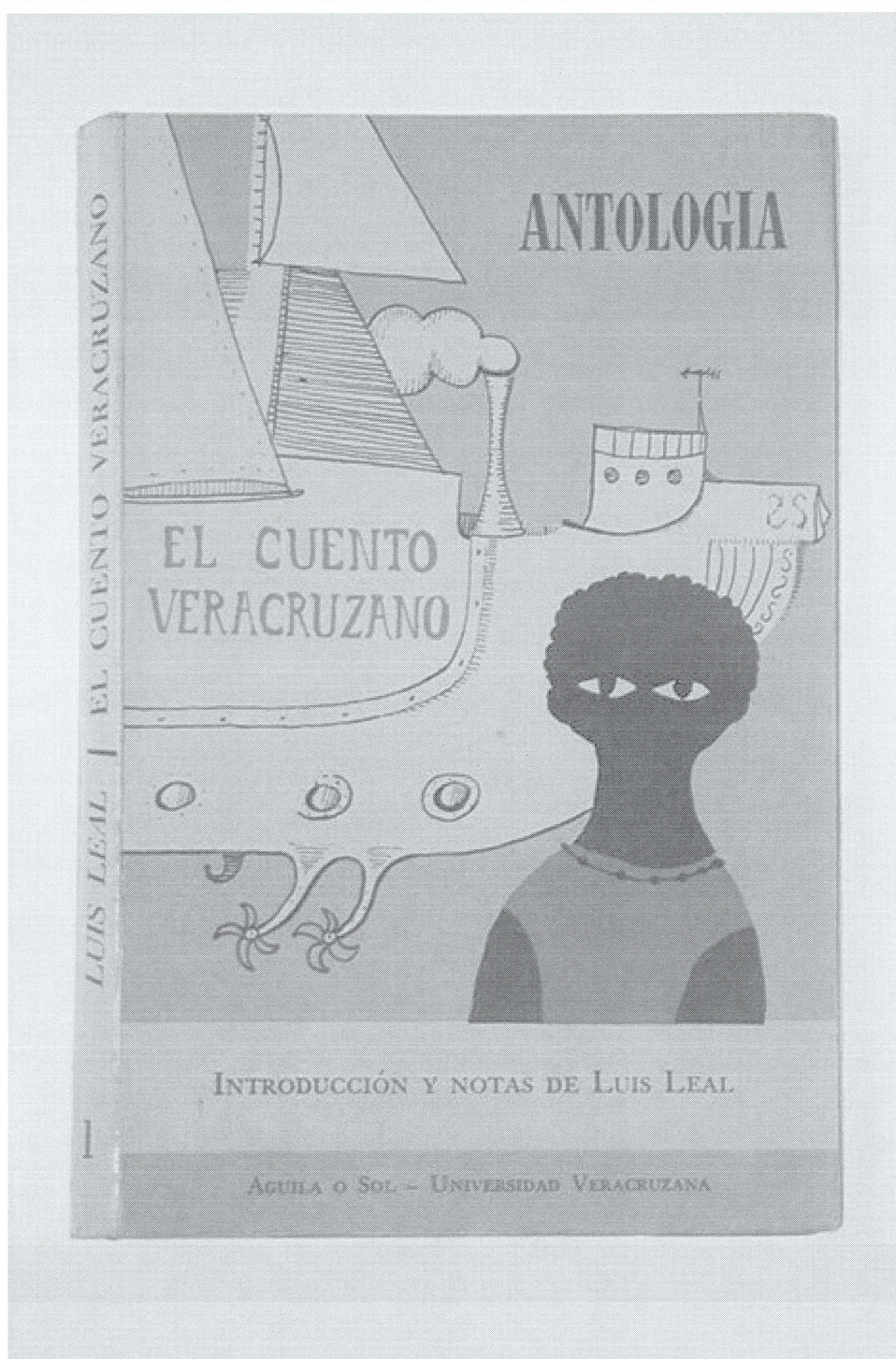


Figure 1

The cover of *El cuento veracruzano* (1966)

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PALARA

**“Landscape, Place and Belonging in Selected Poems by the Afro-Cuban Writer
Jesús Cos Causse”**

**“Place in post-colonial societies is a complex interaction of language, history and
environment.”¹**

**“Nature is not simply *décor consentant* or pathetic fallacy. Land is central to the
process of self-possession.”²**

by Paulette Ramsay

The preceding epigraphs point to the ways in which the poetry of the Afro-Cuban writer, Jesús Cos Causse, creates the unmistakable impression that he delights in contemplating and depicting images of the lush, varied and beautiful landscape of his country, Cuba. From poem to poem, in different collections, Cos Causse skillfully weaves descriptive diction, the names of a wide variety of plants, birds and other features of a landscape that is distinctly Caribbean, into the fabric of his very subjective poems.

Jesús Cos Causse, a Cuban of African descent and an important poet, who not only represented his country as a diplomat in a number of countries but also was a prolific writer. Indeed, Cos Causse published more than ten collections of poems before his death in 2006. He was involved in the promotion of Afro-Cuban culture for many years while he served as Director of International Affairs for Casa del Caribe. His poetry reveals many themes such as family life, Afro-Cuban culture, love of country, his sense of affinity to the entire Caribbean region and the beauty of the Cuban landscape.

A reading of his poetry reveals that his objective is not simply to add aesthetic value to his poetry, by evoking the grandeur of the Cuban or Caribbean landscape, but rather, that he is interested in presenting the various natural aspects of the place he occupies, as an essential and central constituent of his existence, his history and his understanding of himself as Cuban and as Caribbean. In other words, Cos Causse may be said to satisfy the criteria advanced by Glissant, who maintains that in the depiction of landscape and place, the Caribbean writer cannot be satisfied with simply describing nature, but must give place or landscape, a position of centrality, along with its importance to Caribbean people, in the work. Glissant declares:

“Describing the landscape is not enough. The individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. Landscape is a character in this process” (Glissant xxxvii).

Glissant is not alone in the call for the recognition of landscape and place as being integral to the process of becoming and self-definition in Caribbean writing, but his view is shared by others who hold firmly that European colonization had as its

objective the plundering, exploitation and subjugation of both non-European peoples and their lands. Plumwood, for instance opines:

An encompassing and underlying rationalist ideology applying both to humans and non-humans is thus brought into play in the specific processes of European colonization. This ideology is applied not only to indigenous peoples but to their land, which was frequently portrayed in colonial justifications as unused, underused or empty areas of rational deficit (503).

Plumwood further berates the tradition of colonial writing in which "nature is represented as inessential and massively denied as the unconsidered background to technological society" (305).

Cos Causse's obvious commitment to presenting his local landscape as more than a 'backdrop' to his poems, must be seen then, as an agenda to reject and suppress 'supremacist models' informed by the ideology of colonization, which 'otherizes' Caribbean landscape along with its people. In this regard, his poems become a site of contestation to the colonizing attempts to objectify and homogenize peoples and places, in keeping with Eurocentric values and ideologies. By depicting tropes drawn from the local landscape – he leaves no doubt that Cuba and the wider Caribbean, possess their own tropical flora and fauna, which are a source of pride to him. He leaves no doubt, through his embracing of Cuban names of trees, flowers, insects, sand, birds that he is contented with his own landscape, with nature that surrounds him and is not seeking for what may be considered as an ideal landscape which lies somewhere outside of the Caribbean.

There is no nostalgia, no longing for daffodils and tulips which many of us learnt about in the Caribbean, long before we knew the names of some of our own tropical plants. Cos Causse simply celebrates and consistently gives emphasis to different features of his landscape, the place he knows, in a manner which confounds anthropocentrism, - a cynical aspect of the ideology of colonization. Anthropocentrism, "underlines and justifies the colonization of non-human nature through the imposition of the colonizers' landforms and visions of ideal landscapes in just the same way that Eurocentrism underlines and justifies modern forms of European colonization which see indigenous culture as 'primitive' " (Plumwood 504).

In the poem, "Leyenda del esclavo,"/ "Legend of the Slave", the poet suggests that the history of the Afro-Cuban is indelibly recorded in the natural environment and landscape of Cuba. Nature is presented as an eyewitness to the inhumane treatment of the African slaves. It is depicted as eyes that bore witness to the untold truths and horrors that were concealed from human eyes. Tropical night creatures like fireflies, symbolize the truth – shining in, or penetrating the darkness of slavery – highlighting the suffering and ignominies that accompanied it:

Los cocuyos, las tojosas, los murciélagos y
las luciérnagas
son los ojos de los esclavos que murieron
ahorcados
y huyendo del látigo,
y dónde esté una palma muy alta y un
volcán y estalle: ahí murió un esclavo.

Los cañaverales son testigos: por las raíces
atraviesa su sangre, la miel fue su sueño y el
tallo que termina en una corona de espina
fue su último golpe al enemigo, sus dientes
amenazantes, sus unas futuras.

(Leyenda del esclavo," *Las islas y
las luciérnagas*, 38).

Fireflies, wild pigeons, bats and
glowworms, are the eyes of the
slaves who died, hung, running
away from the whip, and wherever
there is a very tall palm tree and a
volcano which erupts: there died a
slave.

The sugarcane plantations are
witnesses: his blood runs across its
roots, honey was his dream and the
stalk that ends in a crown of thorns,
was his final blow to the enemy, his
menacing teeth, his future nails.

("Legend of the Slave,"
Islands and Glowworms,
38)

Vivid images of the places where crimes committed against the black slaves are poignantly presented in the final lines of the first stanza: "y dónde esté una palma muy alta y un volcán y estalle: ahí murió un esclavo" / "and where there is a tall palm and a volcano which erupts: a slave died." The image of the tall palm conveys the great height – a long drop in the execution by hanging, to which many slaves were subjected. The volcano and its eruption, metaphorically depict the scenes of torture, of scorched, burning flesh, juxtapositioned against the scalding hot lava. The vivid image of exploitation of the slave's labour metaphorically screams images of bleeding, wounded hands. Furthermore, the dual exploitation of slaves and land is conveyed through the irony underlying the suggestion that despite their labour, the slaves never benefitted from the fruit of the land as any desire they carried for benefitting, still remains an unattainable dream: "la miel fue su sueño"/"honey was his dream."

The poet demonstrates his rejection of this exploitation of both slave and land in Caribbean slavery, by depicting the sugarcane as a potential weapon, a symbol of empathy, resistance and aggression against oppression: "y el tallo que termina en una corona de espina"/ "the stalk that ends in a crown of thorns." Cos Causse's response to the history of the enslavement of his black forebears, along with their oppression of the land, speaks to a rejection of the traditional European/capitalist approach to the plantation system. Indeed, the poetic voice intimates that the bloodstained roots of the sugarcane permanently carry the condemnation of the cruelty that fueled colonization and slavery in the Caribbean. The blood stains reiterate the lament, that although the slaves laboured in ignominious conditions, they never enjoyed the fruit of their labour in the cane fields. The enduring presence of the testimony of the land implies that the history of the slave is timeless, told over and over by the language of nature. Some of the sounds that are reminiscent of slavery seem to be replayed at different times through movements on the land. This includes echoes of the sounds that bring to mind the calls for rebellion by different rebel slaves across the Caribbean seas:

Los navegantes han escuchado, de
noche, entre las islas y las aguas que
llaman a los esclavos por sus nombres y
la voz de Cuffy que responde desde
Guyana y la voz de Nanny que responde
desde Jamaica y ruidos de cadenas
destruidas de pronto y de campanas
coléricas. Porque volverán en otros
hombres que abrirán de par en par las
puertas de África y el Caribe.

(“Leyenda del esclavo,” *Las
islas y las luciérnagas*, 38)

At night, between the islands
and the seas, sailors have heard
slaves being called by their
names and the voice of Cuffy,
who answers from Guyana, and
the voice of Nanny, who
answers from Jamaica, and
suddenly the noised of broken
chains and angry bells. Because
they will return in other men,
who will open wide the doors
of Africa and the Carriibbean.

(“Legend of the
Slave,” *Islands and
Glowworms*, 38)

Indeed, one of the arguments used to support the conquest of the ‘New World’ and the appropriation of lands in places like the Caribbean, was that Europeans would make idle, barren lands ‘productive’ for the good of all.³ “The cultivation of the earth and the organization of the landscape for the benefit of (European) progress were upheld as acts that endowed meaning: only when brought under control by the colonizer does nature, otherwise regarded as merely passive matter, have value” (Niblett 57). In “Leyenda del esclavo,” Cos Causse, suggests that it was the sweat of slaves who cultivated the land and gave value to it, but he simultaneously shows that the land became an ally of the slaves.

Cos Causse selects a well-known tropical icon, a signature of the Caribbean, the palm – to underline its centrality to the establishment of subjectivity and selfhood among the Cuban people. In the poem, “La palma que está en el patio,”/ “The Palm in the Yard” the poet uses the palm as a feature of nature in which the memory of Cuba’s history is recorded and preserved. The contemplation of the palm allows the poetic persona to recall its role in the creation of an alternative historical discourse for Cubans. The poet does not fail to highlight the beauty of the palm, but simultaneously reveals that it is celebrated not just for its beauty, but also because its utilitarian worth makes it even more valuable and central to Cuban life and identity. The palm is depicted as having served as a refuge for rebel soldiers in the War of Independence and functions metaphorically as a character who actively guards the secrets of how the war was won. Attention is also given to the ways in which the palm offered support and provided natural armament and camouflage to those who opposed the colonizing forces during the time of Spanish colonialism:

“La palma que está en el patio”
 Secreto de la tierra, guitarra Silvestre,
 bastón de la patria.
 En la guerra de independencia
 campamento del mambi.
 Con cuántas odas dolorosas la
 evocaron los poetas desterrados.
 Serena para que entre limpia la luz del
 sol en la isla
 Alta para divisor hasta la sombra del
 enemigo.
 las palmas ¡ay! las palmas deliciosas
 (“La palma que está en el
 patio,” *El último trovador*,
 13)

“The Palm in the Yard”
 Secret of the earth, wild guitar, bastion of
 the homeland.
 In the war of independence, a rebel
 soldiers’ camp.
 With many painful odes exiled poets
 extolled her praises.
 Serene, so that the sunlight can reach the
 island easily.
 Tall, to block even the enemy’s shadow.
 The palms, oh, the beautiful palms!
 (“The Palm on the Patio,” *The*
Last Troubadour, 13)

The resilience of the palm is suggested by the focus on its continuity and the way in which its stillness allows the entrance of light into the island, and for how its majestic height allows for even the enemy’s shadow to be detected. The palm is praised for continuity in its protective role, as well as for facilitating the readiness against an attack on the island. The celebration of the palm for its rootedness in Cuba’s history, Cuban life, Cuban music and Cuban community is inscribed by the poetic persona’s recollection of the many poets who lauded it even while in exile, and in the celebratory reflections of the persona who effusively expresses adoration of it and its breath-taking majesty – “las palmas ¡ay! las palmas deliciosas”/ “the palms , Oh the beautiful palms!”

It is significant that the poet’s recollection and celebration of the palm links it to its role in the creating of a new history in Cuba through its aiding of the *mambises* in their struggle to end colonial rule.⁴ In this imagery of the palm, Cos Causse simultaneously undermines the “colonial domination” which went hand in hand with European colonization and the exploitative approach to land and nature. Ironically, the land or nature, which like the Cubans under colonial rule, was dominated by Europeans, is presented as the means by which the Europeans are defeated. The poet suggests that nature, represented by the palm, became an ally in the struggle against the Spanish, and aided in the establishment of a new Cuban nation and identity.

Cos Causse continues to trace, the course of the transformation in Cuba’s history – from the colonial period to contemporary period of Cuban nation and the way in which this change or development is reflected in the land, in the poem “La carreta” / “The Cart”:

PALARA

Ya las viejas carretas no rechinan.
Ahora sus ruedas son las risas del
camino
y el canto del carretero es el eco de
amor.

Atraviesan arroyos, palmares,
guardarrayas,
llevándose en sus pasos la escena
del paisaje.

Ya las viejas carretas no rechinan.
Ahora pasan tan contentas y tan
cubanas
porque van hacia el corazón del
pueblo.

("La carreta," *El último
trovador* 47)

The old carts no longer creak.
Now their wheels are the laughter on the
road

and the song of the cartwright is the echo of
love.

They cross streams, palm groves, coffee
paths, taking with them the scenes of the
countryside.

The old carts no longer creak.
Now they pass by so happy and so Cuban,
because they are going to the heart of the
town.

("The Cart" *The Last Troubadour*,
47)

Cuba's history of slavery and its excessive demands on the slaves' labour seem to be depicted in this poem. The contrast between the ease with which the carts now traverse the Cuban landscape, and roads, built by a revolutionary Cuban nation, is compared to the arduous journey of the burdened slaves as they tried to move along the roads of the colony. The implication is that with the change from slavery and later colonial rule to self-rule, better roads have been constructed to facilitate travel and exposure to the varied Cuban landscape. The poetic voice highlights the change from oppression to liberation in the change in the cartwright's disposition, as he is now able to move with greater facility on the journey through the landscape. The scenic journey is portrayed through evocations of the lush vegetation, abounding with water, forestry and various tropical plants.

The discovery of Cuba's varied landscape metaphorically parallels the discovery of the Cuban people and nation and of what it means to be committed to the process of nation building and transformation. It simultaneously creates a sense of community and belonging to this land that unfolds as the journey progresses. For the change in the landscape suggests the change in ownership of the land -Cuba, or a relinquishing of colonial power and hold. There is a celebratory and happy mood and a sense of connection, belonging, possession and patriotic attachment to the Cuban land that has been realized through the change – the Revolution that has given greater importance to Cubans:

Ya las viejas carretas no rechinan.
Ahora pasan tan contentas y tan cubanas
porque van hacia el corazón del pueblo.

("La carreta," *El último
trovador* 47)

The old carts no longer creak. Now
they pass by so happy and so Cuban,
because they are going to the heart of
the town. ("The Cart," *The Last
Troubadour*, 47)

In the attempt to present the Cuban nation and nature in agentic terms, Cos Causse confounds supremacist ideas which fuel sexism, racism and ideas about the inferiority

of post-colonial societies through his focus on the flamboyant, the Flame of the Forrest, that strikingly beautiful tree which when in full bloom, scatters golden and red shades of light, in small and large spaces all over the Caribbean. In "El flamboyán"/ "The Flamboyant" the poet writes:

Recuerdo cuando era sólo una semilla
que abuela sembró frente al portal de
casa y que con el tiempo vi brotar de la tierra
sus primeras hojas tímidas, húmedas y
asustadas

Juntos crecimos el flamboyán y yo
Hoy he vuelto al flamboyán y busco
a ver si encuentro en su tronco y en sus
ramas
mis barcos, mis tesoros, una flor para mi
madre o el esqueleto del esclavo de la
leyenda de abuela.

("El flamboyán," *Las islas y las
luciernagas* 12)

I remember when it was just a seed
that grandmother planted at the front
door of the house and, over time, I
saw its first timid, wet and frightened
leaves sprout from the earth.

We grew together, the flamboyant
and I,

Today I returned to the flamboyant
and I searched the tree's trunk and its
branches for my ships, my treasures,
a flower for my mother, or the
skeleton of a slave from my
grandmother's legend.

("The Flamboyant," *Islands and
Glowworms*, 12)

The continuity of the tree is ensured by the black grandmother, that custodian of traditional Afro-centric values, who takes the seed, the metaphor of African-derived cultural forms and sows it to preserve its life. In this seemingly insignificant action, the grandmother firmly asserts agency and female subjectivity, making a choice for her family that will have important implications for their lives. Through this single act, the grandmother overturns the colonizers' construction of her as labourer on the plantation, cultivating the land for her boss. Instead, she plants a seed and tends her own land, for her family. Furthermore, she becomes the preserver of life and culture and the creator of a new history in the development of the Cuban nation.

The affinity between the Caribbean persona and the tropical landscape is implied in the reflection on the growth of the seed by the poetic persona who witnesses its planting and growth. The persona has had the privilege of watching his own growth and the growth of the plant. The flamboyant bursts into existence through the dark surface of the earth just as man or woman, the shaper of the nation, bursts through the womb. The kinship of the tremulous growth of the tree to the vulnerability of new life, is reflected in the harmonious assonance reverberating in tempo with each thrust – "vi brotar de la tierra' sus primeras hojas tímidas, húmedas y asustadas" "I saw its first timid, wet and frightened leaves spring from the earth". This hint of kinship between persona and plant, reflects the shared experience and solidarity between Afro-Caribbean person and nature in the journey of life: "Junto crecimos el flamboyán y yo"/ "we grew together, the Flamboyant and I." The poetic persona is able to trace its own growth and the development of a generation against the growth of the tree, both of which have been nurtured by the grandmother. The grown man is now pride of the community, just like this strikingly forceful and beautifully distinctive tree. The persona's return to the tree – the repository of history and memory suggests his recognition of the role of nature in providing an understanding of his own individual

development, the importance of history and of how the past, present and future are linked in his natural environment. Nature or, the land facilitates his search for a connection with and an understanding of his ancestral roots, reflected in the physical search at the root of the trees for mementos from his past and for the veritability of his grandmother's oral tales.

In the poem, "De frente la vida," *Las islas y las luciérnagas*, "Facing Life," *Island and Glowworms*, the poet presents a determined effort to convey the centrality of the land in the everyday life of Cubans, that, is in providing him/her with meaning and purpose:

Sobre la mesa las rosas silvestres que mi
madre escondida del mundo cortaba en el
jardín cada mañana en silencio como una
mariposa, como una muchacha enamorada.

Mi madre tenía en los ojos una lagrima íntima
y el color de la tierra muerta.

Las rosas al atardecer ya estaban mustias
todas, y mi madre lloraba en el cuarto en
silencio siempre como una mariposa que se
posa, como una muchacha muy enamorada y
olvidada en ventana.

Así vivía mi madre.

Ayer la vimos de frente a la vida cortar una
rosa del jardín de casa y no lloraba sino que
cantaba y tenía en los ojos el color de la tierra
después de la siembra.

("De frente la vida," *Las islas y las
luciérnagas*, 15)

On the table, the wild roses that
my mother, hidden away from the
world, cut in her garden every
morning, in silence like a butterfly,
like a girl in love.

In her eyes my mother had an
intimate tear, and the colour of
dead earth.

At dusk, all the roses were already
withered, and my mother cried in
the room in silence, always, like a
butterfly that perches, like a girl
very much in love and forgotten on
the window.

That's how my mother lived.

Yesterday we saw her, facing life,
cutting a rose from the home
garden and she was not crying,
rather she was singing, and her
eyes were the colour of the earth
after the harvest."

("Facing Life," *Islands
and Glowworms*, 14)

The idea of capturing and even claiming the wildness of beauty, suggests taming and domestication, possession and protection: "las rosas silvestres que mi madre / escondida del mundo / cortaba en el jardín cada mañana" / "the wild roses that my mother/ hidden away from the world/ cut in her garden every morning." The attendance to this ritual bespeaks gentleness and love, concentration, diligence and the dedication of a butterfly in adoration of the fragrant beauty of a flower or blossom, as is evoked by the simile and rhythmic line... "en silencio como una mariposa, como una muchacha enamorada" / in silence like a butterfly, like a young girl in love".

Daily life is infused with man's progressive interaction and relations with the land which often result in an interdependence and a reflective patterning of or adaptation to one's environment: "Mi madre tenía en los ojos una lágrima íntima y el color de la tierra... y mi madre lloraba..." / "In her eye my mother had an intimate tear and the colour of the earth". This consciousness of the environment underlines the epistemological function between man and his natural habitat – a harmony of identity, even in the face of loneliness or a lonely space, suggested by the term "y olvidada en la ventana" / "forgotten in the window." The transition from the general lugubrious atmosphere in life – "Así vivía mi madre" / "so lived my mother" – to one charged with vivacity and rejuvenation of florescent life, is seen in the juxtaposition of the second stanza with the third. In the second stanza the image of a sad mother is disturbing but this changes in the third:

Ayer la vimos de frente a la vida cortar
una rosa del jardín de casa y
no lloraba sino cantaba y
tenía en los ojos el color de la tierra
después de la siembra.

("De frente la vida," *Las
islas y las luciérnagas* 15)

Yesterday we saw her, facing
life, cutting a rose from the home
garden and she was not crying,
rather she was singing, and her
eyes were the colour of earth
after the harvest.

("Facing life," *Islands
and Glowworms*, 15)

The poetic voice unravels the transformative scenes of life through nature and shows the resilience of man in these confrontations, from barrenness to fertility, sorrow to rejoicing and finally, from defeat to glorious victory, isolation or separation to connection and solidarity, in the fight of life and territorial possession. The implication is that the future is one of hope, vision and life, just like the earth suggests, after the heavenly cleansing of the showers of rain.

Nature and Cubans Transcending Time

The centrality of place in Caribbean history from the early periods is evident in the poem, "La historia más antigua de la tierra," / "The Oldest Story on Earth" *Las islas y las luciérnagas* (55). Earth is depicted in the period of innocence, before man etched his identity as a memorial on the walls of time; where nature is the embodiment of mystery and man's curiosity the scribe of history's unravelling:

Los animales dibujados en las paredes
de las cuevas,
el horizonte, la luz la oscuridad, el
misterio de la muerte, los sueños, las
estrellas tan altas, la sorpresa y
el susto frente al fuego, la ternura del
viento
que de pronto cambia de rumbo y las
hojas que ayer caían hacia el norte hoy
caen melancólicamente hacia el sur, el
lenguaje, los pájaros, los insectos
silenciosos, el descubrimiento del
tiempo.

Las primeras mentiras: dios y el diablo,
Adán y Eva.

Las piedras convertidas en instrumentos
de trabajo y en armas de combate. La
pólvora, los fusiles, las guerras, los
desastres, los sistemas sociales, las
fábricas, la explotación del hombre por
el hombre, las luchas de clases, Marx y
Lenin, los obreros y octubre, las
revoluciones victoriosas, la conquista
del cosmos, el himno y la bandera de
esta isla que levantamos sobre el Caribe.

Animals drawn on the walls of the
caves, the horizon, the light, the
darkness, the mystery of death, dreams,
stars so high,
the surprise and fright before the fire,
the tenderness of the wind, which
suddenly changes course and the leaves
that yesterday fell to the north today
fall wistfully to the south, the language,
the birds, the silent insects, the
discovery of time.

The first lies: God and the Devil, Adam
and Eve.

Stones converted into work tools and
combat weapons. Gunpowder, rifles,
wars, disasters, social systems,
factories, man's exploitation of man,
class struggles, Marx and Lenin,
workers and October, victorious
revolutions, the conquest of the
cosmos, the anthem and the flag of this
island that we raise up over the
Caribbean.

Cohesiveness is resonant in the synchronous assonance of the verses, despite the looseness of the structure, which, in itself symbolises the dissonance of discovery in the imagery conveyed in the lines of stanza two. The landscape has changed and natural forces are displaced and overridden with man-made ones. Inventions are seen as instruments of destruction and war, rather than as markers of development: the historical trajectory from pre-civilisation to civilisation, from colonialism to post-colonialism and modernity, is underscored by ideological division and hierarchy where the exploitative nature of man is evident in his lust for power, competitiveness and conflicts.

But evolving from history's processes in this poetic discourse, *Cos Causse* shows Cuba's nationalism and pride after the revolutionary war against colonialism and the ownership of geographic territory. The final stanza begins harmoniously suggesting that work never found ownership of the kind a new history begins. There is a picture of internal unity and solidarity of a people connected by history and place. This view is reinforced by commonality and equality of the sexes in a single cause: asserting and converting a geographical space for a people in the rewrite of history:

Al hombre y a la mujer que unidos de
las manos...
salieron a caminar aquella geografía
desconocida, justificando el universo,
humanizando la vida, construyendo el
planeta,
confirmando el futuro, inaugurando el
amor, la historia más antigua de la
tierra.

("La historia más antigua de la
tierra," *Las islas y las
luciérnagas* 55)

To the man and woman who, hand
in hand, perhaps on a similar night,
went out to walk that unknown
landscape, justifying the universe,
humanizing life, building the planet,
confirming the future, starting love,
the oldest story on earth.

("The Oldest Story on
Earth," *Islands and
Glowworms*, 55)

Evidences of life and its continuity are visualized through the polemic alignments of the labourer's toil and the space in which labour is done. These reverberate rhythmic prose through the land and its product. The musicality of the lines is accentuated by the literariness of alliteration and assonance as the poet interweaves the people with the natural landscape, thereby revealing connection and belonging. This idea is affirmed in the unforgettable memory of the Cuban national, surpassing the annals of time and history which are now disintegrated like dust being carried by the wind. "El pasado es el polvo y el viento se lo lleva. El presente es el porvenir y el futuro lo afirma. Alguien escribiría nuestros nombres en las calles de Santiago, la ciudad lo sabe..." / "The past is dust and the wind carries it. The present is good fortune and the future affirms it. Someone would write our names in the streets of Santiago, the city knows it." (21).

Caribbean History Carried by the Sea

Cos Causse personifies nature to transmit the story or history of the Caribbean, in the poem "La tierra canta y tiene un rostro," / "The earth sings and has a Face," *Las islas y las luciérnagas*, 66. Nature is represented by both land and sea. The earth depicts the face and voice of history and the persona's observation of the oceanic expanse causes him to reflect on the history of his African ancestors and the journey to the Caribbean. Both distant and immediate past are captured through the musicality of the sea, while the earth conveys its messages about the history of African slavery in the Caribbean, as a story that is timeless:

Victora a pesar del tiempo y los
poetas y los trovadores el ar tiene
esa nostalgia similar al amor y a
la muerte. Por el mar llegaron
desde Africa nuestros
hermanos...

("La tierra canta y tiene
un rostro," *Las islas y
las luciérnagas*, 66)

Victorious, despite time and the
poets and troubadours, the sea has
that nostalgia, which is similar to
love and death.

Our brothers travelled across the
sea from Africa....

("The Earth Sings and Has a
Face," *Islands and
Glowworms*, 66)

It appears that nature has recorded several events only to replay them at varying intervals, throughout the course of time. African slavery is symbolised by the omnipresent sea-chronicler. There are nuances of sentimental overtones in the first two lines. The aura from the sea is one of melancholy, and there is a lugubrious atmosphere generated by and emanating from the sea which provides a backdrop to the history of plantation slavery in the Caribbean. Furthermore, the sea imagery evokes the visual, auditory and olfactory senses in conjuring up the brutal Middle Passage. Moving beyond the superficial veneer to the depths of the sea, Cos Causse re-enacts the journey through the Atlantic Ocean to the Caribbean, where many African slaves were deposited. It is, indeed the Caribbean Sea that carries the reminder of the slave journey from Africa to the Caribbean. The repetition reveals the Middle Passage and marks the initiation of atrocities when countless Africans died because of the terrible and inhumane conditions on the slave ships. This, coupled with cruel and severe maltreatment, forced many Africans to jump overboard, preferring a suicidal death rather than being subjected to a life of slavery.

The metaphoric language, “el mar tiene esa nostalgia similar al amor y a la muerte” “the sea has that nostalgia similar to love and death,” underscores the personal pervasion from one agent or entity to another while conveying the human embodiment of the sea. The poetic persona seems to project his own longing to coexist with nature on the sea. Moreover, the personification transcends the inherent life of the sea, to the embedded dead in the sea whose voices cry so strongly and unceasingly from its depths, that they penetrate the soul with its sad secrets. The figurative language also gives the implicit view that creation does not cast into oblivion anything that transpires with its own in life and death. The juxtaposition of two powerful and arresting forces – love and death – reinforces the full effect of the nostalgic ambience evoked by the sea.

Moreover, it is obvious that the poet is intimately familiar with the history of slavery in the Caribbean and uses the seascape to communicate two major themes and messages associated with it: life and death. He suggests that there is an interconnection between Caribbean/Cuban nature and history, for nature carries the strong memories of the horrors of Caribbean history. He shows that he especially shares an affinity with Africans, evident by the possessive pronouns “nuestros” and the harmonious assonance “nuestros hermanos.”

Memories of the Plantation

The centre stage for slavery was the plantation and from this stage the master-slave relationship was acted out. The cruelty of overseers and the general system of slavery served as propellants for resistance and revolts, followed by varying degrees of punishments meted out to slaves, dependent on the gravity of the resistance and rebellion. The plantation setting is evoked by the imagery in the ensuing lines:

...no sólo cortar caña como esclavos ni
morirse como cimarrones sino levantar
y luchar y encender juntos llamarada
revolucionaria.

Juntos nos ahorcaron y juntos
volvimos a levantarnos.

("La tierra canta y tiene un
rostro," *Las*

...not only to cut cane like slaves or
die
like maroons, but to get up and fight
and
together light the revolutionary
flame. Together they hung us and
together we rose again.

("The earth sings and has a
face," *Islands and
Glowworms*, 66)

In a relaxed, sporadic, poetic structure Cos Causse unravels the stages and trajectory of African slavery in the Caribbean culminating in the rebellions that precipitated their freedom. The sequence of negations "no...ni...sino" serves to debunk the system of colonial slavery while the remaining lines suggest how the indomitable spirit of Africans emerged to challenge this system. Indeed, the imagery in the line: "...no sólo cortar caña como esclavos ni morirse como cimarrones"/ "not just to cut cane like slaves or die like Maroons" gives a picture of submission to forced labour on the sugar plantation and slaves fleeing from this place of bondage and oppression. The phrase, "ni morirse como cimarrones"/ "or die like Maroons" evokes the images of slaves in marronage and of how they sometimes traversed the land indefinitely while being hunted by their masters, unable to establish permanent settlement. For fear or avoidance of recapture they became fugitives and not many survived this lifestyle but some soon died. The second and third lines however portray the continuous fight against slavery, the pause before the isolated line "juntos nos ahorcaron y juntos volvimos a levantarnos," "together we were hanged and together we will rise up" suggesting a deliberate break between the acts of rebellion. The sense of unity and the collective spirit with which the slaves fought is assonance reinforced. There is solidarity in experience and insurgent spirit and revolution acquires a purposeful mode, intransigent in the revolutionary cause. The poetic persona is not detached from this experience, evident by the words "juntos", "nos", "volvimos", and "levantarnos", and his involvement and connection to the African past surpass the rudimentary acquaintance to a shared experience on the spiritual, mental and emotional realms. He does not merely empathize with the situation of history, but shares in the suffering and afflictions of the Africans, their fight for freedom, and the continuous struggle against the oppression of Blacks. He carries the legacy of that resilient, indomitable African spirit, and finds constant reminder in nature.

The poetic persona moves from recounting distant history to a more intimate familiar immediate history:

Conozco la leyenda de aquel
músico haitiano enamorado de
abuela que venía a buscarla y el
barco se hundió entre las aguas del
Caribe y abuela melancólica
recordaba cuando escuchaba una
guitarra o acerba esta tarde.

("La tierra canta y tiene un
rostro," *Las islas y las
luciérnagas*, 66)

I know the legend of that Haitian
musician who loved grandmother,
who was coming to look for her
and the ship sank between the
waters of the Caribbean, and
grandmother sadly remembered,
whenever she heard a guitar or
evening was approaching.

("The Earth Sings and Has a
Face," *Islands and Glowworms*,
66)

The spacious, asynchronous, elastic layout in a series of enjambment becomes signature throughout this poem, while the recurring sea imagery is treated as a leitmotif. The setting of the Caribbean Sea en route to Cuba is the site of the tragedy. The persona's appreciation of nature -the seascape and ecosystem also derives from a personal historical bond: the love story of his grandmother. Because of this intimate attachment, the poet is more in touch with his natural surroundings, and uses this love tragedy to solidify the ambience of 'nostalgia' evoked by the sea, as presented at the beginning of the poetry. The sea carries the history of love – a love lost, in a tune of sadness. The musicality is poignantly interwoven in the love tragedy: "aquel músico haitiano enamorado de abuela / y abuela melancólica / recordaba cuando escuchaba una guitarra..."

The title "La tierra canta y tiene un rostro,"/ "The Earth Sings and Has a Face" becomes symbolic in the timeless music of the past being connected to actual people and events. The implication is that the sea does not erase the events of African slavery, despite the passage of hundreds of years, as history continues to be recited in the movement of the sea.

There is a paradigm shift from the gloom and doom to light and life, from the past to the present, from seascape to landscape. The transition from the past to the present is punctuated by the illusion of space where the poet has an ethereal prepossessing encounter. This encounter is with transitory cosmic light sources from outer space, juxtaposed with ships travelling to various destinations and an "out-of this world" foreigner:

A veces me preocupan esos resplandores en
el espacio esas luces fugaces que pasan,
las galaxias cercanas, la física, las naves y
los viajes y la posible sorpresa de
encontrarme un buen
día con alguien de otro planeta

("La tierra canta y tiene un rostro,"
Las islas y las luciernagas 66)

At times those lights in space worry
me, those fleeting lights that pass
by, the nearby galaxies, the
physical, ships and voyages, and the
possible surprise of finding myself
one fine day with someone from
another planet

("The Earth Sings and Has a Face,"
Islands and Glowworms, 66)

In keeping with the title, music pervades the verses in several forms. The stanza has a fluid, non-break pattern that transmits harmony and symphony through its internal linear rhythm and assonance. All of this suggests the poetic persona's perception of the great harmony that exists between Cubans and their Caribbean landscape.

The Bond Between Man and Land

History becomes a basis for defining the present and alluding to the future. "ahora quiero hablarte de la tierra que nos pertenece"/ "I want to speak to you now about the land that belongs to us". This communicates an acceptance of the persona's past, an understanding that his ancestral home is separated from his current home by the sea, and an awareness of his current surroundings. The final stanza has a continuous almost non-linear flow of longevity that embodies and epitomizes the earth and man's existence on it. Cos Causse introduces this lengthy verse in a familiar conciliatory tone. He intimates a high degree of intimacy with a magnetic inclusiveness that pulls from the peripheral exterior to the centre:

Ahora quiero hablarte de la tierra que
nos pertenece, nos une nos sostiene,
nos alimenta, y nos anuncia que la vida
existe

("La tierra canta y tiene un rostro,"
Las islas y las luciérnagas 66)

Now I want to talk to you about the
land that belongs to us, that joins us,
that sustains us, that feeds us, and tells
us that there is life

("The Earth Sings and Has a
Face," *Islands and
Glowworms*, 66)

The persona seems to express the resolved conclusion of one who has reached a settled equanimity and the sense of ownership and attachment to the earth are emphasized strongly and almost palpably with the words "la tierra que nos pertenece"/ "the land which belongs to us." The poetic voice conveys and invites his audience to share in the sense of territorial possessiveness that should be innate to humanity. The earth is man's natural habitat, created for his well-being, for communion and enjoyment. His conviction of belonging moreover, conveys a defensive and protective stance of our spatial geographic occupation. While being collective in the concept of sharing there are undercurrents of a dichotomous struggle on sovereignty and territorial title through conquest and occupation by individual nations. Africa's ousted position by European nationals and the displaced Africans as a result of enslavement by Europeans paradoxically, now appears overturned. Ironically, the dispersion has resulted in an extensive territorial reach of African occupation on the earth. Unequivocally spoken, yet in ambiguity, the earth belongs to us (Cubans, Caribbean): "nos pertenece". As such, Africans who were brought to the Caribbean as slaves now possess the land, and relate to the land in a manner beneficial to them.

There is a great degree of appreciation, even reverence, in Cos Causse's treatment of the land, in this poem. He recognizes, through ascription of human qualities to the land, the caring attribute of the earth, the maternal bond between the land and its people. The land becomes a symbol of love and it is presented as Sustainer and Provider, Nurturer and Care-taker of the children of men: "nos sostiene , nos alimenta, y nos anuncia que la vida existe" "it sustains us , feeds us, and announces to us that life exists". The land is self-evidential to life and the continuity of life as its inherent creative and sustaining power announces and establishes this fact.

The suggestion that the land is now owned by ordinary working class Cubans is created by the reference to "los obreros"/ "the workers" and "los campesinos"/ "peasants" and the depiction of them now shaping the land through their work. In the

present, ordinary Cubans work to rebuild the land, once owned by imperial powers, but still bearing the marks and the songs of hope of heroes who fought for its ownership:

que los obreros están construyendo piedra
nuevamente el mundo, que los campesinos
están abriendo un surco desde el presente
hasta el porvenir, porque estamos de prisa,
nos esperan los asuntos urgentes, los
documentos, los testimonios, los estandartes,
las conquistas,
quiero decir, la sangre y la canción de los
héroes y de los hombres de esta isla donde la
tierra canta y tiene un rostro de esperanza.

that the workers are rebuilding a
strong world, that the farmers are
opening a path from the present to
the future, because we are in a
hurry, we have urgent matters to
deal with, documents, testimonials,
banners, conquests, I mean, the
blood and the song of heroes and
of men of this island where the
earth sings and has a face of hope.

("La tierra canta y tiene un rostro,"
Las islas y las luciérnagas 67)

("The Earth Sings and
Has a Face," *Islands and
Glowworms*, 67)

The pride which the poetic persona has toward his land is declared in the last lines which personify the Cuban landscape rejoicing in song always, reflecting hope in the face of the Cuban people.

Cos Causse reveals a tremendous understanding of the connections between his people and the land. He suggests that the land is not divorced from the particular history and an ongoing story of triumph and achievements of ordinary Cubans and Caribbean people. Cos Causse reveals, too, the ways in which the Caribbean lands must be recognised in relation to the sea, and how the sea links the Caribbean to Africa not only in terms of geography, but also through the historical journeys and experiences which have connected both spaces. Undoubtedly, land in Cos Causse's poetry is integral to his establishment of an unmistakable Cuban and Caribbean identity, sense of belonging and sense of self and is given attention which suggests that it fulfils more than just a decorative function.

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Notes

¹ Ashcroft et al. (eds) The Post-Colonial Studies Reader. London: Routledge, 2005. (345)

² Michael Dash's interpretation of Glissant's theory of the place of landscape in the writing of Caribbean authors in Eduardo Glissant's Caribbean Discourse: selected Essays. Trans by M. Dash. 1992.

³ See Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," Uncommon Ground, ed. William Cronon. New York: Norton, 1996, 9. 133.

⁴ *mambises* – The term refers to anti-Spanish fighters in Cuba that is rebel soldiers who fought in 19th Century Cuban War of Independence, which broke out in 1886. The soldiers took the house that was originally used to refer to rebel fights in the War of Independence on Dominican Republic.

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PALARA

Lo Barroco y lo Real Maravilloso en *El reino de este mundo* de Alejo Carpentier

by Nydia R. Jeffers

De acuerdo con el prólogo escrito por el autor cubano, Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980), la novela *El reino de este mundo* (1949) inicia lo "real maravilloso". Transforma lo real (fechas y nombres de la historia de Haití) en lo real maravilloso, es decir, en la fundación de la literatura caribeña de manera independiente a la francesa. De hecho, el autor no usa la técnica surrealista y crea su propio concepto, lo "real maravilloso".

La percepción del personaje por parte del prólogo refuerza la idea del negro como personaje violento que identifica al humano, sea blanco o negro, con un animal. Sobre esta jerarquía ontológica occidental, Lane Kauffmann afirma que "el sujeto sobre el objeto, el uno sobre el otro, el humano sobre el animal, la mente sobre el cuerpo, se reproducen fielmente en la historia" (146) ["the perennial Western ontological hierarchies—subject over object, self over other, human over animal, mind over body are faithfully replicated in the story"].

Pero esta jerarquía se desmonta en esta novela. Esto quiere decir que el elemento negro es considerado tan primitivo como el elemento blanco, tengan ambos acceso al poder o no. La rotundez de estas afirmaciones se acompaña con el estilo nominal del texto. En opinión del autor en *El adjetivo y sus arrugas* sobre el arte de narrar, el uso del adjetivo debe ser mínimo.

Y la verdad es que todos los grandes estilos se caracterizan por una suma parquedad en el uso del adjetivo. Y cuando se valen de él, usan los adjetivos más concretos, simples, directos, definidores de calidad, consistencia, estado, materia y ánimo, tan preferidos por quienes redactaron la Biblia, como por quien escribió el Quijote (4)

En efecto, el uso de adjetivos del prólogo resume sucintamente la teoría de su técnica de narración. Algunos adjetivos que se pueden extraer de la definición de lo "real maravilloso" en el prólogo son insólito, milagroso, inesperado, revelado, mitológico, pero sobre todo, colectivo. La fe colectiva genera la revolución y el derrocamiento simbólico del poder blanco. La sustitución por el poder negro, sin embargo, reproduce la esclavitud. La causa de esta decisión estética de perpetuar la injusticia no es sólo una recreación de las condiciones históricas. El narrador se atiene tanto a lo concreto que los personajes seleccionados para protagonizar el "reino de este mundo" son demasiado individuales y no suficientemente colectivos o representativos de la población.

La relación entre el blanco y el negro es una reunión de los tres niveles que Tzvetan Todorov distingue para la relación con el otro. Combinando las tres relaciones posibles que Todorov tipifica, hay un juicio de valor sobre una relación de distanciamiento debido a la ignorancia de la identidad del otro (12). La relación entre el amo y el esclavo ignora al otro axiológica, pragmática y epistémicamente. En esta ignorancia, tiene protagonismo la fantasía, según Patricia Fox: "La fantasía atrae porque no es asequible y sirve en gran medida para subrayar la distancia entre la ficción reductiva y la compleja realidad" (2) ["The fantasy is alluring as it is unattainable and serves largely to underscore the distance between reductive

fiction and a complex reality”]. De acuerdo con la compensación de la ignorancia del otro, lo real maravilloso cobra sentido como la técnica más adecuada para hablar del esclavo, sea éste blanco o negro.

Henri Christophe representa la raza, pero no asume la etnia (creencias) de los miles de revolucionarios. Es negro pero actúa como blanco. Por su parte, Ti Noel representa la raza, pero no actúa como revolucionario. Su participación es marginal (viola a una blanca). No es líder de la revolución. Por tanto, el papel que juega el narrador en la selección de los personajes tiene implicaciones en la repetición de la historia: la perpetuación de la esclavitud.

Otro adjetivo aplicado a la técnica de composición de la novela es el de barroco. Por barroco, se entiende la combinación de varias culturas, no sólo la mezcla de opuestos en la escala social (blanco/negro). El dilema consiste en dilucidar si esta combinación es una coordinación o una subordinación de elementos. Descartamos la idea de la subordinación como punto de partida porque en principio, todas las culturas son iguales. Si acordamos que la mezcla de las culturas blanca y negra es una coordinación de elementos, queda responder la pregunta de si se trata de una homogeneización o si por el contrario, equivale a una heterogeneización de culturas. Como afirma Clementina Adams, “otro aspecto humanístico de la realidad hispano-americana es la heterogeneidad de las culturas y el mestizaje, que se ha convertido en otro elemento importante de la literatura latinoamericana” (17) [“Another humanistic aspect of Hispanic-American reality is the heterogeneity of culture and race mixtures, which has become another important element in Latin American literature”].

Los críticos consultados apoyan la segunda hipótesis, afirmando que la unión de la tesis y la antítesis es una síntesis, o sea, un sincretismo cultural. Y en todo caso, se trata de un proceso y no un estado. Patricia Fox cita a Lawrence Levine para definir “la negritud, que como la cultura, no es una condición fija sino un proceso y como tal tiene la habilidad para reaccionar creativamente a las realidades de cada nueva situación” (4) [“Blackness, like culture, is not a fixed condition but a process and as such possesses the ability to react creatively and responsively to the realities of each new situation”].

Si se trata de la preservación de una cultura junto con la adquisición de un sistema económico, entonces, la obra mantiene la fe vudú y aprende el sistema de la esclavitud. Por tanto, la fe en los dioses y el destino africanos dan más importancia a lo sobrenatural que a lo cotidiano, mientras que cuando gobierna el dictador con sistema europeo, se superponen los sentimientos sobre los del reino. Por ejemplo, en “Crónica del 15 de agosto” el pánico personal del rey se extiende a su reino. El derrocamiento del rey Henri es simultáneo al desorden público. La rebelión empieza desde su casa, donde los esclavos y sirvientes han desaparecido. El derrocamiento político es simultáneo al individual: la fortaleza del rey, símbolo de su poder, se descompone y consecuentemente su ánimo decae.

Aquí radica el primitivismo de la novela, en el teocentrismo de un líder africano que somete a los suyos a la esclavitud a pesar de representar sus intereses por el hecho de compartir su cultura. En este caso, la idea religiosa estaría cristianizada y homogeneizada, ya que prioriza la idea católica del sufrimiento en la vida, en espera de una gloria eterna y así se produce la perpetuación de la esclavitud.

Junto a la cristianización, se da el blanqueamiento cultural. El líder negro se comporta como un blanco en el sentido de que posee esclavos. Esta hipótesis es consistente con el mito pagano del vudú. El destino de la historia no se crea, sino

que se hereda. Asimismo es consistente con el mito cristiano de las bienaventuranzas. La coordinación acaba siendo subordinación. La jerarquía real en la escala política, social o económica del amo contra el esclavo se produce culturalmente también porque el negro asume el comportamiento social blanco hasta el punto de apoyar la esclavitud de los suyos.

La lógica primitiva/africana coordina la fe simultánea en los dioses y en el destino racionalmente libre. Sin embargo, el modo de pensar moderno/europeo margina la fe y privilegia la razón. No iguala ambos extremos, sino que los jerarquiza. En la novela *El reino de este mundo*, hay una técnica de composición real maravillosa y barroca en el sentido de que la mezcla de las etnias (raza y cultura) blanca y negra resulta en un blanqueamiento cultural. Dicho de otro modo, entendiendo por etnia la combinación de la raza y la cultura, en cuanto al personaje no se da un sincretismo cultural. Esta hipótesis se analizará por medio de una lectura del título de la novela y a través de la individualidad de los personajes principales: Henri Christophe, líder negro y Ti Noel, ex esclavo negro.

El título de la novela parece relacionar un reino europeo con un mundo americano de manera autoritaria o posesiva a través de la preposición “de”. Sin embargo, pasando del análisis lingüístico al literario, que es el valor añadido o maravilloso que tiene la lengua, “el reino de este mundo” conjuga en la misma proposición dos continentes en forma de la metáfora del tipo A de B. La identificación del término imaginario (“reino”) con el real (“mundo”) anuncia una coordinación, o sea, una ausencia de subordinación entre el reino europeo y el mundo americano. Esto quiere decir que invertir los términos no altera el significado final. Los miembros de la ecuación son intercambiables y “el mundo de este reino” funciona como un espacio en que lo tradicional y lo moderno adquieren el mismo rango. Carpentier usa una técnica moderna para escribir sobre un evento primitivo. Racial y políticamente, se puede establecer una alegoría afrohispana con un título que sintetiza una metáfora central. Este recurso inicia un tono que difumina la cultura americana negra en beneficio de la blanca europea.

Resumiendo, “el reino de este mundo” o “el mundo de este reino” es una fórmula matemática por la que el orden de los elementos combinados, europeos o americanos, no altera el resultado. La novela se fragmenta, se une y se divide aún más porque la división es interna: no ya entre blancos y negros, sino entre negros y negros. La raza no es un factor determinante en el destino del colectivo sino la etnia, es decir, la identidad cultural asociada a la raza del líder, que se blanquea y se cristianiza para perjuicio de los revolucionarios.

El planteamiento de la novela presenta intereses en conflicto (blancos contra negros) y el nudo (revolución de los negros) da la victoria a los revolucionarios. El final de la acción beneficia el ideario blanco y perjudica la condición de vida del negro. La justicia poética castiga al negro con la consecuencia de la empatía del lector. La identificación emocional con el negro no se establece entre el líder y el revolucionario porque el negro se ha blanqueado.

Igualmente, el narrador se distancia de la causa negra, seleccionando personajes negros que no representan los intereses colectivos. Henri Christophe somete a los negros y Ti Noel viola a una blanca, lo que hace que el negro sea visto tanto como de víctima como de victimaria. Si el narrador se blanquea, en el sentido de que da la razón y el triunfo al poder blanco disfrazado de negro, entonces no se produce la justicia poética. Siendo novela real maravillosa antes que verdad histórica, no se puede evitar la subjetividad en la selección de estos personajes y el desenlace de la acción, que es anticlimático. En definitiva, el rechazo del negro y la aceptación del blanco es una creencia generalizada.

Se sigue la teoría de la diversificación de Antonio Cornejo Polar por la que se acentúan las diferencias a la hora de reunir las culturas en un mismo espacio en la literatura transcultural peruana. Sobre la diferencia en el cuento argentino *Axolotl*, y aquí se extiende su analogía del sincretismo a la novela en cuestión, Lane Kauffmann afirma que “la producción textual de la alteridad es un efecto del sincretismo imaginativo, una colocación retórica de voces y perspectivas una vez opuestas” (140) [“the textual production of alterity—is very much an effect of “inventive syncretism,” a rethorical collocation of voices and perspectives once opposed”].

El desenlace de la novela de Carpentier es un caso de asimilación cultural por la que el negro aprende del blanco el sistema de la esclavitud pero mantiene sus creencias en los dioses africanos. Esta disociación entre la vida visible y la vida invisible es una reunión contradictoria que pasa por la homogeneización del negro a las costumbres blancas.

La polarización del mundo viejo europeo y el mundo nuevo americano es una dicotomía primitiva que Carpentier reproduce porque escribe una novela basada en la historia. Al mismo tiempo, Carpentier innova el modo de recrear la historia en la técnica utilizada: el blanqueamiento cultural y la marginación consecuente de lo negro. La homogeneización implica paradójicamente la heterogeneización. Por tanto, el dilema de si la unión de las culturas blanca y negra era coordinada o subordinada tiene como resultado esta paradoja. La metrópoli francesa, fuente de criollos católicos racionales se enfrenta más que nunca a la colonia haitiana, fuente de africanos vudús y mágicos porque ambos comparten la misma aspiración al poder político, social y económico.

La conclusión ética de esta estética es que el problema político y racial del reino, así como su solución, pertenece a ambas partes. El reino europeo y el mundo americano deben trabajar juntos, igual que el narrador reúne la forma moderna con el fondo primitivo. La modernidad de la obra consiste en usar una técnica de composición histórica y nacional sobre un contenido atemporal y universal. La obra es realista porque la materia literaria imita la materia histórica, pero también es maravillosa porque la capacidad de la sorpresa es común a ambas disciplinas.

Además, la fe colectiva es un enigma milenario que las sociedades tecnológicamente avanzadas comparten con las comunidades rudimentarias. Este ensayo indagará los factores de la ecuación “reino/mundo” para demostrar que el orden de los elementos no altera el producto, es decir, que la identidad primitiva humana conjuga elementos propios/nativos y elementos heredados/criollos sin dar prioridad a ninguno de ellos. Por tanto, el desenlace del fracaso para la población negra que cree en la libertad no es un producto de privilegiar lo europeo sobre lo americano ni el acto inverso de sobrevalorar lo americano respecto de lo europeo. La trama literaria/histórica es complicada de principio a fin, como el prólogo anuncia con el término “barroco”. La ausencia de orden de los elementos implica racismo y clasismo, sin orden ni concierto, es decir, sin respeto a la condición humana. La creencia vudú mezcla el humor y la fantasía con el patetismo y la poesía (118).

It was the connection between history and a faith deeply linked to magic that appealed to Carpentier's project of grounding his historical fiction on the non-Western, African-derived mythologies and rituals that remained vital elements in the cultures and practices of the New World. They represented the very opposite of the separation from the life of the spirit that had been the outcome of the West's privileging of reason (115)

Precisamente porque la obra es sincrética y simbiótica, la posición de Carpentier es ambigua. La libertad del negro es una realidad internalizada, tan presente en la mente/espíritu como presente es la esclavitud en el cuerpo. La insólita revolución del negro no sólo es única/primitiva/primerica en la historia sino que es una respuesta vital a la modernidad estanca y moribunda de Europa, en opinión de Esther Sánchez-Pardo. La posición del negro como víctima da un paso más. Lo extraordinario de la obra es que Ti Noel no asume la condición de personaje colectivo y en lugar de ser un líder de la revolución es un personaje marginal. Por ejemplo, a pesar de la sagacidad y valentía con que considera a los de su raza, Ti Noel se ve resignado a obedecer a su amo. En el subcapítulo 1, el intercambio de personas como animales es evidente en la mercancía que compra el amo: una cabeza de ternero que el esclavo asocia con una cabeza de cera. El tratamiento del esclavo como animal de carga se ultima cuando Ti Noel debe llevar la mercancía. El subcapítulo 2 continúa el solapamiento de imágenes de persona/animal cuando un caballo cae sobre el esclavo Mackandal. El término de “poda” para referirse a la amputación del brazo es otro modo de animalizar al humano.

En “Las cabezas de cera”, la parte (cabeza) sustituye al todo (persona/animal). En “La poda”, la mano resta humanidad al esclavo Mackandal. En este capítulo 3, la combinación de lo natural y lo sobrenatural es otra metonimia que explica la textura “real-maravillosa” de la narración. La mezcla del animal con el humano es materia de observación para Mamán Loi, otro personaje creado por el narrador siguiendo la asociación de ideas metonímica por el lado maravilloso. Por el lado realista, el motivo también sirve para presentar a una mujer anciana experta en hierbas y semillas. Para aclarar más aún la metonimia persona-animal del esclavo, Mackandal le da a probar a un perro un hongo que, sin preverlo, le provoca la muerte, por lo cual huye. Este cuento que Mackandal cuenta añade un nivel narrativo a la historia general, que reaparece en la siguiente escena.

El entretenimiento de que proveía Mackandal a Ti Noel con sus historias resurge en “El recuento”. Mackandal, marginado en una cueva, de nuevo es responsable de la muerte de animales de su amo. En el punto medio del capítulo 1, hay un mayor grado de violencia porque lo que comenzó con la mutilación de partes del cuerpo (animal/humano), se continuó con la muerte de un perro y después con el envenenamiento de unas vacas del amo.

El escalonamiento de violencia sigue para extenderse al ganado y a familias. El solapamiento que da unidad al desarrollo de la trama es de nuevo la igualación del destino para el animal y la persona libre. La expresión figurada de la muerte del blanco a través de la matanza de su animal (perro y vacas) se hace literal cuando cierto esclavo denuncia y anuncia que va a eliminar a los blancos para que los negros puedan ser libres. El título “De profundis” cobra sentido cuando los términos reales e imaginarios de esta metáfora animal/humano se disocian en subcapítulos pero se asocian o reúnen en el discurso de fondo del esclavo.

Si la animalización de Mackandal se preveía con la cueva como su vivienda, ahora en el capítulo 2 el camuflaje del fugitivo disfrazado de animal subraya aún más el motivo animal/humano, sobre todo, cuando una mujer negra pare a un hijo con cabeza de jabalí. “La metamorfosis” del hombre en animal cobra preponderancia desde el instinto de supervivencia propia hasta la falta de respeto a la vida ajena. “El traje de hombre” consolida la forma animal del esclavo fugitivo.

El discurso premonitorio de la matanza del blanco que pronunciara un individuo esclavo en un subcapítulo anterior, se hace colectivo en la charla de los

negros contra los abusos de los blancos en una fiesta sonada. La fiesta es reprimida finalmente para cerrar el subcapítulo. Los personajes oprimidos son Ti Noel y Mackandal, compañeros desde el inicio y separados en la transformación de Mackandal. El dualismo animal/humano se ve desdoblado en los dos esclavos. La conclusión sobre la identidad del esclavo hasta ahora es que su apariencia es de hombre pero su esencia es animal tanto si está aislado de la sociedad como si convive con otros negros.

La ambivalencia del cuerpo/espíritu es una variante del dualismo humano/animal. La algarabía de la fiesta contra el blanco se convierte en una muchedumbre testigo del apresamiento y muerte física de Mackandal. Lo maravilloso de este relato es su transformación en mosquito. La pervivencia del espíritu con respecto a la forma física, que ya se ha visto es variable y manipulable, se hace real a través del recuerdo de su persona. El grito con que fue avasallado por un animal en el capítulo 1 se reproduce con el capítulo 2.

El incremento de violencia—de la mutilación de una mano a la quemadura del cuerpo entero, que irónicamente, se ve reducido a un insecto—no deja de señalar el hecho de la muerte como un acto institucional contra su persona. La inversión de roles confirma el par de contrarios habitual de humano/animal, que en esta novela se hace indistinguible. Durán Moreno concreta que la relación de igualdad entre señor y siervo se da por el uso de la palabra, repartida entre los cuentos del esclavo y la experiencia interior de los amos contada en capítulos enteros: “Como arma maravillosa surge la palabra, el vocablo otorgado por el opresor y tal vez el único elemento que equipara al señor y al siervo” (49).

De igual forma, se difuminan el aspecto racial del personaje (blanqueado en su capacidad de violencia) y su materia verosímil naturalizada con una forma maravillosa (lo real maravilloso). La herencia cultural de los personajes negros del Nuevo Mundo no se mantiene intacta por personajes que la abandonan. Sin embargo, no todos los personajes negros se dedican a la búsqueda de la paternidad cultural negra, como Haakayoo Zoggyie denuncia en la alienación de la herencia religiosa, histórica y lingüística afrohispana (1).

La parte barroca del texto se hace notar en la fiesta y la muchedumbre en torno a Mackandal. La celebración para expresar la voz colectiva del negro en la fiesta se contrapone a la muchedumbre que es testigo colectivo del negro en su quema. El título de la obra en su conjunto *El reino de este mundo* colecciona partes desmembradas—desde cabezas de personas y cabezas de animal hasta personas animalizadas. Lo común de estas metonimias de la parte por el todo y el todo por la parte es que la asociación entre lo animal y lo humano tiene lugar en la imaginación del negro pero en la realidad del blanco.

Ti Noel solapa las imágenes mencionadas en el análisis del capítulo 1 de las cabezas de cera con las cabezas de cordero imaginándolas como presas cazadas para ser comidas. A continuación, Mackandal provoca la muerte de animales que en sucesión ascendente (perro, vacas, ganado) cubren familias enteras. Cuando la imaginación se hace realidad y en un contexto literario, la realidad es sólo ficción, se produce el efecto barroco de la paradoja siguiente. Lo animal parece humano y lo humano parece animal, imposibilitándose su diferenciación porque el hombre mata al hombre como si fuera un animal.

Con esta teoría primitiva de fondo donde la supervivencia física es la primera necesidad humana y animal, comienza el motivo culinario del capítulo 2, titulado con el nombre de un mito sobre un toro: “La hija de Minos y Pasífae”. El trabajo de cocinero de Henri Christophe junto con el maltrato por el alcohol de los

esclavos de la hacienda continúa el motivo barroco del desorden y la violencia física. La única nota de esperanza vital procede del espíritu de los esclavos que aguardan el regreso de Mackandal.

El dualismo continúa, ya que el esclavo que alentó a los esclavos a manifestarse en el capítulo 1 reaparece en el capítulo 2 en forma de Bouckman. Es sacrificio animal para la supervivencia del amo se extiende ahora a la supervivencia del esclavo, para el que se refieren sacrificios simbólicos, igualmente. Los cuentos de Mackandal son sustituidos por la historia oral del jamaicano, que funda su charla en la negativa de los amos del mundo americano a seguir el ejemplo de los amos del mundo europeo para dar libertad a los esclavos. El título anteriormente analizado que concentra lo barroco y lo real maravilloso de la conjunción desconyuntada del motivo animal/humano, hace patente la identificación del amo americano con la parte animal que perpetúa la esclavitud, ya que el amo europeo es la parte humana que apuesta por la libertad. Por esto, esta sección se titula "El pacto mayor".

La inversión de papeles del amo-esclavo tiene una fase de revolución que imita la francesa. Los esclavos son llamados con caracoles. El amo, llamado Lenormand de Mezy, tenía intención de violar a una de sus esclavas, oye la llamada a la pelea. El miedo de la mujer violada se traspasa a él. La destrucción física de la casa del amo pasa por la destrucción de las imágenes que simbolizan a Dios para el blanco. La estructura circular por la que el que antes era esclavo ahora es amo y viceversa tiene un sentido mítico. Por un lado, el mito bíblico de la liberación del pecado, por ejemplo, se reproduce en la liberación de la esclavitud. Por otro lado, el mito destruye al personaje ya que lo devuelve a la esclavitud (Donald Shaw 22).

Sobre el sentido de la liberación, Ingrid Watson Miller sigue la temática de Martha Cobb: "la búsqueda de liberación, política y psíquica, tema predominante en casi todas las obras de autores negros en las Américas" (53). El reparto de la venganza es equitativo porque así como la propiedad privada del amo blanco es destruida y su esposa asesinada, ahora el líder de la rebelión ha sido ejecutado junto con otros esclavos suyos. Bouckman muere donde murió su predecesor Mackandal. Ti Noel sobrevive, aunque es duramente castigado porque su amo lo estima de valor material, así como otra docena de esclavos de su propiedad. La forma simbólica de la práctica religiosa del negro es la serpiente, la cual adoran en secreto. Esta nota de supervivencia espiritual finaliza esta sección, igual que la sección intermedia del capítulo 1.

La imagen del amo blanco en "Santiago de Cuba" carece de referencias animales. Los ritos religiosos del amo en la catedral prescinden de sacrificios simbólicos. Sólo se incluye la música y la reminiscencia de religiones practicadas por él mismo en el pasado. La nostalgia del tiempo ido se confunde con una falsa religiosidad, dada su práctica esclavista. Por tanto, si la conexión humano/animal, consistente para los personajes negros en los capítulos 1 y 2, se pierde ahora cuando el centro de atención es el blanco, se deduce que el retrato del amo está igualmente mutilado. El orden significa la conjunción de lo animal/humano, que se traduce en la seguridad del presagio. El personaje negro conoce, no teme, su futuro. Sin embargo, en la caracterización del blanco, asociado metonímicamente a Europa por la catedral, predomina el desorden barroco y el temor a la muerte, la cual al contrario de Mackandal, es tanto física como espiritual. Se connota que desde el punto de vista católico, el amo teme morir espiritualmente (teme ir al infierno) por haber poseído y maltratado seres humanos. Richard Jackson califica la imagen del blanco de absurda en los siguientes términos: "Los blancos de las obras de Carpentier comenzaron a representar absurda y degeneradamente el fracaso de la cultura occidental, lo que se ve claramente en su segunda novela, *El reino de este*

mundo (1949), también llamada la puesta en escena apocalíptica de “El decaimiento del Oeste” de Spengler (34) [“Whites began to appear in Carpentier’s works as absurd, degenerate representatives of the failure of Western culture, a view best seen in his second novel, *El reino de este mundo* (1949), which has been called the “apocalyptic staging of Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*”].

“La nave de los perros” identifica los animales con las personas. Se mezclan mensajes contradictorios. Por un lado, se anuncia irónicamente que los perros van a comer negros. Por otro lado, se concede una importancia irónica a la llegada de la francesa Paulina Bonaparte. Si el amo sentía miedo por el vacío, la ama disfruta lo vano del ocio y el recreo proporcionado por sus pretendientes, sin ninguna preocupación por el coste espiritual o humano de sus caprichos. La parte maravillosa del relato asociada a la experiencia del blanco se contrapone a la parte real de sus consecuencias sobre el negro. La muestra palpable del perjuicio y prejuicio del blanco contra el negro se hace escatológicamente. El realismo exacerbado de los detalles grotescos caricaturizan al personaje que aparenta honor pero contiene un vacío espiritual. Los vómitos de sangre de su peluquero, dedicado a la imagen superficial de la dama, revelan la interioridad impura de la mujer con poder sobre los esclavos. Al comparar el envenenamiento de animales con la muerte inesperada del peluquero se incrementa la violencia otro grado y se realiza de manera natural o naturalista el presagio del inicio del capítulo donde como efecto de que el animal come al humano, se vomita sangre. En el capítulo 3, en “La puerta única”, el hecho insólito es que el dedo meñique del cadáver del monarca es comparado a un gusano. El motivo humano/animal en forma de mutilación es constante. El efecto es de asco, como era el de los vómitos de sangre del otro capítulo.

El capítulo 2 finaliza con una burla de la unión de la fe con la política mediante el título “San Trastorno.” Paulina empieza a creer en la divinidad africana y el poder de un amuleto. Como consecuencia, se vuelve demente y en parte porque no puede gobernar. El comentario inherente a este argumento es que la unión de la religión con el gobierno no beneficia a la población. La salida del poder blanco deja a la colonia sin gobierno y como prueba del desorden barroco resultante, la matanza de negros se convierte en espectáculo. En resumen, la oración a San Trastorno no ayuda a la gobernadora y el gobernador que surge en su lugar no garantiza la vida de los gobernados. El cambio de poder blanco por el poder negro no mejora la situación. Como nota de esperanza final, surgen los sacerdotes negros, que sustituyendo a los sacerdotes franceses, aparecen como personajes sabios.

Esta última nota sirve de transición para las connotaciones positivas de libertad del personaje y del paisaje en el capítulo 3 de “Los signos”, donde las imágenes de animales no son objeto de burla por parte del narrador, sino objeto de respeto por Ti Noel. Se cambia el punto de vista una vez más. Los animales muertos encontrados y la sequedad del paisaje son indicios de la presencia africana en la Santiago de Cuba. Estas imágenes de libertad son coherentes con la condición libre de Ti Noel.

Sin embargo, esta percepción positiva se invierte y llega a ser falsa en el apartado siguiente. El rey Henri Christophe lo aprisiona y lo obliga a trabajos forzados. La riqueza material y las instituciones existentes con el poder blanco se perpetúan con el rey negro. Se preserva la imagen católica de la Inmaculada Concepción demostrando que el antiguo cocinero del blanco, Henri Christophe, había asimilado los instrumentos de poder del europeo.

En “El sacrificio de los toros” hay una reminiscencia del capítulo de “La hija de Minos y Pasifae”. La estructura paralela de los capítulos 1 y 2 con

personajes que ejercen funciones idénticas (Mackandal/Bouckman) se continúa con Henri Christophe/Lenormand de Mezy. La tiranía y la demostración de poder con fortalezas animaliza la figura negra. El opresor negro reinstaura la política de terror del opresor blanco. Así como el argumento se repite, la caracterización del personaje dictador se reproduce también.

El tratamiento cíclico del tiempo y del espacio refuerza la continuidad de la tiranía. Por un lado, el reinado de Henri Christophe vuelve al pasado francés. El nombre afrancesado para el dictador lo identifica. Por otro lado, la vuelta de Ti Noel a la misma hacienda donde había sido esclavo de Mezy significa un retroceso espacial también, es decir, la acción no avanza ni espacial ni temporalmente. La representación del amo, sea blanco o negro, es atemporal y ahistórica. En este sentido, la imagen es primitiva.

La imagería visual que confirmaba la presencia africana para Ti Noel en la ciudad Santiago se convierte en imagería auditiva en la Ciudad de Cabo. Los rumores, los gritos y los llantos son algunos ejemplos que señalan la presencia de la muerte próxima. En el penúltimo subcapítulo, los tambores serán el símbolo de la rebelión. Una vez fugado (tal como Mackandal), Henri advierte la conspiración religiosa reprimida en torno al tirano. El dualismo del animal/humano, que podemos cifrar en que el hombre es el lobo del hombre, tiene lugar entre los religiosos relacionados con el tirano. El confesor pretende delatar al tirano y el fraile delata al confesor.

Las alegorías étnica, racial y política que se derivan de la elección de este antagonista confirman que la fe en la libertad no cambia a pesar de la historia. La fe es una realidad inherente o natural, no expresada en forma de ritual sino innata al haitiano por ser consciente de su condición humana. La combinación de la naturaleza y de las protestas sociales es la visión de la condición humana para Richard Jackson. La postura de Esteban González Echevarría es igualmente híbrida. Para el crítico, la historia del haitiano es una repetición "ritual" cuya razón consiste en la fe en el destino. El mito de la autodeterminación es europeo no africano, pero el mito de la predestinación es igualmente europeo que africano.

La parte primitiva de la obra es la realidad humana, atemporal de la fe en sí misma contrasta con la historia de la opresión tras la revolución. La subversión de miles de haitianos no parte de la razón proclamada por los intelectuales franceses, sino de su propia fe vudú. El proyecto de Carpentier es ambiguo para Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, quien describe la historia de Haití como la repetición de un patrón que se inicia y finaliza con la opresión occidental pero que se desarrolla cuando los haitianos ponen en práctica sus creencias.

Carpentier [was] committed on the one hand to an alternative depiction of Haitian history that emphasizes the people's enduring faith in Vodou and the lwas, yet not unwilling to fetishize aspects of that faith in his text in his quest for the magic-realist unveiling of that history required by the new literature he envisioned (118)

Al contrario que en la lectura alegórica de Lane Kauffmann sobre el "Axolotl" de Cortázar, "las jerarquías ontológicas occidentales –sujeto sobre objeto, uno sobre otro, humano sobre animal, mente sobre cuerpo" (146) no están reproducidas en la historia. La alegoría etnográfica de Ti Noel y Henri Christophe no puede seguir simplemente el binomio de blanco/negro. Carpentier subvierte la filosofía hegeliana así como la corriente de la novela histórica romántica-hegeliana. La combinación de opuestos no es una síntesis homogénea sino una síntesis en conflicto, una

divergencia barroca que se reúne con la simultaneidad de los eventos naturales y sobrenaturales.

Para conceder un uso igualitario a los planos de la realidad y la ficción, la narración usa el adjetivo cualificativo de manera moderada incluso en situaciones de evidente crueldad. El único adjetivo, “prudente”, revela el pragmatismo de la violencia.

El amo llegó a tiempo para impedir que Ti Noel y doce esclavos más, marcados por su hierro, fuesen amacheteados en el patio del cuartel, donde los negros atados de dos en dos, lomo a lomo, esperaban la muerte por armas de filo, porque era más prudente economizar la pólvora (69-70)

Por tanto, en la novela, hay sincretismo barroco en que se imita la idea europea de la revolución con la diferencia del mantenimiento de la fe colectiva en el destino a través de la concesión del mismo estatus para los opuestos de otro modo de la razón y la fe. La revolución es una revelación: es un caso único en la historia y en la literatura afrohispana y es también una enseñanza insólita por no publicada antes: el negro no defiende al negro. Como resume Luis William, en su trabajo, Carpentier anota las transiciones de la historia de Haití, desde la rebelión del esclavo Mackandal hasta el gobierno de Boyer. Mackandal, Boukman, y Ti Noel usan el vudú para derrotar tanto a los amos blancos como al negro Henri Christophe y los republicanos mulatos; los dos últimos abandonaron sus raíces africanas y aceptaron el sistema europeo de cultura y gobierno” (130).

En conclusión, partiendo de una coordinación de tipo antitética (hay más conjunciones adversativas que copulativas), de lo barroco y lo real maravilloso en “El reino de este mundo” de Carpentier emerge una subordinación lingüística que comunica una jerarquía cultural. La modernización de lo primitivo pasa por el blanqueamiento cultural. La imitación de sistemas de gobierno ajenos no supone una repartición justa de bienes. El narrador actúa de primitivo más que de moderno, por no intentar erigirse en juez, a pesar de lo lógico de pensar que cualquier selección de imágenes para la representación de una historia va a ser necesariamente parcial. En última instancia, el lector decide qué función asignar al narrador. En este caso, se concluye que la narración favorece al blanco incluso en un espacio donde la imaginación puede derribar a la razón.

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PALARA

Opposing Unity and Weakening Identity: Afro-Ecuadorians, Racism, and the Forces of Negative Stigma

by Linda Jean Hall

Introduction

"Clifford argues that what frequently passes for the local or native's perspective in ethnography is, more often than not, only the beliefs, ideas, and assertions of the anthropologist who, in the act of inscribing culture, serves to suppress the native's world view"... A. Charles Dawson, 2014

My summer sojourns to Ecuador were initially motivated by a personal tragedy and the promise of a close friend and native Ecuadorian that I would find adventure and comfort in his culturally diverse nation. But, there would be a life-changing and unanticipated outcome that neither of us expected. The first two years (2006 and 2007) I immediately noticed what is best described as an absence or invisibility that I began to question. As I walked about the airport, waited outside at the pickup zone for my friends, and during our trips together that spanned the Andes and coastal regions, I rarely saw and never had an opportunity to speak to Afro-Ecuadorians. I actually asked my hosts, a *blanco-mestizo* (indigenous and Euro-white) family, "Where are the Black Ecuadorians"? I was told that Afro-Ecuadorians for the most part live in the barrios surrounding Quito – or they keep to themselves – surviving on what God provides them in their homeland villages – all places where I should not go because it wasn't safe. This idea of safety being a condition that exists outside of the domain of Blackness was not an unfamiliar concept to an Afro-American. However, as an outsider in another culture where nearly everything is different, I reluctantly accepted – with a considerable amount of ambivalence, this and other irrational ideas. After all, my caring friends were the experts and as a part of my immersion I resigned myself to be an amiable and at least outwardly accepting pupil.

The conversations with my long-time friends about being Black in Ecuador revealed how little they actually knew about the Afro citizens in their country. Members of the host family are world travelers; recipients of advanced degrees and nearly all of them lived for extended periods in various parts of the U.S. In some cases they know more than I do about Afro-American history. Some are attorneys and I'm always amazed at their knowledge of events and litigation that emerged in the civil rights era. Above all, they accept me without hesitation and over the years my value to these friends has increased so much that they refer to me as a member of the family. Yet, I struggled in those early years to understand why they were so adamant to warn me to stay away from people who look like me. My relationship with my very kind host family and the idea of Afro-Ecuadorians being the unsafe and unknown prompted me to explore Afro identity in Ecuador.

Although political-economic differences among Afro-Ecuadorians are well documented, there is little research specifically exploring the function of cultural difference among Ecuador's Afro citizens. The first part of this article provides and analyzes testimonies and experiences, which prompted me to explore the particular topic of negative stigma among Afro-Ecuadorians. A great deal of the second part of

this article is also rich in both local testimony and autobiographical reflection. Individuals are given a chance to speak about and define in their own words the meaning and function of negative stigma. The goal is to explore the phenomenon of negative labeling in order to better understand how my experiences with Afro-Ecuadorians has shaped my current approach to doing work as a cultural anthropologist in Ecuador. I will begin by explaining why I am pursuing this type of research project exploring the meaning and function of negative stigma among Afro-Ecuadorians.

Life-changing Events and Motivations

The first two years I visited Ecuador I restricted my activities to doing archival research. During that time, I lived in a very comfortable single-family house in the rural and middle-classed parish of Tumbaco. A wall at least 10 feet tall covered at the top by six inch shards of glass is a barrier between the home owners and their neighbors on the outside who are for the most part day laborers. During this time, my host took me everywhere – I was told by my home university and most of my friends to avoid unsafe public transportation. At the universities in downtown Quito, I began to do work to finish my bachelor's degree in Spanish and then a Master's in Latin American studies by perusing and analyzing socio-political, and historical literature about Afro-Ecuadorians. These trips freed me to walk about in the downtown area and I slowly began to assert my independence. I also started shopping at QuiCentro, a glossy and modern three-story mall near the office of my friend and this taste of freedom led me to begin taking a taxi *sola* (by myself) to off campus sites like the Abya Yala Bookstore. On and off campus, I found very few books devoted exclusively to telling the Afro-Ecuadorian story.

Most of the literature at the university and private bookstores was recently published and most consisted of only shallow accounts of the historical path to citizenship of Afro-Ecuadorians. Unfortunately, there was even less material dealing with the current socio-political and cultural development of Ecuador's citizens of African heritage. Perhaps the reason for a lack of focus on the plight of the nation's Afro citizens was due to the fact that between 2007-2009 Ecuador itself was being politically redefined. The national movement of Rafael Correa and his anti-neoliberal party Alianza País had begun its ascent to control of the presidency, the national assembly, and the rewriting of the constitution. The media portrayed the indigenous as Correa's partners and the Afro-Ecuadorians appeared in the newspapers, magazines and on the TV only after committing criminal acts or as performers of dance at events celebrating the diversity of the nation. The bookshelves at that time were overflowing with political critiques that challenged Correa's interpretation of democracy and the ideologies of multiculturalism and interculturalism. At this politically tumultuous time in Ecuador's history, there didn't seem to be a space in its dynamic society for Afro-Ecuadorians.

The invisibility of Afro citizens and the absence of a public discourse about who they are prompted me to question even more what types of relationships exist among Afro-Ecuadorians. The data that did address these differences among Afro citizens spoke of cultural diversity in terms of their geographical location in one of three natural environments: the littoral Western coast, the Andean high sierra, and the

inland and coastal regions that comprise Guayaquil. At that time, I was also deeply engrossed in reading sociologist E. Franklin Frazier's (1957) mid twentieth century critique of black middle-class America --- or the *Black Bourgeoisie*. Frazier recognized several factors were responsible for the development of a distinct and culturally different elitist class of Afro-Americans. First of all, the black bourgeoisie's geographical place was within modernity inside the technically advanced urban centers where they distinguished themselves and established a new cultural identity within their class that did not in anyway grant them equal status in the greater white community. For the most part, the other class of black Americans occupied a transitional and transitory place because they were involved in a great migration from the rural south, the struggle to find jobs doing whatever type of work that was available, while sustaining themselves on the long-established cultural beliefs of their ancestors.

The greatest difference between U.S. black bourgeoisie and the other less fortunate, poor, and highly migratory class of Afro-Americans was that the elitists felt entitled to be antagonistic towards the new arrivals and they went to great lengths to avoid and denigrate traditionalist black cultural beliefs. In this environment, differences in skin color, hair textures, personal comportment all became extremely important markers and justification to use stereotypes to relegate members of the other class to a position of less importance and socio-economic disadvantage. These stigmas in the U.S. weren't new ideas. Some first emerged during slavery or their roots reside in modern ideas held by the white community about being black that were embraced and employed by the elitist Afro-American community. My research question for my 2008 summer project in Ecuador engaged this issue in very simple terms: If there were cultural differences between Afro-Americans based on geographical place, then is it also possible that powerful ideas or stereotypes and social stigma are at play within Afro-Ecuadorian communities? I continue to explore the complexity of this issue within the body of my current research.

As I prepared to return to Ecuador in 2008, I knew I'd have to find a way to overcome my "lack" of knowledge about Afro-Ecuadorians. This necessitated that I step outside my comfort zone with my friends in Tambaco in order to see Afro-Ecuadorians as more than the literary subjects in Lydia Andres' historical biography *Papa Roncon: Historia de Vida* (2008), the socio-political scholarship of Catherine Walsh, and the anthropological ethnographies of Norman Whitten and Jean Muteba Rahier. The plan to increase the scope of my research required I begin speaking directly to Afro-Ecuadorians. In order to accomplish this type of immersion, I started by requesting help to meet Afro-Ecuadorians from amongst my existing and only network of *blanco-mestizo* contacts.

Networking, or constructing a web of social contacts in order to build confidence in your project, is a critical element of field research. I still rely heavily on personal introductions and over the years I've found this approach to be especially valuable as the Correa regime tightened political control of Ecuador after 2008¹. Most Ecuadorians continue---even in 2015--- to be rightfully reluctant to openly criticize the populist president. This is especially true for Afro-Ecuadorians who are understandably suspicious of outsiders because they feel these strangers might take their information and use it to their own advantage. In 2008, most of my *blanco-mestizo* friends didn't know any Afro-Ecuadorians, but one with deep roots as a teacher in the Quito community stepped forward to introduce me to an Afro-Ecuadorian member of her social organization.

Irina was the proud owner of a small restaurant tucked away in a quiet section of a multi-ethnic neighborhood in Quito. During this two hour interview, she discussed her struggle to keep her children in good schools, the discrimination she experienced from her husband and public officials because of her inter-racial marriage, and the blatant favoritism of the court that granted most of her worldly possession to her *blanco* husband during her recent divorce. Tears filled her eyes and she stopped several times as she recounted a particular incident when stereotypes about Afro-Ecuadorian females dominated and shaped her life.

In our country, here in Ecuador, for Negros opportunities are scarce, very scarce. People say that there is no racism, racism does not exist, but truthfully there is, there is at every level. In Guayaquil, ...but there too there was something very difficult. There it was if I felt racism a lot, a lot. I went to get a job in a place that they called Supermercado el Rosado, that now is Supermercado mi Comisariato,. And so, there were a lot of people. I saw it in the newspaper. I was 19 and I dressed myself in an attractive manner, in my best clothes. At that time I went to get that job at Supermercado and there were a lot of people waiting for a job, there wasn't just one job... So, I arrived there, no, and there was a person in charge of selecting personnel...then this man arrived and he counted five people...to count them he arrived to where I was, he jumped over me and continued passing a lot of people [Afro-Ecuadorian], they had passed a lot and nobody [very emotional response]....did nothing, nobody did nothing. Then, when I saw this job wasn't possible for me [now crying softly with each word]...Icame to Quito. I was better received in Quito....they looked at me, like I was their lover, it's like that. All beautiful Negros or Negras have to always serve first as lovers. So, I struggle because of this (Irina 2009).

The testimony above disputes the claims by many politicians that because there are specific provisions in the constitution condemning racist practices, racism² is no longer a viable issue that qualifies to be discussed in the public domain (Ospina 2010). The interviewee is a native of the Western Ecuadorian coastal region of Esmeraldas and the majority of her conversation about her mother-centered and father-absent family life in her native region related to the strong and unified desire of all her family to overcome continuing oppression. Education for this interviewee is a key she sees as a way to gain a higher socio-economic status and she continues to self-educate as proof of her determination. The majority of her siblings migrated to either the U.S. or Europe and the next generation is well on their way to obtaining college and advanced degrees. As she spoke, I began to wonder if at some point she reached out to any agency or community group that especially tasked itself to resist discrimination against Afro-Ecuadorians, especially in the courts. She firmly said, "there aren't any such agencies, committees, whatever that I'm aware of to help us, Black people, here in Quito, are there"? I remembered reading about a group, CODAE and she said she never heard of them and asked what they do. I explained their mission is to facilitate Afro-Ecuadorian development and that there is a legal staff. At the end of her conversation she emphasized that this all sounded too political and she felt very much alone in her struggle. The bottom line for her is: she's sure of is that she can only rely on her own resources to move her family forward. The interview was revealing for many reasons.

Above all, the interviewee's testimony stands in stark contrast to the opinions based on stereotypes and stigma that permeate Ecuadorian society about Afro-Esmeraldasians.

Words and Images of Difference

During those first summers in the field I was introduced to the Afro citizens of Ecuador through the eyes of my fellow passengers on the 12-hour flights to Ecuador. Stopovers can be as long as two to four hours in Bogota or Miami. On these occasions I always begin to immerse myself in Spanish. Usually, the flights are full and *blanco-mestizos* occupy the majority of seats on the plane. From outward appearances, very few if any of my fellow passengers appear to be of African heritage. I'm sure one reason Latin Americans may want to speak to me is that I look and act very North American; I'm a light complexioned and redheaded Black female who is fluent in Spanish; although, I speak – very polite and well-meaning native speakers tell me --- with a pronounced Yankee accent.

I have made the Los Angeles to Quito flight yearly since 2006 and on each trip people identifying themselves as Ecuadorian take advantage of my presence to chat about the miserable state of the US economy, or the international goodwill inspired by what my fellow passengers politely refer to as the fortuitous election in the US of a Black president. Often, they try to establish a symbiotic relationship with me by claiming that they, like me, and most Ecuadorians, share my African heritage. I always sit and listen during these informal conversations (Bernard 2006) and allow them to introduce the topics they want to talk about. In nearly every case they freely share their opinions about color or race, and groups of people of different geographical regions in Ecuador. I have a tough skin when it comes to being involved in verbal exchanges where negative stereotypes and generalizations about the comportment, appearance and intelligence of my race are used to describe what it means to be Black. But, that is my attitude and the way I behave in the U.S. I honestly wasn't quite sure how to respond when my fellow passengers openly talked about Afro-Ecuadorians using the same derogatory terms and descriptions I'd read in Handlesman's critique of Afro-Ecuadorian colonial and post colonial literature, *Lo Afro Y La Plurinacionalidad: El Caso Ecuatoriano Visto Desde Su Literatura* (The Afro and Plurinationalism: The Ecuadorian Case seen from Their Literature 1999). But, at the same time I came to realize that I had to modify both my comportment and the notions about race I brought with me from the US. After my second year as a summer researcher, I clearly understood it was extremely important that I see blackness as a community domain in Ecuador to which everyone laid claim. Being Black in Ecuador crossed boundaries strongly demarcated by differences in skin colors, particular facial features, diverse hair textures, and above all, the mandate of the state to self-identify as one of several official 'ethnic' groups recognized by the government.

The reason skin color in particular was a factor I had to personally come to terms with relates in part to the literal fact that most Ecuadorians are not blond and blue-eyed, but different shades of what would be considered in the US, dark-complexioned skin tones. Also, according to my fellow passengers, every Ecuadorian has some "dark-skinned", Negro, or black-slave ancestral connection to the past. They based their claims on both tangible and intangible evidence, i.e., old photos and the oral stories they've heard since they were children. However, census data reveals that the most common shared ethnic identity in Ecuador is *mestizo*, a mixture of indigenous and immigrant Euro-White. Stigma about Afro-Ecuadorians operates at the intersection of

Ecuador's ethnic diversity and the political and economic domination of *blanco-mestizos*.

This paper explores two intersecting topics including the value of reflexive theory and methodology to the analysis of the dynamics of Afro-Ecuadorian inter-group relationships in Quito, Ecuador. The other purpose of the article is to shed light on the construction of Black cultural identity by examining through participant testimonies the meaning and function of negative stigmas — markers of disgrace that serve as reasons to justify and exacerbate ethnic and social differences among members of what could be a more unified community. The approaches utilized both in the field and during the hermeneutic --- or what Geertz refers to as the 'reading process' (Geertz 1973), each unquestionably employ reflexive strategies in a way that gives priority to the telling of the story from the point of view of the local participants. At times in this paper, the narrative utilizes the personal designation "I" which provides the reader the opportunity to become familiar with the ideas, emotions, and history of the researcher. Therefore, this ethnography recounts the steps through time to developing an understanding of how the interviewee's words or phrases elicit a particular (or no) response from the researcher. In this way, the ethnography avoids the pitfalls of plot omission. Smith's critique of Lévi-Strauss argues that leaving out events contributes to the abstraction of the society of study (Smith 2001). Malinowski's very personal experiences with the Trobrianders that appear only in his posthumously published diary, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (1989) are a classical example of how the researcher's personal comments reveal hidden meanings and more accurately situate the reader inside the telling of the Trobrian story. A series of expository local testimonies in this paper form the storyline — because the plot belongs to Afro-Ecuadorians --- and the meaning of stigma evolves parallel to the plot from within the context of the relationship as a memory of events (Ebron 2001) between the researcher and each interviewee.

Afro-Ecuadorians as Reality and Myth

From a demographical and political-economic standpoint of the status, I'm well aware of the socio-economic status of Afro-Ecuadorians. A little over seven percent of Ecuador's population of 14.4 million self-identify as Afro-Ecuadorian, and approximately 5% reside in Quito's province of Pichincha (2010 National Census). However, the 20 plus Afro-Quitonian activists — a focus group comprised of grass-roots engaged adults, ages 25-55-- I interviewed between 2011 and 2013 claimed that less than 1% of self-identified Afro citizens participate in local politics and social movement groups in the metropolitan Quito area. Although the criteria for selection of the activists was based on only two common factors---their self-identification as Afro-Ecuadorian and their shared current working status as group leaders in the Afro-Quitonean community--the evidence they provided in collaboration with the opinions of other Afro-Ecuadorians interviewees justifies an analysis to began to answer one question: Is there a relationship between the low political participation of Afro-Ecuadorians and the propagation of negative stigma about Ecuadorians of African heritage?

Black Quitoneans are for the most part permanent residents who maintain strong familial ties to their scattered and culturally distinctive geographical provinces of origin. The Ecuadorian state and organizations as part of the state's project, i.e. CODAE, that are specifically chartered to oversee Afro-Ecuadorian development, promote the formation of a unified Afro-Ecuadorian culture. Anti-racist public policies

at the national level in the form of laws and constitutional provisions are also now in place that recognizes an Afro-Ecuadorian as a member of the ethnic-racial collective Afro-Ecuadorian, an official census category as defined by the state. But, on the ground, negative stigma used throughout Ecuadorian society by the great majority of the nation's citizenry--- including Afro-Ecuadorians --- unapologetically stands in opposition to the national agenda of unification. These internal and external forces of stigma resist the conflation of Afro-Ecuadorian values and norms because they can act at the individual level as divisive self-esteem issues (Crocker and Major 1989). The individual repercussions accompanying a political assignment of one's body to one particular collective ethnicity and simultaneously erase cultural boundaries that speak to individual identity is a modern phenomenon of great anthropological importance.

At the intersection of race-ethnicity and the political, power is stratified in Ecuadorian society. Within what is an ethnic-class hierarchy there are three groups: the majority population of dominant politicians and economic elites, a burgeoning and politicized indigenous sector, and those who self-identified as Afro-Ecuadorian. Because the nation is very small in terms of landmass (98,985 square miles), relationships of kinship and modern ties acquired at university and while working guarantee access to opportunities of employment and socio-economic uplift. The boundaries that separate these groups are best described in the words of activists I interviewed in 2013 as modestly porous and perceptions of individual identity determine access to a higher social status. One approach to better understand the role of stigma is to first ask what factors contributed to the construction of restrictive borders between individual Afro-Ecuadorians?

Carlos, a long-time grass-roots Afro-Ecuadorian activist acknowledges and provides a brief historical explanation that relates to the current existence of differences and conflicts among Afro citizens of Quito:

One of the elements that affect us is that the Afro population is very dispersed and it is a big population, and it's a migrant population. Therefore, there is a strong population from Esmeraldas [Ecuador's most northwestern province bordering Colombia]. An Afro population, from El Chota and Imbabura, Carchi -- all are provinces that have strong Afro populations, also Loja and Guayaquil -- but these are also zones that are geographically different, very dispersed. In Quito there are immigrant populations and they are building themselves up as Afro united communities. Therefore, there are specific organizational processes that always have difficulties getting together, or uniting themselves (Carlos, 2012).

Carlos' testimony provides evidence that negative stigma opposing Afro-Ecuadorian collaboration stems has spatial and temporal origins and these differences intensify during the processes of migration and collaboration.

My experiences in the field for the first two summers of 2006 and 2007 also included more informal interviews with *blanco-mestizos*. These sessions and the exploration of political literature confirmed stigma about Afro-Ecuadorians circulates freely among all Ecuadorians. After 2008, as a participant observer in the Afro-Ecuadorian community, I witnessed numerous interactions among Afro residents in Quito that lead me to question what role negative stigma plays in shaping social and

political opinions about Afro citizens inside and outside their communities. Existing epistemology about this topic confirms that negative stigma in the form of stereotypes influence how and to what degree Afro citizens share in the benefits of the state (Medina and Castro 2011).

Another issue related to the function of stigmas emerges when my fellow passengers question me about the nature of my research. I usually answer that I investigate the impact of the affirmative action and reparations concessions for Afro-Ecuadorians that exist in the latest version of Ecuador's constitution. Their responses frequently convert to questions that expose various ideas and myths they personally believe to be true about Ecuador's Black citizens: Why are you studying Afro-Ecuadorians, they're happy living on the coast where they have all they need? Why do you want to even waste time examining those coastal people who don't want to be a part of our government? Are you going to travel north of Quito to the mountainous community of El Chota where the smart black people of Ecuador live? These types of offensive questions did have a positive outcome: they prompted me to wonder if Afro-Ecuadorians also propagate and actually believe these and other ideas about their aspirations and inter-group differences based on space and cultural difference. In order to begin to shed light on issues related to the self-propagation of stereotypes among migratory Afro-Ecuadorians I interviewed several prominent Black-Quitonian activists.

The testimony of Lucila in 2013, a native of the high sierra and dedicated Afro community leader with over 20 years experience fighting for the civil rights of all Ecuadorian citizens of African heritage, typifies the testimonies I accumulated during this phase of the project.

I think migration affected people from the coast- how can I explain this? The way of life in the community there is different from those of the sierra. People from the coast, and, I am not talking only about Afros but in general, they are more immediate, they live day by day, on the other hand people from the sierra are like more deliberate ...we think about what is going to happen tomorrow, we think about savings, we think about a future, not an immediate future more like a distance future, on the contrary on the coast, we've seen that they are more immediate, that if we have something for today, tomorrow I'll see how I resolve tomorrow's needs. (Lucila, 2013)

The community activist and leader's testimony exposes the conflation of deeply engrained beliefs in Ecuador about cultural differences and economic class distinctions. Lucila situates the 'other' coastal Afro-Ecuadorians firmly in the past---in a static domain in which non-flexible ideas tied to the past restrict their progress. This particular interviewee avoided the use of blatant stereotypes; yet, many of the testimonies of Afro-Ecuadorians I accumulated between 2008-2013 openly tied their criticisms of other Afro-Ecuadorians to phenotypical markers and geographically specific ideas that separate Ecuador's citizens of ancestral heritage. Lucila's revealing comments inspired me to question; how does stigma function within the many socio-culturally diverse Afro-Ecuadorian communities of metropolitan Quito? My first instinct was to acquire insights from a representative sample of individuals who self-identity themselves as being long-time community leaders. I assumed that their roles as Afro-citizen social organizers had allowed them to accumulate a wealth of very

particular knowledge about the dynamic relationships that exist among Afro-Ecuadorians.

Knowledge of a Particular Kind

Early in my research, it was brought to my attention that Black Ecuadorian leaders operate from a position of privilege constituted by their financial and political ties to the state. De la Torre, a professor at that time at FLACSO and a longtime researcher of Afro-Ecuadorian political economics shed light on this state of politicization of Ecuador's Afro leadership.

Many community leaders over 50 years old, that during all their lives have participated in the struggle for their barrios' livelihoods and basic services (ex., clean water and electric service), saw themselves as part of the pueblo [a broad ethnic category the author later indicates as being a group of poor people who are virtuous and dependent upon the State] and although very conscious of being negras they did not emphasize their negritude when they narrated living experiences and struggles. Try to talk to the common people. They might have a very different...idea of what it means to be black in a country where race is a fact. The black movement here is very small and the (Afro-Ecuadorian) leadership has politicized their identity (De la Torre, 2009).

After the De la Torre interview, I decided my next step should be to obtain lived-experience testimonies from a sampling of the Afro-citizen leaders to get their side of the story. I began this work by visiting an organization administered by Afro-Ecuadorians called CODAE, La Corporación de Desarrollo Afroecuatoriano (Corporation of Afro-Ecuadorian Development). Within the sphere of Afro citizen civil activity, CODAE is the nationally sanctioned and under-funded advocate of public policy initiative construction favoring – but not necessarily representing in the traditional civil rights sense--- Afro-Ecuadorians. I first went to CODAE a day after my interview with De la Torre. The literature about CODAE spoke to both its political and economic ties to the government and its social commitment to serve the 'development' of Afro-Ecuadorians. Therefore, I wanted to see if CODAE's unadvertised mission was to create solutions to bridge the gap among Black leadership and the common people in order to prepare Afro-Ecuadorians to undertake 'development'. Also, as a case study CODAE appeared to be an excellent environment in which I could explore De la Torre's accusations about the politicization of black Ecuadorian leaders.

The questions I asked at this session were designed to shed light on the meaning and function of the division between the leadership and, in the words of De la Torre, the 'common' Ecuadorian black citizen. My approach was to encourage the interviewees to speak freely about what they perceived to be their personal identities as Afro-Ecuadorians and how they felt their individual worldviews shaped the ways in which they actually did work in the communities they serve. As I prepared the questions, I admit to struggling to avoid prioritizing, conflating, or superimposing U.S. ideas about Black leadership and group empowerment associated with the Civil Rights Movement. My objectives were to encourage the CODAE's Black leaders to speak to

the gap between Afro leadership and the greater black community as what De la Torre described to be a historically shaped and socially constructed reality.

In a recently published thesis, Political Scientists Anagonó and Paola claim CODAE's political mandate is to judiciously coordinate the demands grass-root Afro social organizations whose claims are presented by delegates representing a myriad of local issues important to each community organization. Since its creation by presidential decree in 1998 and until recently, the comportment of administrative staff, selection process of delegates, utilization of funding, and the exact role of the agency have all been criticized. Although CODAE is not clearly defined as a representative or voice of the Afro community, their role as a state commission charged to motivate public policy and development for Afro-Ecuadorians leads to confusion about their identity and purpose in the public domain (Anagonó and Paola 2011, Medina and Torres 2011). The agency tends to embrace national issues and despite severe criticism about their overall effectiveness, CODAE's perception Afro-Ecuadorians as a unified entity has resulted in one major accomplishment. Recently recognized by the United Nations (2011) for its commitment to expose violations of human rights, CODAE's campaign to increase the number of self-identified Afro-Ecuadorians resulted in both an increase in the percentage of people claiming Afro heritage, and a substantial rise to almost 10 in the number of seats held by Afro-Ecuadorians in the national assembly. However, there remain many questions about how the norms, values, and beliefs of the agency's leadership may exacerbate the socio dissensions among Ecuador's culturally diverse Black population.

CODAE's role as community liaison between Ecuador's administration and Afro-Ecuadorians permits them to employ students as interns. 20 plus community activists I interviewed for this article between 2011 and 2013 all claimed to have worked with or for CODAE while they earned advanced degrees at local institutions. Unfortunately, each interviewee in this phase of my research described the commission as ineffective and out of touch with the realities faced by its Afro constituents. I discounted two of the claims after listening to the detail of the testimonies because these were based on personal conflicts. However, when asked directly if the other activists felt the demands of each community organization represents a compromise in locally shaped negative stigma, markers of disgrace about blackness each interviewee agreed this is both a truism and an issue, which CODAE fails to come to terms with in its negotiations with delegates, one activist's response was particularly revealing.

CODAE is like a mask of neo-liberal multiculturalism – and not only CODAE but a lot of institutions in charge of ethnical politics. They are institutions without budgets, without any weight, specific weight inside of the establishment and with scarce opportunity to resolve problems in the sectors they represent. And there's even more, depending on who maintains it, these institutions, in place of generating inclusion, generate polarization in the interior of the society they represent, because they become spaces of power and confrontation" (Anonymous 2009).

The scholarship of De la Torre and Antón add weight to the claims by the above interviewee. They describe CODAE as an organization that does not accurately interpret Afro social and political demands (De la Torre and Antón 2012). CODAE's questionable public persona is at least in part due to a history of administrative

instability and budgetary shortfalls (Medina and Castro 2011). However, I expected the leaders to be aware of the social relationships and cultural dynamics at play in the communities over which they were officially charged to act in the capacity of development counselors. My assumptions were based on my experiences in the U.S. as a young adult in the post civil rights era. I remember the NAACP, church groups, and even various altruistic non-Afro-American organizations and their multi-level interaction at all levels of the community. This network of support was what I unreasonably expected to encounter again over 3,000 miles from my country. My ethnocentric attitude did not reflect the reality of living in a post 1980's Reaganist neoliberalist nation in which the extreme right literally eradicated almost every trace of Black America's uplift movement.

Place, Invisibility, and Unified Identity

The conclusion of this paper will be a synthesis of two interviews I obtained at CODAE. Both testimonies address issues previously introduced in this paper; place, invisibility, and the unified identity Afro-Ecuadorians. The first interviewee at CODAE was – and as of 2015 still is, the agency's legal counsel, Douglas Quintero. Quintero's testimony is a historicized account of personal commitment, the local and global accomplishments of his work, and the universal suffering of members of the Black Diaspora. The first part of the interview Quintero speaks of Esmeraldas and the brave resistance of marooned 15th century slaves and their ancestors to outside infiltration that successfully lasted until the mid-twentieth century. Like my first restaurateur interviewee, Quintero's life stands in stark contrast to the negative stigma in Ecuadorian society about Esmeraldasians:

I was born in the Province of Esmeraldas, but for the past 16 years I lived in the city of Guayaquil where I've made a home for the few possessions I've been able to acquire. I'm a lawyer, I've actively worked and had something to do with the development process of Afro-Ecuadorians – and also, of course, some valuable contributions in the sphere of Afro Diasporian visibility in the Americas and Caribbean (Quintero 2009).

The theme of invisibility as it depicts the social status of Afro-Ecuadorians to which Quintero refers directly relates to the continued presence of structural racism in Ecuador. Ecuadorian scholars who criticize the state's constitutional embrace of multiculturalism, an ideology that merely recognizes cultural diversity, and the most recent adoption in the nation's social contract of interculturalism are both incomplete solutions that fail to resolve persistent racism. Although both ideologies promote cultural tolerance, political scholarship argues that public policies created under the influence of multiculturalism and interculturalism do not prevent *mestizaje*, the colonial caste system, and modern class differences from diminishing the value of blackness in Ecuadorian society (Rahier 2008, Ospina 2009 and Wade 2011). The theoretical evidence supports the need for scholars to pursue analyses of institutional discriminatory practices and racist ideas, through the lens of what I argue is the most basic factor driving continued racism in Ecuador, negative stigma.

Although we did not discuss stereotypes directly, Quintero is very aware these ideas exist and his response to one particular question regarding the individual impact

of negative stigma was the only time he moved forward in his chair --- a gesture that indicated to me he definitely wanted to make the following point perfectly clear.

It's not the same to talk to me, someone who has achieved in some way to break the stereotype and models, speak to José, with John in Guayaquil--- with the common denominator of the people who in most cases don't even have a birth certificate (Quintero 2009).

Quintero's brief comment above clarifies two previously mentioned points. His reference to those without proof of birth and his denial that he cannot even speak to that particular lifestyle or worldview indicates there is a social distance; a hegemonic class structure within the Afro-Ecuadorian community. Gramsci (1926/1967) argues this type of social gap between intellectuals and the people they serve will close very slowly due to the inability of organic intellectuals like Quintero to maintain vital and personal contact in the community. I struggled with Spanish the entire interview and as my time with Quintero concluded, I thanked him for his patience, gathered my audio recorder and notes and prepared to be introduced to his boss, José Chála, Director of CODAE.

The possibility to chat with Chála would be my first encounter with an Afro-Ecuadorian who was born in the high sierra in the Andean valley of El Chota. I was aware that unlike in the scattered and relatively free villages of Esmeraldas, the rigorous surveillance and brutal retaliations for flight attempts of El Chotaean slaves by their owners and the state successfully suppressed slave uprisings until 1778. That year, a group of slaves representing El Chotaean Valley directly requested state intervention to curtail the gross and inhumane practices of highland plantation owners (IFA 1997). Despite the fact that the leadership of the insurrection received harsh punishments, state regulations slowly emerged to protect vital living and working conditions for highland slaves. I was curious to see the way in which Chála reflected or spoke to this history and how he feels this may or may not be related to supposedly glaring cultural differences between El Chota and Esmeraldas.

Chála linguistically traces his roots back to Bantú, the language of Lunda in what is now the Republic of Congo and asserts with pride that this distinguishes him from the "lies they told me in school that my mother country is Spain....we are Afro-Ecuadorians" (Chála 2008). One of the questions I asked Chála specifically addressed the current unity or lack of unity between Afro-Ecuadorians. His response reveals how the state's census category of Afro-Ecuadorian masks and conflates differences between Afro-citizens while simultaneously increasing their invisibility. Regarding the state's ascription by of formerly enslaved and currently marginalized groups by ethnic category; Dawson describes this as an exercise of domination incapable of generating the psychological and social cohesiveness necessary for the designated group to imagine or develop a collective identity (Dawson 2014). I asked Chála if there is a coalition or national movement, some effort now in Ecuador to encourage unity between citizens who self-identify as Afro-Ecuadorians.

Who told you there's no united action? To me it appears to be a myth. Historically they've said this about Negros, before they called us Negros, that we're we're dispersed, separated. They have their perceptions of us, saying we're disorganized. I believe that it's a big lie inside the context of neoliberalism and that then we, I have the

obligation to change that...a historical mandate. Always when you speak of Afro descendants, of Afro-Ecuadorians, for me it's a way to say what we're doing, and that quickly serves as a stimulus to Afro-Ecuadorian men and women of the diaspora. It's the theme that we are a great family of the diaspora; we're the same, with the same fight (Chála 2009).

For Chála and Quintero, the umbrella of Afro ethnic identity is Afro-Ecuadorian. Endorsement of the category of Afro-Ecuadorian for them is a politically wise approach that has the potential to increase the visibility of the nation's Afro citizens by augmenting the ethnic group's official percentage of the population. Also, Chála's call to action empowers the category and extends the meaning to include a global entitlement to space in the Black Diaspora. But, the agency's approach is not without problems. Once again, due to the limitations of space it is not possible to cite and analyze all issues that pertain to this debate. The most glaring and obvious problem is that a rarefication of Afro-Ecuadorian as a civil category assumes there already is a national unity between the nation's Afro citizens. At best, current scholarship in 2015 describes the national unification of Afro-Ecuadorians as a movement of scattered community organizations, each working on primarily local issues in their barrio or sector of a metropolitan area. I will explore the diverse and complex relationships involved in the unification process between Afro-citizens in Ecuador as part of my future research.

Conclusion

This paper explored very particular circumstances and testimonies in order to begin to uncover the roots of social stratification between Afro-Ecuadorians. A very personal methodology style was used in order to convey to the reader the possibility that the way I – an Afro-American female --- interpreted what was being said to me in interviews and the writing that I've converted these experiences into may be influenced by ethnocentric perspectives on my part. This however does not decrease the value of future narratives about unity and the development of Afro-Ecuadorian community organizations written by other members of the Black Diaspora. In fact, the paper is a conversation across the Black Diasporic divides offering proof that a future discourse of this type could provide a very unique perspective that should not be ignored. Negative stigma and stereotypes do have an origin and the ways these socially divisive mechanisms brazenly ignore temporal boundaries directly relates to the formation of community action – the force capable of changing unfair and racist socio-political systems.

Regarding racism as a modern social problem in Ecuador, in a follow-up interview with me in 2013, José Chála argued, "Still, it's the same for the topic of racism, interculturalism [state endorsement of cross-cultural discourse] thinks of throwing it out of here. But, it's here. I believe racism here [in Ecuador] is in good health" (Chála 2013). In order to understand how racism continues to work in Ecuador despite juridical change, its necessary to examine the function of negative stigma; or, the ways differences of language, racial markers, social and racial hierarchies, and persistent negative ideas about blackness impact Afro-Ecuadorian political involvement. The task to give meaning to negative stigma would not be accurate

without first considering the development of stereotypes and racist ideas about Afro-Ecuadorians within Ecuador's political environment.

Almost all the issues discussed in this paper continue to adversely impact not only Afro-Ecuadorians but also all members of the Black Diaspora. Although both Chála and Quintero spoke with great respect about the success of Blacks in North America, they also recognized the fact that racism in the U.S. magnifies cultural and phenotypical difference in order to weaken and separate Afro-Americans. Chála's final remarks that conclude this paper build on E. Franklin Frazier's micro and local critique by placing in dialectic opposition the survival of structural discrimination and the global unification of African descendants: "I've said to Afro descendants, Afro-Americans and Afro-Latinos that here (in Ecuador), I'm doing a critique, a positive critique at a historical moment Afro descendants should go back to thinking, not as individuals ignoring the family, but to the collective and from there understand that's the point from which arise new principles and objectives".

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¹ Simón Pachano's article *Ecuador: El Nuevo sistema político en funcionamiento* (Ecuador: New Political System into Operation [2010] traces Rafael Correa's rise to the presidency of Ecuador and the resulting establishment by Correa of a national new order, or revolution Alianza Paiz. Pachano calls attention to particular shifts in a post-Correa Ecuador and the institutional reconstruction as a national project that brought stability. Marc Becker's *Correa, Indigenous Movements, and the Writing of a New Constitution in Ecuador* (2010) is a detailed examination of the role of Ecuador's indigenous and the pre-2008 election political methodologies of Correa. Correa's anti-corporative policies are examined further by Ospina in his 2010 article Corporativismo, Estado y Revolución Ciudadana El Ecuador de Rafael Correa (Corporativism, the State and Citizen's Revolution) 2011 and all these articles shed light on both the mechanisms employed by Correa and the outcome, a reduction of the political involvement of particular civil organization including women's groups, Afro-Ecuadorians, labor organizations, grass roots community organizations, etc.

² Particular elements of racism in Ecuador and the political and social ramifications to Afro-Ecuadorians are argued to be continuing phenomena in Hall's synthesis of Ospina, Clark & Becker and Johnson in *Afro Inclusion in Ecuador's Citizen's Revolution* (2013).

PALARA

Title: "Affirming the Woman: Georgina Herrera's Response to a History of Violence and Exclusion."

by Lindy Anthony Jones

The principal historical sites of the oppression of woman have been sex/gender and race. In speaking of the sex/gender dynamics that operated in the Caribbean context, Gayle Rubin in "The Traffic in Women" suggests that this system constitutes a "set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity" (159). Here, patriarchy associates unique behavioural attributes to each sex (male and female) with the aim of subjugating the woman. These behavioural or performative attributes denote gender roles. The point of discrimination is therefore not so much gender but sex, as sex/biology acts as the primordial site of distinction, one which automatically relegates one to the side of oppressor (male) or oppressed (female). However, this explanation can only hold true within the context of gender politics and not racial politics, as in the latter colour/race becomes the primary site of representation. Nonetheless, the working definition of sex/gender proposed should not be accepted as a universal meaning of the terms, as their interrelatedness is much more complex. In commenting on various schools of ideas which discuss 'sex' and 'gender', Toril Moi in her book *What is a Woman?* states that "as soon as opposition to biological determinism has been established, it really does not matter whether one writes 'sex', 'gender', or 'sexual difference' (Moi 32). However, she went to great lengths to formulate a checklist of the distinct terms that writers such as Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler, and Donna Haraway use when discussing 'sex' and 'gender'. For the purpose of this paper, the use of gender will encapsulate the meaning inherent in sex (maleness and femaleness). Therefore, when the female gender is discussed, it is aimed at capturing also the essence of the female sex.

The disenfranchisement of the woman on the grounds of gender is a socio-political reality fuelled by phallocentricity. The image of male dominance is said to permeate even the natural world of animals, a point of justification used by patriarchy. Simone de Beauvoir reflects this concept by stating:

Even when she is willing, or provocative, it is unquestionably the male that takes the female – she is taken... for whether by means of special organs or through superior strength, the male seizes her and holds her in place; he performs the copulatory movements. In this penetration her inwardness is violated, she is like an enclosure that is broken into. ... His domination is expressed in the very posture of copulation – in almost all animals the male is on the female. (Beauvoir 54-55).

The oppression of Black women on the basis of sex and race is a historical phenomenon which provides an understanding of how power was negotiated to the detriment of Black women. Tracing the oppression of these women during slavery helps to define their current struggle against the stereotypes of that legacy, and provides a point of departure which women of the Diaspora (North America, Cuba and the rest of the Caribbean) share. History critic, Digna Castañeda, supports this methodology by stating that "In the Caribbean, and therefore in Cuba, it is impossible to evaluate properly the black woman's present position if her slave predecessors are not taken into account" (Castañeda 683). Africa, through slavery, ancestry and various cultural inheritances, acts as a trope which colours the Black woman's

consciousness of herself and her struggles within her unique socio-political context, and informs her strategies of response and retaliation.

During slavery, Black women experienced much oppression from European slavers because of their sex. "Sexism was an integral part of the social and political order white colonizers brought with them from their European homelands, and it was to have a grave impact on the fate of enslaved black women" (hooks 15). These women were viewed by the colonizer as being more depraved and obnoxious than their male counterparts. The Black woman was victimized and brutalized and was not deemed a physical threat to the white phallus. In exercising dominance over the woman, the colonizer sought to break her will, making her more docile for domestic duties, that is, to work in the home with his wife and children. hooks states that the "female slaves were beaten as harshly as the male slaves. Observers of the slave experience claimed that it was common on a plantation to see a black female stripped naked, tied to a stake, and whipped with a hard saw or club" (hooks 23). In looking at slavery in the Spanish Caribbean, Joseph Dorsey also speaks to the cruel treatment of Black women:


Though women did not dominate numerically in the Inter-Antillean traffic of Anglophone slaves, once Britain began strident efforts to free its black subjects, the Spanish bureaucracy proved to be fairly liberal toward certain male slaves, but utterly inflexible toward female slaves and their offspring, regardless of age or sex. (Dorsey 635)

The Black woman in Cuba was also known to suffer various atrocities during slavery: atrocities which she fought fearlessly. One of the most common injustices was the separation of her family despite her effort to keep it together. In speaking to this, Castañeda states:

In accordance with her possibilities, she fought boldly with all the means at her disposal, including legal ones, to protect her relatives; she helped them to obtain their freedom or get it back, and to keep them united. This was a hard and complex struggle, because generally the family nucleus was dispersed, subject to the will of different slaveholders who violated the laws with impunity, almost always with the connivance of the colonial authorities who were supposedly responsible for defending the slaves" (Fido 686).

Female slaves were also abused sexually through episodes of rape, being used as breeders to replenish the slave population, and beaten severely even during pregnancy. They had no right to self-representation as the popular discourse presented them as not-humans, animals, and therefore materials to be possessed; objects of sexual gratification. It is within this context of gender and racial oppression and suppression that Afro-Cuban poet Georgina Herrera's poetic voice emerges as counterpoint in its presentation of female and black affirmativeness and resilience.

Within this socio-historical context of the disenfranchisement and oppression of women, Herrera seeks to provide the woman with a space for the expression of her experiences, personal and vicarious. She seizes this space by using her work to redefine, historically, the biased views of women promoted through the lens of patriarchy and slavery, and thereby re-claim as a female, an integral part of history, thus setting a trend of female presence for the future.



Herrera's poem "Eva", from her collection *Gustadas sensaciones*, provides an ideal launching pad into the history of gender conflicts. By attacking the primordial site of woman's oppression, she demonstrates the concerns of her work to re-position the woman to her rightful place in history. The poem speaks of man and God conspiring to promote the woman as a product of the man's body and therefore the inferior of the genders:

Adán despierta,
la ve preciosa, cree que sueña,
que ha salido de él,
pregunta
a Diós, su cómplice, y ambos
la intuyen poderosa
más que ellos dos. Temen
y ajustan la mentira. (22)

By seeking God for a 'true' understanding of human origins, the poet reveals the patriarchal notion of always conveniently employing the male authoritative God-figure as a means of legitimizing the subordination of females. Realizing this, the woman rejects the man's versioning of history and his assumed superiority, and asserts herself as an independent and distinct being of equal standing to the man:

Rueda la historia
contada por Adán a su manera, dice
que desnuda la extrajo
de su costado, cuando
en verdad, llegó vestida
de cielo, tarde y cantos de mil pájaros. (22-23)

In this poem, the difference between Adam's and Eve's historical versions has set in motion the constant battle of the genders. The female seeks to stem the spread of the male version by contending that the female has the true account of what happened. This perpetuates the debate as to what is truth and the role of gender as a decisive force in truth formation and the versioning of history.

Vuelve a pasar el tiempo,
tanto [...]
Adán respira hondo, hincha
su pecho, extiende
sus brazos
con la seguridad de quien sostiene
al mundo por sí solo, llama a Eva
para que escriba con menudos trazos
una versión novísima de aquel suceso.
Ella entonces, piensa:
"Es hora ya
de que este hombrecito cuente
sus costillas, sepa
que están intactas". (23)

Here Herrera attests to the patriarchal objective to control knowledge and to maintain its superiority through dominating discourse. This is seen through Adam commanding Eve to

write her “versión novísima” of their creation, but “con menudos trazos”. The version she is encouraged to pen is not only new, but more so, meant to be seen as novel / fictitious; and by writing in small lettering, it would not be easily seen, read and therefore not known nor recognized as truth. However, the clincher of the poem is the woman’s utterance wherein she belittles the man (“hombrecito”), and chides him for his ignominy in believing that woman was actually created from one of his ribs, seeing that there is none that is missing from his body: “...cuente / sus costillas, sepa / que están intactas” (23). This poem seeks to dismantle patriarchal superiority by an attack on one of the principal discourses that fuels male dominance and female subordination: the Creation Story in the *Bible*. The use of the diminutive “hombrecito”, does not convey endearment, but the notion of ridicule: the woman ridiculing the nonsense that the man promotes and expects the woman to accept. This strategy of rewriting the account from the woman’s perspective signals the woman’s attempt to establish her independent identity, not as superior or inferior, but as one of equal status and importance to the male. Herrera’s attack on patriarchal discourse conveys a feminist reading of this poem, while the persona’s objective to achieve gender equality, which is integral for gender co-dependence and cooperation, aligns her work with the core concept of African Womanism which promotes the male and female working in concert for the survival of the family and by extent the community.

In “La dama de Nigeria” from the collection *Africa*, which Herrera wrote in recognition of a black mentally ill woman in Old Havana in the seventies who was referred to as la Marquesa, underscores her intention to unearth the memory and experiences of women and especially black women, women who have been disenfranchised or forgotten. There was also a mentally ill man in the town known as El Caballero de Paris who was white and said to be well-educated. Both La Marquesa and El Caballero would walk the town and were well-known. However when both individuals died, a statue of him was erected in the town, but no recognition was given to La Marquesa. Herrera comments:

Y al Caballero de Paris se le hizo hasta una estatua. Hoy en día, las historias del Caballero de Paris son increíblemente cosas ciertas, hasta yo me imagino que le han agregado cosas y ahí está la estatua en La Habana Vieja, cerquita del convento de San Francisco. Ahí está la estatua al Caballero de Paris y cada vez que se habla de andar La Habana. Ahí está El Caballero de Paris y de La Marquesa, no habla nadie. El poema que le hice a la Marquesa, porque como a él le decían El Caballero de Paris, yo a ella le puse La Dama de Nigeria.¹


It is against this background that Herrera dedicates this poem to: “la marquesa, esa personita oscura que al parecer, de no recordarla, nadie sabe que existió, porque oscuro fue también su tiempo en esa ciudad en la que puso un toque de su encanto y su magia” (13). She resurrects this woman from a history that is void of affective identity: ““tienes historia – dice -, aunque sin fecha / de llegada ni partida de bautismo ni de nacimiento””. (Herrera, *Africa* 13). Herrera interrogates the powers that inform politics or control history, claiming that this woman has a history, must have had something for which she lived: “alguna / tuvo que ser tu heroicidad o tu malicia” (Herrera, *Africa* 14). And even though nobody remembers this woman, Herrera affirms that her memory is the objective of her work:

¹ Georgina Herrera, Personal Interview, February 10, 2006.

[...], ya nadie te recuerda.
sin embargo
palabra a palabra
con cuanto amor yo te levanto". (14).

This act of reconstructing the life of this forgotten and seemingly 'unimportant' woman has transmitted the desire for memory or recall of the lives of other women who have been forgotten or whose histories have been misrepresented: "Donde yace, tú y yo / pondremos en juego todos / los ardides de la memoria" (14). Herrera, through poems such as these, seeks out female experiences in history that are revolutionary in their engagement of systems of oppression.

Herrera, in looking to a history of black oppression to inform her present consciousness of self, unearths the struggles of, and violence against, her black ancestors and contemporary blacks outside of Cuba, as a catalyst for her own awakened awareness, resilience and revolt; appropriating their ideology and quest for freedom in her own sense of defiance. As a woman, Herrera therefore writes herself in as the internalisation of the spirit of a line of historical iconic figures who found purpose in the fight against the inhumane treatment and violence against blacks, especially women. Herrera also seeks, through her engagement of the historical space of slavery and oppression, and as a counterpoint to the popular discourse of male liberators and liberations movements led by men, to unearth the valiant efforts of the black woman and re-inscribe her in history as a woman of strength, honour and integrity; a woman of worth and inspiration who earns her space of nobility through her dedication to the liberation of her people from oppression. Her poems therefore focus on history as a space to be redefined and re-appropriated to include the black woman emerging from a space of violence and oppression to become the embodiment of a spirit of community, black pride and a liberated consciousness; a consciousness by which Herrera as an Afro-Cuban female writer becomes infused.

 "Fermina Lucumí" from *Grande es el tiempo* is one of Herrera's poems which underscores the woman's struggle on behalf of her people. Herrera draws on historical data in which she presents Fermina, a black slave woman, who risks her life to free her fellow slaves in what was classified as the Ladder Conspiracy of 1843 in Cuba. Here hundreds of slaves in revolt set fire to cane fields in Matanzas. Fermina was an instrumental figure in every aspect of the slave rebellion. Between 1843 and 1844 thousands of slaves were killed by torture as a reprisal for this rebellion. Through the use of various interrogations, Herrera draws attention to Fermina's astuteness and her heroic warlike vigor:

¿Qué amor puso la astucia en su cerebro,
la furia entre sus manos?
¿Qué recuerdos
traídos desde la tierra en que era libre
como la luz y el trueno
dio la fuerza a su brazo?
la mano de la mujer
hasta decapitar a su enemigo
... volaba más que corría (17)

The warrior image of Fermina ripping off the heads of her enemies and guiding slaves to freedom is similar to that created of Nanny of the Maroons, the somewhat mythical freedom

fighter, and single female heroine of Jamaica. And, like Nanny, who has been often described as being masculine in her behavior, Fermina has been chastised for behaving like a man in her acts of rebellion and defiance of the state. Herrera undscores this when she says "Fermina, dice que por violentar los estatus del reino y el gobierno de Cuba y por portarse como un hombre, ... de querer ser libre y estar al frente de una rebelión, era un problema de hombre ... y por portarse como un hombre fue condenada a muerte y es fusilada."² Therefore, even though Fermina's efforts tend towards the liberation of the enslaved, she was chastised as her actions did not fall within the ambit of appropriate female decorum. A male figure would have been lauded for similar actions. Fermina therefore emerges as a tool which Herrera employs in her defiance of rigid gender roles and the relegation of the female figure to a space which does not incorporate her into an active engagement with social and public acts of defiance, and the representation and liberation of the oppressed. Here, Herrera presents Fermina as a strong African woman, whose praxis is seen as inspired by her African origins with their ideology of struggle and freedom. Her use of violence is presented as an appropriate reaction to the injustices of enslavement and serves to further shock the sensibilities of those who would not easily associate such violent actions with the woman ("la mano de la mujer/ hasta decapitar a su enemigo").

Fermina, therefore, even though not receiving the due recognition as a liberator, emerges as one of Herrera's favourite icons who fought to liberate enslaved people. Herrera speaks to this in a Personal Interview conducted with Herrera in 2006:

Fermina fue la que regó la noticia en todos los barracones y en toda la cercanía porque ella fue la que oyó, su oído fue quién recibió y su lengua quién transmitió, o sea que el papel de Fermina fue tremendo. Cuando otros negros empezaron a rebelarse de los diferentes barracones, de los diferentes ingenios, lo primero que hicieron fue sacar a Fermina del cepo y ella iba al frente de la rebelión. Ella decía quiénes eran los malos y quienes eran los mayores que más golpe daban y decía a ese gordo mantecú cortarle la cabeza.³

In her commentary on Fermina and her contemporaries, Herrera inverts the discursive representation of the African as "slave" to what she perceives as the appropriate diction to describe her black ancestors, which is: "enslaved" by a cruel and oppressive system.

Fermina junto con tres esclavos más, tres esclavizados porque ellos no eran esclavos, a ellos los esclavizaban. Entonces Fermina con tres más fueron hechos prisioneros y fusilados juntos, o sea que Fermina muere de una manera indistinta. No muere masacrada ni nada, ella muere.⁴

This inversion of ideology rescues these ancestral figures from the politics that surround the racist concept of the 'innate' inferiority of blacks (esclavos) and therefore their suitability for governance, control and abuse by a so-called superior race, to locate them as victims (esclavizados), and the oppressors as morally base and the perpetrators of violence. By appropriating the true condition of enslaved to Fermina and recognizing her for acts of defiance, Herrera lends her voice in self-affirmation and the sanctioning of appropriate acts of rebellion. The poem concludes with the poet's silent protest of the powers that govern the

² Georgina Herrera, Personal Interview, February 10, 2006

³ Georgina Herrera, Personal Interview, February 10, 2006

⁴ Georgina Herrera, Personal Interview, February 10, 2006

recording of history; that a woman who has contributed so much to the liberation of a people from a violent regime, and has played a significant role in the freedom of many enslaved blacks, has not received her due recognition among the lauded male icons of slave liberations: "Lástima que no existía una foto de sus ojos./ habrán brillado tanto" (17). Herrera therefore views it as her duty to inscribe Fermina into the discourse of prominent figures who have defied hegemonic governance characterized by violence and oppression in her quest for personal and, more so, communal freedom. Herrera's poem thus becomes a historical documentation of the life of a woman who has been excluded from the formal records of history.

"Canto de amor y respeto para Doña Ana de Souza" from *Granos de sol y luna*, represents another attempt by Herrera to engage the politics of discourse through her rewriting history to discover a space where the woman is respected and recognized for her contribution to the liberation of a people from a violent past. The poem speaks of Queen Nzinga of Angola who employed strategy and defiance in her fight against the Portuguese slave trade in Central Africa in the 17th Century. She converted to Catholicism and changed her name to Ana de Souza (Martin 72). Presented as being born with the noble purpose to liberate the oppressed, ("Al borde mismo de la incendiada tierra/ libre de Ngola vino usted al mundo"), this assertive female character defies patriarchal hegemony and rises to the position of leader. She refuses to be subjected to oppressive male domination. Instead, she subdues and conquers:

... Tantos
años de lucha contra el enemigo
de las pequeñas flores de sus ríos, hacen
de usted una mujer no repetida
...
Vencida a veces, nunca prisionera,
siempre emergiendo
entre sus hombres, sin más armas,
que en los ojos,
prendido como llama furiosa, el deseo
de acorralar al enemigo, junto
al mar tremendo de donde vino. (Herrera 10-11)

Nzinga's life breeches the limits of patriarchal governance and is dedicated to dismantling the systems of oppression evident in her fight for the freedom of slaves and against colonialism:

De la bonita flor que son las manos juntas,
de la brecha
que es esa flor despetalada,
para el enemigo
Usted, establecida entre
los ríos Dondo y Kuanza, haciendo
grande al pueblo, y de los esclavos
del Jesuita Baltasar Barreira
un viento fuerte (11)

Herrera's portrayal of Nzinga's astuteness and tactful manoeuvrings finds congruence with the UNESCO publication *Nzinga Mbandi, Queen of Ndongo and Matamba* which highlights:

Demonstrating extraordinary talent as a strategist, she sent spies regularly to Luanda in order to thwart colonial projects. Their particular mission was to wait for

reinforcements to arrive from Lisbon and to study the training methods used by the conquistadors. Nzinga thus familiarised her army with Portuguese fighting techniques. As she preferred guerrilla tactics, her army attacked at night to catch the enemy unaware. In thirty years of warfare, she evaded all traps to capture her. (47)

However, even though through the eyes of the persona Nzinga possesses the qualities of a warrior queen, she is still not void of her tender, female sensitivity/sensibility depicted through the diction used to represent her: "amor", "bondad", "bonita flor" "madre", "agua limpia". By the use of the titles "Doña" and then "Madre" to refer to this iconic figure, the poetic voice consciously moves from an outside and distance space (the European "Doña") to a closer, more personal or intimate one (the African, "Madre Yinga Mbandi para su pueblo"). This distancing technique, further from being a linguistic exercise, more so denotes an ideological separation between the persona's concept of Europe and Africa: Europe the inhumane, impersonal, the oppressor; and Africa, the personal and personable, the humane oppressed.

The life of Nzinga (also referred to as Yinga) has become a source of inspiration for the poet, who realizes the imposed subjectivity on her as a woman, and therefore seeks to establish a sense of resistance to the various social and political confines on women: 'Yinga, / señora, agua limpia donde quiero / verme reflejada' (12). The attitude of resistance and revolt that Nzinga demonstrated becomes the desire of the poetic voice. She therefore invokes the "agua limpia" which becomes the embodiment of the spirit of Nzinga. It is in this that Herrera internalizes Yinga's experiences to effectively appropriate the concepts of rebellion and leadership in Yinga' to her own life.

Furthermore, even though Yinga/Nzinga was not consciously fighting against gender oppression, but colonial oppression, her being highlighted in this role and being a woman, underscores Herrera's desire to again (as in 'Fermina Lucumi') foreground the historical contribution of women in various liberation movements: a discourse which is flooded with the male presence. She therefore engages her voice in acts of historical recall and affirmation of the past and consciousness formation as well as energizer for the present.

In her affirmation of the female iconic figure, Herrera is also careful to present diverging modes of power deployment among women in positions of influence to reveal her conception of the woman of honour. In the poem 'Conclusiones sobre la Reina Subad' Herrera presents a contrast in influence to that of Nzinga in 'Canto de amor y respeto para Doña Ana de Souza'. Here Herrera tries to unearth the responses of two women in their acts of representation of the oppressed. The life of 'la Reina Subad' of the First Dynasty of Ur (2600 BC) is seen through the persona's pitying gaze, and her death looked upon with much indifference: "Pobrecita Subad, / tan reina, descendiente / orgullosa de los Ur" (13). Even though she is from a line of powerful leaders, her life has not been positively influential, and therefore her death does not evoke much sympathy in her subjects; instead, the materialistic aspects of her crown are elements that capture the scene of her burial:

Junto al fastuoso séquito de damas y lacayos,
apareciendo
a voluntad, entre vapores
de licor, y de ese modo
acompañándote sin lamentos
hasta el refugio último.
[...]

Y en verdad te ves triste, pobre y sola
con tanto lujo y los sesenta y ocho
servidores (hasta una dama
tocando un harpa). Todos
muriendo, para congraciarse
con tu ya inútil poderío (14-15)

Herrera, through the depiction of the two female leaders in the respective poems, has demonstrated women at both extremes of the continuum of influence (positive and negative, strong and weak): Nzinga asserts her way to become leader, a very influential woman and queen who has liberated her people, while la Reina Subad who, even though born queen, does not have the same influence as Nzinga over her subjects and does not receive the same high level of respect. The poems contrast the powers which characterize both women's leadership: Nzinga's which is liberating versus Reina Subad's which is self-indulgent and neglectful of the needs of her people. We therefore see Subad being "triste", "pobre" and "sola" at her death which is very characteristic of her life: a life void of true meaning and purpose. The "conclusión" mentioned in the title does not only attest to the summary of Reina Subad's life, but more so, the finality of her influence, one which does not resonate into the future as an ideal mode of leadership. Her spirit characterized by selfishness and false pride perishes with her, and her life now lingers as an unwelcomed memory, better forgotten by her people. This 'conclusión' is pitted against the celebration and love the poetic voice expresses for Nzinga evident in the title 'Canto de amor y respeto'. Herrera's deployment of these figures underscores the personal responsibility of women to defy patriarchal stereotyping and assert themselves as free agents of positive change and service for others. She also acknowledges the existence of women in all spheres of society and in different historical periods who are passive and self-serving, allowing themselves to be defined and controlled by various systems of suppression and oppression through surrender to passivity or actively embracing imposed female subjectivity. Therefore, while la Reina Subad does not seek to alleviate the conditions of her people, Yinga accepts it as her purpose to dismantle the forces of injustice within her society.

"Retrato oral de la Victoria" Herrera articulates a direct personal link to historical female figures upon whom she proudly focuses her attention. Here she pays respect to her great-grandmother, Victoria, as a prominent woman in history: "Que bisabuela mía esa Victoria. / Cimarroneándose y en bocabajos / pasó la vida" (22). She lauds her for her resilience and her rebellion against the forces of enslavement. In this figure, Herrera locates a source of power and defiance, a sense of passion for freedom, in her great-grandmother's refusal to be contained or boxed in. These qualities explain her great-grandmother's repeated escape attempts from the clutches of enslavement. Herrera concludes with a profound affirmation: "Dicen / que me parezco a ella" (22). This is not just a physical comparison, but more so Herrera's acceptance and internalization of the spirit of rebellion and resistance of her great-grandmother, a similar response employed by her in her treatment of Yinga in 'Canto de amor y respeto para Doña Ana de Souza'. This internalizing strategy employed by the poet may foreground the persona's desire to resist oppression on two fronts: gender and race.

In "Despidiendo el duelo de Rose Parks" from her collection *Africa*, Herrera pays respects to Rosa Parks, an African American, whose simple act of not giving up her seat to a white person on a public passenger bus in 1975 set in motion various acts of black liberation. Rosa Parks is thus presented as the embodiment of resistance and defiance of a certain status-quo which privileged whites over blacks, a status-quo which emerges from the historical context of the enslavement of blacks. The poet opens with what appears to be a plea to Rosa

not to leave as there is great need for her now than ever before, that is, her spirit of subversion and noncompliance is needed now in a time when the current of black oppression and racism undergird public and private apparatuses:

Rose, por favor ...
No haga esto aún más difícil.
¿Cómo dejarla ir precisamente ahora
cuando la necesitamos como nunca?
Las cosas han cambiado sospechosamente,
Ya no tenemos que ceder asiento; por el contrario
nos los ofrecen en medio
de exageradas reverencias. (15)

The issue of appearance versus reality is unveiled as whites now yield their "asientos" to blacks but in an exaggerated display of reverence, hinting at white patronizing of blacks and by extension, their (white) insincerity and the superficiality of racial equality.

The persona reveals the unity of all who recognize the iconic role of Rosa; who applaud and praise her for her simple yet powerful act of defiance: "Nos dedicamos a aplaudirla, a gritar: / "Rose, qué bien, estoy contigo"" (15). The applause is also extended to other figures, "y ellos conectados", whose actions also inspire black liberation. The lament at the outset is then sustained by an urgency in the poetic voice that is now seeking direction and advice from Rosa: "¿Qué puede aconsejarnos?" (15) This invocation of the presence of Rosa to offer counsel for her present situation re-emphasizes the idea that the persona occupies a space where oppression persists.

The persona then unearths what she views as the plight of her and her contemporaries: seemingly diseased ("las tiñosas") and ill-prepared for the looming challenges ("amenaza lluvia"), which when these finally arrive will produce infighting or scuffle among themselves. The representation of blacks lacking a consciousness of self, place and time is captured in the metaphorical depiction of the "tiñosas" scuffling to find shelter from the falling rain:

Rose, me invade
la sensación de vernos como las tiñosas cuando
amenaza lluvia, girando sobre
sí mismas, en busca del árbol que las cobije
porque
si llueve y se mojan, las plumas
van a multiplicar su peso, e irán
estrepitosamente al piso. (16)

The result of such ill-preparedness is embarrassment, inactivity and even death: "e irán / estrepitosamente al piso" (Herrera, Africa 16). It is this realization that signals resolution in the persona's voice: "Y no podemos" (Herrera, Africa 16). For the persona this tragic end is not an option for her: the idea of losing touch with the legacy of those who fought against black oppression such as Rosa Parks, must be resisted. She therefore awaits counsels and directives from Rosa to deal with the present crises that face blacks

Rose [...]
cuando llegue, desde
el sitio en que va a estar, envíe
señales. (16)

"Despidiendo el duelo de Rosa Parks" draws attention to Herrera's custom of locating black oppression outside of Revolutionary Cuba. It may be further argued that this poem may be deemed an act of projection of the challenges of the poet's national space (Cuba) onto foreign grounds (USA). This becomes even more evident as the poetic voice presents herself as a member of a unified group who awaits counsel from Rosa to deal with their current racial challenges. By lauding Rosa Parks' act of resistance, Herrera's poetic voice draws attention to contemporary/continuing issues which require activist defiance.

In "Oriki para las negras viejas de antes" Herrera further positions the woman as central to the transmission of valuable oral traditions. Through the African practice of storytelling, the old black women, like books of wisdom and knowledge, relate to young children valuable lessons and rich traditions they had learned from their ancestors:

ellas eran como libros fabulosos abiertos
en dorados páginas.
Las negras viejas, picos
de misteriosos pájaros,
contando
como en cantos lo que antes
había llegado a sus oídos, (199)

The persona acknowledges that, even though they may not have realized it then when they were little girls, they were being made receptacles of truths that were hidden from them as females: "éramos, sin saberlo, dueñas / de toda la verdad oculta / en lo más profundo de la tierra" (199). The fact that these old ladies saw it necessary to educate these girls about information that was hidden from them suggests that there was a patriarchal agenda at work, against which these women struggled and thereby saw it as necessary to prepare the young girls to continue this fight. However, the persona appears to lament having not listened carefully, assimilated, or valued the lessons she and the other girls were being taught, being more concerned with formal western education ("filosofía") and the modernity implicit in changing times ("otro siglo"). This therefore posing a hindrance to their continuing of this valuable tradition:

Pero nosotras, las que ahora
debíamos ser ellas, fuimos
contestonas,
no supimos oír; teníamos
cursos de filosofía,
no creímos,
habíamos nacido demasiado cerca
de otro siglo. (199)

The persona, now an adult, sees the need for little girls to be taught the hidden truths and traditions proclaimed by their black female ancestors. However, those women who are looked to for guidance have nothing to offer as they had trivialized the words of the wise old women, and spent more time being cheeky instead of learning:

Ahora, en la cocina, el patio,
en cualquier sitio, alguien,
estoy segura, espera

que contemos lo que debimos aprender.
(199-200)

The persona's lament is compounded by the realization of the contribution she and other women of her time have made to the plight of contemporary black women; denying them, through their own negligence, the inherited wisdom and knowledge out of implied African traditions, necessary for their guidance and survival as black women:

Permanecemos silenciosas,
parecemos tristes
cotorras mudas.
No supimos
apoderarnos de la magia de contar
sencillamente
porque nuestros oídos se cerraron,
quedaron tercamente sordos
ante la gracia de oír. (200)

The regretful tone of the persona has been impacted by her coming to consciousness and the awareness of lost opportunities and their current impact on the lives of Black women. The nonchalant behavior of the young girls who would not listen to the valuable teachings, contrasts greatly with the purposeful urgency and concern shown by the old female storytellers. Herrera pays homage to these wise female figures who sought to subvert patriarchal hegemony through the art of story-telling; women who transmit traditions and knowledge valuable to the liberation and survival of the black woman. Herrera posits as her purpose as female poet to validate and bring to the centre these women, along with those iconic female figures discussed earlier, whom she reveres as black women of great valour whose contributions to the black race have been lost in history: "Tengo una deuda que no voy a saldar nunca, pero mientras que este viva mi lucha es reivindicarlas como seres humanos que son, iguales que cualquier otra mujer".⁵

Herrera's poetry, to a large extent, has re-presented the female figure as integral to the liberated consciousness of the woman in a patriarchal society. Herrera established her intention to carve a unique space in which the contribution of the woman in her struggle against violence and oppression is validated. She further seeks to underscore that the true iconic female figure is one whose life is dedicated to the liberation of the oppressed and not one whose life is characterized by indulgence in material possessions. By drawing from the past, Herrera affirms a present consciousness of self that is infused and influenced by her female heritage of resilience and revolt.

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⁵ Georgina Herrera, Personal Interview, February 10, 2006.

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PALARA

Oshun's Daughters: The Search for Womanhood in the Americas

by Vanessa K. Valdés (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2014). 207 pp. \$71.25 (hardcover)

Reviewed by Rhonda M. Collier, Ph.D.

Vanessa K. Valdés' *Oshun's Daughters: The Search for Womanhood in the Americas* (2014) joins an increasing body of dynamic works engaged in reimagining the Americas and the place of Africa within it. Her work enhances groundbreaking work by Dawn Duke (*Literary Passions and Ideological Commitment: Toward a Legacy of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian Women Writers*, Bucknell UP, 2008) and Monique Adele Callahan (*Between the Lines: Literary Transnationalism and African American Poetics*, Oxford UP, 2011), who have also explored the literary production of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian female poets. Valdés, like Callahan, includes the United States in her study finding agency in spiritual traditions available to women in the Cuba, Brazil and the United States. However, Valdés' unique approach considers the orisha "Oshun" as a literary trope for women's empowerment in the Americas. By also including non-Black writers in her study, Valdés acutely examines the role of spirituality in providing alternative representations for women within the African Diasporic religions of the Yoruba tradition. The Yoruba tradition and goddess Oshun become as Valdés notes "...alternative models of womanhood that differ substantially from those found in Western patriarchal culture, namely, that of virgin, asexual wife/mother, and whore (2)." Using spirituality as a prism, Valdés examines poems and novels from the United States, Cuba and Brazil to show intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality roles for women in the Americas. Her study rejects post-modern fragmentation and embraces Toni Morrison's idea of "rootedness." Valdés' work seeks to explain the nature of balance as she questions the idea of "home" throughout various works. She provides representative literary application of the religious epistemologies in Brazil (Candomblé Nagô), Cuba (Regla de Ocha) and USA (Christianity/Yoruba). Valdés thoroughly contextualizes the tenets of the African religions explaining and decoding the orishas in various literary applications. Moreover, she historicizes her work in terms of gains of women in the twentieth and twenty-first century. *Oshun's Daughter* serves as a brief literary history, national history and close reading of canonical texts borrowing from and building on work by many literary scholars.

Chapter one examines the iconic Audre Lorde, who is an ideal center for the chapter entitled "Diasporic Revelation." *Oshun's Daughters* argues that the Yoruba religion is the key to freedom for daughters of the diaspora (46-47). Valdés study offers a juxtaposition of Lorde's poems "When the Saints Go Marching In" and "The House of Yemanjá." Also, in her study of U.S. women, Valdés posits Nuyorican poet Sandra María Esteves and Ntozake Shange. Esteves crosses linguistic and religious borders with bilingual poems that invoke Jesus Christ as well as the entities of the Regla de Ocha. On the other hand, Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo* fits perfectly into Valdés thesis; the characters in her works use the orishas to explore gender identity and sexuality. Valdés' reading of the Shange's novel provides various explorations of orishas and connections to ancestors; Oshun is only one possibility to freedom for oppressed women. While Esteves is a U.S. Latina poet, according to

Valdés, she also represents “the continued vibrancy of the African diaspora living in the Americas” (47). Esteves, like Lorde and Shange, sees Africa as a source of spiritual inspiration.

Chapter two, “The Search for Home,” continues to explore the influence of the African diaspora on U.S. Latina writers, Cristina García and Loida Maritza Pérez. Valdés focuses on the relationship their novels create with mother-daughter characters, homeland and the idea of syncretism with African diasporic religions. Womanhood is achieved through the main characters interactions with African diasporic religions(59). “The authors employ the religion as a metaphor for liberation: they come to understand they carry home within themselves” (59-60). Valdés offers a new reading of García’s now canonical *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992). Each mother-daughter is offered agency through access to the orishas, male and female. Pérez is not a Cuban American writer; however, her novel shows how African religions serve to reconnect daughters to their spiritual mothers. Valdés posits an interesting spiritual paradigm for Pérez’s *Geographies of Home* (1999). This paradigm of self-knowledge is achieved through the resistance to Christian religions with the final acceptance and empowerment of a traditional African religion. *Oshun’s daughter* examines García’s and Pérez’s novels and places them squarely in African religious traditions. Valdés intricate work on literary daughters and granddaughters is invaluable to instruction on womanhood in the Americas as she breakdowns familial, religious and geographical barriers.

Chapter three, “Love, Revolution and Survival,” investigates Cuban writers Nancy Morejón and Daína Chaviano. Valdés deciphers religious codes present in both their poems and novels. Morejón’s poems offer multi-possibilities for Oshun’s daughter and re-readings of black women in the Americas. In Afro-Cuban systems, Oshun does not just represent physical love, but, as the chapter title notes Oshun represents “revolution and survival.” Moreover, Morejón offers Elegua, another orisha, who in “Los Ojos de Elegua” represents the survival of a once forbidden religion in Cuba (94).The study examines multiple orishas using Oshun to deconstruct stereotypes for women making it known that the other roles are available: warrior, soldier, avenger and protestor. In Daína Chaviano’s science fiction novel, *Casa de juegos*, Valdés problematizes racial imagery and depictions of Yoruba traditions as “demonic and tempting” (114). At the same time, Valdés allows for the ability of Chaviano to create sexual free characters, which in itself is an act of revolution.

Chapter four, “Sacrifice and Salvation,” explores contemporary Brazil, women and the Candomblé. Novelist Helena Parente Cunha and Conceição Evaristo employ Oxum (*Oshun*) to access freedom for principal characters. Valdés explains how these authors redefine women’s patriarchal definitions of womanhood (121). In *Mulher No Espelho* (1983), Valdés posits that ‘a mulher,’ the personage in the mirror is actually the orisha Oxum, in which case the novel is one that traces the gradual recognition by the protagonist and the fact that this entity guides her life as a mother, daughter and a wife. This process of recognition is a thread throughout Valdés’ work. Most importantly, the study highlights the liberation available to white protagonists who recognize African traditions. Valdés provides Afro-Brazilian writers Sônia Fátima da Conceição and Conceição Evaristo as contrasts to literary use of African tradition by European writers. Evaristo’s *Ponciá Viva* emerges as coming of age novel that invokes the orisha Oxumarê as the main character returns to her childhood home to find a serpent instead of her family. Examining spiritual codes, Valdés continues her thread

of balance as “sacrifice and salvation” characterize works by Afro-Brazilian female writers.

Oshun's Daughters: The Search for Womanhood in the America troubles the notion of the African experience for women in the Americas. Moreover, Valdés upsets the notion of a purely Christian experience for Africans in the Americas. However, Valdés focuses on African-ness and not blackness, which many scholars may find disconcerting in a work about African religion. While not her focus, a mention of Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1983) might have further explained the necessity of the “Africanist” presence in works by non-black authors. Valdés' study agrees that the African presence is essential to the identity of all people in the USA, Cuba and Brazil. Moreover, she points to the problem of eroticizing Africanness in the works of Chaviano and Cunha. Given the book's aim to highlight the presence of African religions in providing personal, cultural and spiritual agency for diverse women in the Americas, Valdés strikes a balance between reading texts from Judeo-Christian and Yoruba lenses without losing respect for the various traditions within these frameworks. This ground-breaking work is a necessary addition to Latin American and women's studies libraries.

Tuskegee University

PALARA

October Afternoon

by Paulette A. Ramsay (London & Hertfordshire: Hansib Publications, 2012.)

88pp.

Reviewed by Warrick Lattibeaudiere

A female, born a rebel, is made hardened by life's bitter sweet experiences. She abandons the social norms prescribed for her while parading with cynicism as the reader is convinced that there is no turning back for this rebel whose story we are told in the poetic lines of Paulette Ramsay's *October Afternoon*. Although Literature has carefully made a distinction in the genres: prose and poetry, both having rules governing their individual structure/form, Paulette A. Ramsay seems to muddle the waters of identity by weaving the story of her female rebel in the 55 short poems she has penned better known as *October Afternoon*. Her book is divided into two sections: 27 poems under the title, "Agency," and the remainder: "Enjambment." Despite bringing the reader through a poetic excursus, one gets the idea that Ramsay has a story to tell; that of her female rebel. In fact, we are given a hint of this oxymoronic idea of what I call "prosaic poetry" when Ramsay announces that her work is dedicated to her two grandmothers who were not poets but rather storytellers. Such a formidable influence from ancestresses seasoned in the art of storytelling is interesting given the strong poetic backdrop against which she situates her work citing poets of renown such as Pablo Neruda:

"...my poetry was born

Between the hill and river,

It took its voice from the rain,

It steeped itself in the forest like timber..."

By making the aforementioned poignant words of Neruda the first to greet the reader, Ramsay indirectly signals the diverse terrain that will form the base for her poetic lines. As the hill, the river, the rain, the forest and the timber are remarkably different elements, they harmoniously come together to tell a story: the story of Nature, with each element embellishing the other. In a similar way, the diverse thematic considerations of her rhythmic lines coalesce to tell the story of that "fateful" October afternoon.

Ramsay's work reveals poetry to be a derivative of every and anything. Its origin is everywhere and particularly in atypical areas. There is a way in which Ramsay suggests that the poet is a product of her environment. She initially accomplishes this by referencing Cos Causse's as preface to the start of her work:

“the poet searched for words
the page remained blank
pale, like a woman dreaming
now nervous, the poet discovered
that the window of the room was closed”

In the foregoing, the poet suffered a writer's bloc, the cause of which was identified when he remarked that “the window of the room was closed” underlining the importance that nothing must be denied entry to the writer's space. Or rather that the poet is at her best when she is one with her environment / surroundings.

Ramsay's work pushes for a unified whole in her thematic propositions through content and form. Her issues achieve “agency” in the first segment of her collection after which she introduces the literary “enjambment” which she uses to delay the intention in meaning to heighten the expectation of the reader. The poet skilfully blends laughter with sadness, seriousness with frivolity, pain with pleasure, love with hatred, and appreciation with disgust as she shows how these binaries never exist independent of each other. I must say that “Sacrificial Quadruped” exemplifies such conflicting emotions and stands distinguished in showing the hilarious sufferings of the wretched and earth's damned.

The poet becomes the quintessential organising element of nature as she suggests in highlighting Fanon's words “I am my own foundation.” There is a flow of elements intermingling as the force of nature acts both dependently, independently, and interdependently as a veritable melting pot of difference in the same space. It is the poet who plays nature's melodic elements in the order of Hamelin's pied piper who captivated the ears of his listeners through his musical selection and composition. Using Cos Causse and Neruda, Ramsay acknowledges the trendsetting roles of these male poetic geni, then, somewhat turns the table as female poet to take the baton in the shadow of these men going on to claim independence that “she is her own foundation.” As the ordered chaotic nature of Nature intrigues environmental minds, so her treatment of opposing thematic style and content appeals to the literary senses. Through these binaries, Ramsay creates the setting in which her female rebel character of diverse, paradoxical, and even contradictory experiences speak to the fluid dynamics of life which characterise human interaction.

Like Benitez-Rojo who drew on the theoretical postulations of Chaos theory: order in disorder to negotiate the notion of the repeating island, is Ramsay bringing together a host of experiences informed by a diverse Caribbean physical, social, cultural, and economic indicators to converge on the same space which she uses to write the subject of her work and unify its parts. In his work, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and The Post Modern Perspective*, Benitez-Rojo tells us that "within the chaos of differences and repetitions, of combinations and permutations, there are regular dynamics that coexist, and which once broached with an aesthetic experience, lead the performer to recreate a world without violence or --- as Senghor would say to reach the Effective world, the elusive world where all possible rhythms converge" (81). As nature is simultaneously ordered and chaotic, Ramsay's treats with a mosaic of topics and issues which intercept each other for the emergence of the subject.

The repetitive and chaotic but ordered way of life is referenced in the title *October Afternoon*. Instead of the focus being only on a literal day, it is the import of the time and season which is brought to the fore when the title is evoked. It is in the last line of her second poem, "Unanswered Questions", that she employs the term, "October afternoon", prefaced by the word "fateful" which is a clear play on the word. The title, then, aptly aligns us with our environment and casts us in a cyclical nature of life which makes "October afternoon" not only fateful but perpetually faithful. Its fatefulness speaks to that which is ominous, decisive, foreordained, prophetic, even deathly and disastrous: issues that are at the heart of her poetic discourse and responsible for shaping her rebel woman. Ramsay's initial mention of the term, "October afternoon", is within the context of a strong black woman that wedded on that fatefully faithful day. The poet moves away from a reductionist interpretation of the expression *an* October afternoon (14) or *that* October afternoon (12) as a singular point of reference to a title which lacks a definite or indefinite article or a demonstrative adjective: *October Afternoon*. The title, then, references the cyclical, ever revolving nature of life: faithful and at the same time fateful and goes on to use this context to develop the character of her rebel woman.

While "October afternoon" becomes a metonym for gloom and sombre, at the same time, it heralds freedom for a woman who has finally found the strength to liberate herself by "puncturing the bubble she has floated in" from the time she met her husband (10) in "Deciphering Uncommitted," her first poem. The second poem shows that she abandons this "committedness" which she had kept by living the ideal "image that burned brightly in the male's eyes (11)." As she continues in her second poem with "Unanswered Questions", she turns the tables on him transforming her once "callous banana peeling palms" to "hands now soft and smooth", once with "chipped nail polish" to "an unscratched purple nail" one, as she "redefines mother" (11) and cynically remarks that her captor now worries about this change in her. She liberates herself by "abandoning cleaning for writing" (12). This is a never ending path of rebelliousness as her husband can only but question what happened to that woman he married on that October afternoon. She not just tells her experience but engages the one who she has long sought to please by now boldly addressing him as "you" throughout.

The female poet leaves no stones unturned as to where her allegiance lies as a daughter of, although not limited to, Post colonialism and Feminism. The reader cannot help but be alerted to the double referencing of Franz Fanon's work which she employed to encapsulate the two sections of her collection. Ramsay, through a quotation of Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask* and *The Wretched of the Earth* reveals similarly troubling issues that are at the heart of Caribbean political identity. If for a minute one should harbour the slightest inkling that the issue of race and gender should be laid to rest, the poet reveals that they still constitute the basis for political negotiations in the Caribbean context. While making no reference to man in her second poem, "Unanswered Questions," the potent allusion looms that the hands of a feminist are at work in *October Afternoon*. The issues, then, of race and now gender are immortalised by Ramsay at a time when some are seeking to make a rupture with the motherland. Race and gender can never be laid to rest with works like *October Afternoon* and poems such as "(En) gendering blackness" demonstrating how these issues are ever relevant as they inform the dynamics between the sexes and the desire of the "weaker sex" to wrestle herself from the oppressive chains of their husbands.

Ramsay rehashes the notion of the doubly colonised woman, the "strong black woman" who was married a year ago that fateful October afternoon (12). However, instead of being doomed to oppression, she is a free moral agent. She uses this trope to demonstrate how black women suffer not only at the level of race but gender, being doubly colonised at it were. Her poems in many ways than one tell the story of this black woman. However, her reference to such a woman in her second poem constitutes a story with a broader range of experience, to be seen in other poems, spanning childhood days to marriage and resistance to it and also days subsequent to her October afternoon wedding. By aligning *October Afternoon*, the title of the novel, to the strong black woman who was destined for marriage on that day, the author decries the institutional arrangement of marriage and suggests that it is nothing short of slavery and a hindrance for black women. She thus calls for an abandonment of the dictates of marriage. In her article, "A Propos de la Femme dans la société Politique", Madame de Staël remarks that legislation has used marriage to perpetuate the demise of women when she states that it is an "erreur detestable de notre législation qui place en effet la femme dans la dépendance cupide de l'homme (a detestable error of our laws that in fact places women in a greedy dependence on man) (175). Despite Staël's commentary, Ramsay manages to show that women, by reappropriating the power that comes with their "strong blackness", can free themselves of any captivity.

The author uses the words of her poems to tell the story of the travails of innocence of a little girl shaped by the words of her grandmother as she goes through the cyclical periods of never ending October afternoons. She creates a setting which is not only physical but there is an emotional context which carries this little black girl through life's excursus bordered by the rigors of race and gender dynamics. Thus, through her poem she creates a non-linear graph which when plotted tells a story which is seen in her collection not divided but rather unified by two sections marked by diverse experiences. Note for example that the faithful strong black woman of that

fateful October afternoon (12) is the little girl enamoured by her grandmother's "Negro spiritual and tender yellow breadfruit of country life" is the intellectual professional rebel woman of this Mona October afternoon (86).

The liminal and subliminal jabs at men cannot be hidden as the poems overflow with irony and humor in many shapes and form. It's always worthy to note not only what writers include but of equal potency is what they exclude from their work. The grandmother figure is almost deified in Ramsay's collection. There is no mention of a grandfather figure nor the mention of her father. Mention is made rather of her mother, a preserver of her story and not "hi(s)tory" effectively removing any vestiges of male as storyteller. The gunny sack of her "Mother's handbag" with remnants of priceless objects "preserve the secrets of my life, tell my stories between its tattered lining." She, accordingly, privileges the female influence in her life. It was no doubt the strength of some of these women who she drew on to empower her resolve to abandon subservience for writing. Even her last poem highlighting how her inspirational thoughts come and go, her comparison is to a "sly adulterer" and not an adulteress. Even in "Memory of my Childhood Village," the setting is wroth with women thus rendering the men as ghosts: invisible, not worthy of favourable mention. In her poem, "Insomnia", the sleep which snores tempestuously morphs into a witch, the only time in Ramsay's 55 poems where it could be said that a female was shown in a bad light. And yet a closer reading shows that it doesn't appear so either since she asks in the following line (or was it a wizard)? Even insomnia is masculinized "just as sleep pitying me ...under his seductive touch." Readers are simply unable to overlook the strong feminist underpinnings which characterise Ramsay's work.

"Deciphering Uncommitted", "Unanswered Questions", "Rain on an October Thursday Afternoon", "(Un)like Lot's wife", and "The Wait" are the first five poems of Ramsay's collections which either overtly or indirectly allude to the travails of women with a life complicated by the presence of man. "Self-liberation", "Children of the Mountain Woman", "Love Adjourned", "Synonyms", "Mr Feminist", "Troubling Binaries", "Needed: Nine Wives", "The last Poem", "Memories of My Childhood Village", "Mama's Handbag", "Wilful October Rain", "Milk to the World", "Awakening", "Appeal to Pathos", "After Drought", "Discovery", "Inbox/Outbox Incongruence", "Boy with many Toys", "Insomnia", "Blank Verse", "Come back to me", and "Recovery" articulate controversial female experiences which span both sections of her work. Therefore, some 28 of Ramsay's 55 poems traverse the terrain of male/ female politics. Keener poetic eyes could possibly propose a larger figure. Within this feminist foundation, Ramsay situates other issues of national, transnational and international importance.

"Caribbean Global", "A Scrapbook's Revolt", "Denouement", "True Globalisation", "The Interview", "Engendering Blackness", "Modern Trickery", "English Hypocrisy", "European Cup Football", "Eating Words", "What if", "Globalization", "Campus Blackout", and "Agent of Degeneration" confront issues relating to a writing to the centre. In and among these issues of great importance Ramsay intersperses the theme of Death almost unexpectedly in a series of poems:

"Earthquake Aftermath", "Death, Portentous, came into my house", "Mama's Grave", "On the Edge of Hell", and "Morbid Deduction." Clearly, the poems are not divided along rigid lines of demarcation as one poem may be home to a host of many thematic considerations.

Like many Postcolonial writers, the issue of language appears inescapable for one writing from a Caribbean context. The creole space as popularised by Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant underscores the ever burning issue of the dialect as a feature of language. While expressing some of her poems in Standard English, she gives recognition to the Jamaican vernacular. Creole forms or broken language are generally frowned upon / marginalised by many speakers of Standard English. Like Confiant and Chamoiseau who camouflaged their Creolist agenda through a mixture of Creole and standard French is Ramsay who gives status to the Jamaican patois where it functions side by side with English, Spanish, and French words. By interspersing Jamaican Creole in a collection of poems written mainly in Standard English, Ramsay hints at the language complexity in the Caribbean which seems to make the search for a Caribbean dialect or standard language for writing, an elusive phenomenon. The author proposes, on the other hand, writing that embraces and acknowledges the diversity of speech in the Caribbean. Rather than focusing on the division caused by languages, she presents a work having elements of each language coexisting with each other. While providing the English translations for some of her Spanish quotations, she deliberately provides no translation to Pablo Neruda's opening words to her poem, "Rain on an October Thursday Afternoon." In "Jordan Crossing", "Denouement", and "Postmodern Guerra" we see similar issues of language arising.

Ramsay masterfully capsulizes the Caribbean Creole experience through poems of varying length: those which are short and potent and others which are lengthy yet hilariously captivating. Her shortest poem, "Denouement", is as potent as the lengthiest, "Monologue of a Papine Market Vendor." Her refusal of "thingification" in the former speaks to the poet's rejections of the colonial master's essentialism of blacks as mere objects. She contrasts this with "smadification" (the positively continuous developmental process of being somebody) which like "thingification" is a process. However, both take on meaning through time and spatial experience. But the two words to the literary mind easily evokes "signification" popularly used by French intellectual mind and deconstructionist, Jacques Derrida, to refer to meaning being on a never ending path of deferral. What is interesting is how Ramsay uses her poem in the vernacular to tell the story of the Caribbean people. This is masterful, since she does it through the eyes of a woman in a context least expected: a market. Accordingly, her penultimate poem, "Monologue of a Papine Vendor", shows the harmonious tension which exists between the different languages and customs of the islands which make up the Caribbean shown by the different layers of a variety of provisions she offers. The layered assortment of food form "a pattaan" (a pattern) with "di chocho", "sapodilla," and "christophine" representing specific words of different language origin of the people from "dose likkle likkle islands." Ramsay dexterously uses a market as a microcosm reflective of the macrocosmic Caribbean space where the issue of language

is ever current and relevant. The Caribbean people seem to appreciate their individual diversity which makes them into who they are: "Mi customas love di pattern"

Ramsay approaches a wide range of complex themes addressed through her poetic lines which resonate strongly with readers of the Caribbean whose space she shares. The idea of the intellectual rebel reverberates through her work as she calls for "banana stained hands" to identify the power of their palms to pen liberatory words. Her work appeals not only to Caribbean eyes but grabs the attention of all those oppress women and shout a warning at them that they should beware. The ever present influence of the colonial master still lingers menacingly in the form of oppressive males and husbands and one must treat with the resulting ever present tension created between colonizer and colonised. The context becomes very complex for black women who because of gender have to doubly negotiate colonisation and the troubling issue of language. In and among these poetic lines the story of a young girl is written, married one October Afternoon, goes on through life's sojourn becoming a rebel as an intellectual reminiscing on life's contradictory experiences. Ramsay through the story of her poetry challenges intellectual writers for a greater use of their poetic license when she asks that the borders of divide between literary genres not be defined by rigidity since they can serve to rather complement each other and open another portal for women in subservience to "bruk out" (break free).

University of the West Indies - Mona

PALARA

Black Legacies: Race and the European Middle Age

by Lynn T. Ramey (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2014.) 176pp.

Reviewed by Elizabeth J. West

Periodization is perhaps a necessary and effective practice for cataloging and organizing thousands of years of human history; however, Lynn T. Ramey's *Black Legacies: Race and the European Middle Ages* points squarely at the shortcomings of such a static approach to viewing the historical and ideological development of race. Ramey forgoes the too often scholarly impulse to privilege periodization as method even when cultural and ideological transmittances reveal the shortfall of casting a fixed lens on a history that spills over and across times. A French Medievalist, Ramey stretches her scholarly reach to US culture--early and modern, making the convincing case for a more fluid interpretation of the history of race in the so-called new world and modern era. In this well written, clearly argued study Ramey shows the centrality of European Medieval notions of race to the formulation of race ideologies in the post-Columbus Americas.

Ramey clarifies the focus and organization of *Black Legacies* in the succinct introduction to the work, and she begins by calling into question the commonly espoused argument that race is a construct of the modern era. Examining George Fredrickson's *Racism: A Short History* (2003) and Christian Delacampagne's *L'invention du racisme* (1983), Ramey calls our attention to a body of scholarship on the history of racism that falls short in examining racism in Medieval Europe. In this regard, there are a number of works that Ramey does not note¹: for example, Thomas F Gossett's 1963 publication, *Race: The History of an Idea*, though primarily a study of race in the US, briefly looks back to antiquity and the Middle Ages. Gossett concludes his quick survey in chapter 1 with the very assertion that Ramey's *Black Legacies* will dispel, that is that "Race theory . . . had up until fairly modern times no firm hold on European thought" (16).

The six body chapters and the conclusion of *Black Legacies* will make the case that Ramey asserts in the introduction, that is that "many elements of the key discourses [of the modern era] on race were already present in the Middle Ages" (2) and that it would serve medievalists and modernists to "recognize variations rather than assuming a violent rupture between medieval and modern life and culture" (3).

Of all places in this study of race in the European Medieval period, Ramey begins in nineteenth-century America. This chapter, entitled "Remaking the Middle Ages," examines the origins of Medieval Studies in the United States and Europe. This is a well calculated beginning as readers are reminded that the Middle Ages is an era constructed centuries after the lived period: those populations living during this expanse of centuries did not envision their milieu as a fallout of Rome's demise, or as an interlude to a new era of grand civilization. Although Americanists know Washington Irving best for *The Sketch Book*, his 1820 collection that included his two most well known tales, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and "Rip Van Winkle," Ramey draws

attention to Irving's interests in, travels to, and publications on Spain. She focuses on Irving's writings about the history of Spain, awarding particular attention to *The Alhambra*, his 1832 fictional story.

Ramey takes us to Irving's fictional construction of specific moments, characters and developments in the history of Spain from the medieval period. She shows how Irving's rearward gaze upon this earlier period is informed by his nineteenth-century sensibilities of nation and race. For example, Ramey argues that Irving's distinction between black and white Muslims in Medieval Spain and his assertion that Spain's historical demise stems from the infusion of black Muslim blood into Spain's culture and population, is a view that not only reveals the immediacy of race anxiety in the 19th century western imagination but also how that anxiety is informed in part by certain racial constructs and dynamics from the earlier era. Ramey explains that "Irving's work was shaped by the obsession with ethnic purity and search for national origins that formed part of the intellectual climate of early to mid-nineteenth century (9)," and that "As one of America's first medievalists, Irving participated in the formation of an American medieval studies field that from its inception was deeply concerned with race (16).

Examining the work of French architect, Eugene-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, Ramey looks at the European parallel to America's emerging 19th century field of medieval studies. As with Irving, Viollet-le-Duc traces a history of civilization that ties superior human achievement and civilization to those who descend from European/white ancestors, and he identifies blacks as the accursed race that descended from an inferior ancestor (23). In both her examination of Irving and Viollet-le-Duc's work, Ramey (as she does in the succeeding chapters) includes illustrations that add useful dimension to evidence in written texts. In chapter two "Medieval Race?" Ramey examines Medieval Europe's articulation of racial difference signaled in black and white bodies, and she shows how the matter of gender informed these racial concepts and boundaries. While she acknowledges that there is no "univocal discourse of race" (28) in the medieval period, Ramey convincingly shows that "the concept of race difference began in the infancy of European civilization," and that "scientific racism was the inevitable outcome of the centuries of thought that preceded it" (37).

It is in the two middle chapters that Ramey's use of illustrations in juxtaposition with texts and concepts is especially effective. Chapter 3, "Biblical Race," seems by its focus, a bit out of sequence, but fits neatly into the critical focus of *Black Legacies*. Of particular usefulness in conceptualizing race development in the Middle Ages is Ramey's historical outlining of the biblical translations and revisions that racialized biblical stories and people along a black/white dichotomy that served the white subject's view of the black other. Through the biblical stories of Ham, Sheba, and Solomon, Ramey illustrates how the evolution of these narratives reveals the evolution of blackness in the European imagination and the development of race discourse in the west. In chapter 4, "Medieval Miscegenation and the Literary Imagination," she examines Medieval literary representations of miscegenation from the perspective of three prevalent ideas of reproduction during this era. She shows how concepts of racialized blackness as the equivalence of human inferiority were revealed in Medieval European literary works. The consequences of race mixing in the Medieval imagination were connected to gender and rights of inheritance, just as in later new world interpretations, and Ramey does not fail to consider these intersections.

The work ends with chapter six, "Conclusions: Medieval Race and the 'Golden Age,'" but this chapter works in conjunction with chapter 5, "Mapping the Monstrous: Humanity in the Age of Discovery," to trace the development of race in European/western discourse that extends from the Middle Ages well into 21st century constructions. Chapter 5 shows the import of the first century Roman sea captain Pliny and his *Natural History*, a work that cataloged monster races that resided beyond the boundaries of humanity. In later European travel and literary writings, these monsters would become the dark others that resided beyond civilization. The final chapter returns to the focus of chapter 2, that is, interpretations of the Middle Ages post-period. However, Ramey's nineteenth-century look in chapter 2 shifts to a 20-21st century lens where she examines representations of the Middle Ages in film and visual media --with emphasis on productions in the US and France. She compares films such as *Black Knight* (2000), *Robin Hood* (1991), and *La Chanson de Roland* (1970s) to their Medieval textual sources, exploring what the differences tell us about present day engagement with questions of race in the Middle Ages. Although the chapter does not include illustrations, it left this reader with the desire to return to the middle chapters to compare some of the Medieval illustrations of ancient racialized characters with visual representations of those characters in modern art as well as cinema. This desire is a reminder, though, that Ramey's *Black Legacies* has made a significant contribution to interdisciplinary as well as cross-periodization studies, but that this work is a call for much more research in the area of racialized blackness in the western imagination.

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ⁱ Annette Ivory Dunzo's *Africa in Spain and Latin America* (1986) is a study that more closely examines European (in this case Spain as the study focus) Medieval attitudes about blacks, but scholarship addressing this milieu and its connection to modern day racism is scant. Works such as F James Davis's *Who Is Black: One Nation's Definition* (1991), Werner Sollors's *Neither Black Nor White, But Both* (1997), Sylvia Wynter's "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom" (2003), and Michael Gomez's *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* (2005) to some degree look back to antiquity to explore how race emerged as a concept from antiquity to the modern period. Though these works look at race in the ancient world, most give only cursory attention--if any at all--to the Middle Ages. These works exemplify again, Ramey's point in *Black Legacies*, that in studies of race in the European imagination there is a longstanding practice of leaping from antiquity to the age of discovery (or even later).

PALARA

Palenque de San Basilio hoy: Entrevista con Víctor Simarra

by John Maddox

El 16 de abril de 2012, el presidente estadounidense Barack Obama estuvo presente con el presidente colombiano Juan Manuel Santos en reconocimiento del otorgamiento oficial del título colectivo al pueblo afrodescendiente del Palenque de San Basilio.¹ El líder norteamericano, uno de los afrodescendientes más influyentes en la historia, afirmó que este logro es un ejemplo de que el progreso es posible en ambos países. Este progreso ha llevado muchos años para llegar a su plenitud. La lucha empezó entre los siglos XVII y XVIII (Schwengler 107). Según creencias que comenzaron a finales del siglo XX, africanos esclavizados se independizaron en 1603 de la esclavitud y el colonialismo y quedaron aislados del resto del país hasta ser “descubiertos” en los años 1960, en parte por la construcción de carreteras que proveyeron acceso a esta región rural (Schwengler 115–16). La falta de documentación exacta de su fundación otorga una importancia especial a la memoria colectiva y oral de esta sociedad. Como profesor de letras afro-hispánicas, fue un honor conocer a un protector de estas tradiciones orales, el palenquero Víctor Simarra [Figura 1]. Simarra ha colaborado con profesores de Colombia, Francia y Estados Unidos en proyectos de investigación tales como *Palenque* (2012) de Graciela Maglia y Armin Schwegler y *A History of Afro-Hispanic Language* (2005) de John Lipski. Conocí a Víctor en el congreso *Negritud* en la Universidad de Cartagena en marzo de 2014. Le dije que quería conocer su pueblo, ya que había leído sobre él en la novela *Changó el gran putas* (1983) de Manuel Zapata Olivella. Víctor no sólo me contó muchas historias sobre el palenque y su historia sino también facilitó un viaje para un grupo de la conferencia *Negritud*. Conocimos el llamado Primer Pueblo Libre de América, el que la UNESCO declaró Patrimonio Oral e Inmaterial de la Humanidad en el 2005. Se llama así porque comenzó como una comunidad de cimarrones y sigue hablando la lengua criolla más desarrollada con base léxica española. Lo que sigue es una conversación sobre mi experiencia en Palenque y, más importantemente, las vivencias de Víctor y su comunidad.

John Maddox: Víctor, me dijiste que no eras guía turístico, pero llevas a personas a conocer Palenque. ¿Cuál es la diferencia entre el turismo tradicional y lo que haces tú?

Víctor Simarra: Bueno, la diferencia es que los que son guías turísticos mantienen cuotas. Piden para llevar a las personas por diaria. La diferencia es que lo que yo hago es no llevarte sólo a conocer Palenque. Hay mucho que ver, pero hay mucho que aportar, o sea llevar mis aportes para que las personas absorben. Si viene una persona que trabaja lingüística, que historiador, que antropólogo que sociólogo, en su efecto lo que hago es hablar con las personas sobre la gastronomía palenquera, eso es lo que quiero enseñar. O sea, llevar solamente personas a oír música, llevarlas al arroyo, aquí está el becerro, aquí están cien personas, y estas son las personas a hablar del folclor, quiero hablarte de cosas en general de la comunidad con visión que tú escribes algo.

JM: Nos llevaste a tu casa y tu familia nos preparó una comida deliciosa. ¿Puedes contarnos un poco más sobre María de Reyes y la mujer que preparó la comida?

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3lkhdIIUOI>

VS: María Reyes es mi mamá. Nació en 1922. La señora que me ayudó a preparar la comida es Luz María y es mi señora. Nació en el 1958. Los llevó Víctor Simarra y lleva 52 y es hijo de María Reyes. Esas son las categorizaciones que yo tengo en el afecto que tengo. No quiero que me llamen “guía turístico” porque figúrate en este momento y en el momento en el que fuiste a Palenque, en este momento entre cientos de libros que ha escrito este libro de recetas es Víctor Simarra. Pasaron 302 años para que se diera eso. Entonces, esos son los efectos que yo quiero llevar. Por lo menos cuando yo conocí a la primera persona que vino de los Estados Unidos para hacer investigaciones en Palenque, hacer estudios serios como dicen, eso fue ya en el 1985. Para mí, el etnooturismo, americanismo, palenquerismo asociativo, eso tiene mucho más efecto. Yo te conocí en esa universidad, me presentaste y me dijiste a qué venías y es una cosa que uno tiene que sentirlo, vivirlo porque entonces, porque tengo un poder energético que me aproxima a estar con alguien, pues entonces llevarte a gozar a entender lo que quieres saber.

JM: Gracias. ¿Puedes explicar qué continuación existe hoy de la arquitectura tradicional del palenque? Me fijé en los techos y las verjas. Sigo con la imagen de tu casa en mi cabeza.

VS: El proceso de la arquitectura de hoy: bueno, bienvenido todo lo que se está dando en la modernidad, pero el legado que dejaron mis abuelos, para mí ha sido tan importante porque en Palenque sigue los efectos de ese legado, de esa tradición. Hoy en día estamos colaborando con Francia, con Berlin, pero todavía no se ha sabido o sea a las personas de la comunidad que hay que hacer la casa de las palmas vargas que nosotros llamamos, son unas hojas y con esas hojas hacemos una casa cuando están frescas, porque figúrate te pudiste dar cuenta de que Palenque es una comunidad que tiene la temperatura entre 25 y hasta 35 y hasta 40 grados. En esta altura, mujeres como mi mamá y hombres como mi papá en su momento han entendido, usando la terminología de ellos que han dicho que la modernidad o las casas modernas no han sido tan buenas. Yo cuando niño nunca vi un abanico, nunca vi nada eléctrico hasta mis primeros 17 o 18 años. Ni una licuadora, ni un radio eléctrico o un radio de pila, todo se hacía natural. Por ejemplo, una ciudad que tiene 17 o 14 grados centígrados. Yo anoche estuve en Cartagena. Se fue la luz. Todo el mundo en la calle. Yo siento bien el efecto de pueblo todavía en la naturalidad. Lo que pasa hoy es que se ha dañado el ecosistema, o sea el medio ambiente, el hombre lo tiene totalmente trastornado. Por eso creo en las palabras de los abuelos. Los indígenas hablan de la Madre Tierra. El efecto es que entre todos estamos recalentando el planeta. El efecto ese está por todos lados. Los cambios—hoy en día estamos haciendo casas sintéticas, estamos haciendo casas ya prefabricadas. Todas las casas que están en pie en Palenque las hicieron con lodo, las cáscaras de arroz, la piel de la vaca y hoy en día todo vamos sacando el adobe. Y ese adobe que se hace se le pone pintura. Y ese adobe cuando lo pintan hace el efecto [Figura 6]. Esas casas con las paredes naturales y los pisos naturales son mejores.

JM: Esta relación entre el hombre y la naturaleza es de gran interés para la eco-crítica y otras áreas de estudio. También, nos llevaste a un centro cultural que se llama “Casa del Saber Palenquero” [Figura 2]. En el centro, vimos bailes, oímos la historia oral, y tuvimos una introducción a la lengua palenquera. ¿Cómo y por qué fue fundado el centro?

VS: Bueno, esa “Casa del Saber” figúrate en que Palenque han pasado cosas que hoy parece ser que son muy curiosas pero dentro de todo ese proceso yo les digo a los más estudiosos de las universidades del mundo, el proceso de la naturalidad que tiene la literatura oral, eso de la oralidad es lo que prima entre los hombres y las mujeres del planeta. Hablamos de la universidad y los científicos. Los que nosotros llamamos “científicos” en las ramas en la vocación yo diría energética de abuelos de no sé quién y

eso nace porque todos somos y hemos sido a la hora de lengua palenquera nada más o bailadores pero hay un núcleo de personas que tienen que dedicarse a ciertas cosas. El médico, eso nace como quien dice “cada quien con su ánimo”. Conque la casa de saber se da por eso. Mira, a nosotros en la comunidad desde 1603 en el palenque segundo en Colombia se ha negado a nosotros de todo. ¿Por qué nos han negado de todo? Primero, que en la trata negrera llegamos a Cartagena. O nos traen hasta Cartagena. Y cuando mis Ancestros fueron llevados hasta Cartagena, aquí en Cartagena, ¿que pasa? Es que las mujeres empiezan a formar parte del cimarronaje. Esas mujeres con sus peinados y los hombres que estaban en ese momento laborando y como dicen haciendo las murallas [de Cartagena], pero había mucha necesidad laboral, esos peinados estaba el papel que decía cómo llegar al Palenque [véase Mojica Patiño]. Así el más sabio, el más desarrollado, como dicen, Benkos Biojo, tomó la ruta para irse a Palenque. Obviamente hicieron muchos palenques, pero lo que acabó reinando fue el Palenque San Basilio. Fue uno de los últimos que quedaron en esta zona. Y este hombre y todos que pasaron por allí – mis abuelos, los abuelos de los abuelos hasta los abuelos de ahorita, resulta que hasta todavía en 1954 sale casi, en tres siglos, sale el primer profesional de Palenque, que se llamó Arturo Hernández. Es el primer profesional que sale. Todavía a nosotros se nos está negando la educación. Qué pasa con Arturo Hernández que tuvo que venir a Cartagena a rimarse o una familia a absorberlo, posiblemente blanca o mestiza, y lo absorbieron y se lo traen a su casa. Allí se quedaron casi todos los palenqueros desde el 54 hasta la época de los 70 que vienen a reaccionar. Parece ser que en los 70 sacamos 3 o 4 profesionales más. Se muere ya en la década de los ochenta. Luego entra una institución educativa para secundaria y de allí para acá. En este momento, Palenque, que es un pueblo pequeño, de 5 mil habitantes, tiene más profesionales que muchos municipios. Palenque es un poblamiento pequeño y tiene más profesionales que una gran ciudad. No es porque los etnólogos vinieron sino porque nos dimos cuenta de que el poder está en el conocimiento. Por eso viene el nombre de la “Casa del Saber” porque unos palenqueros que lograron irse a Cartagena y vinieron llevando todo lo que tiene que ver con la ciencia, como dicen, profesionalizada o intelectual. Lleva ese nombre. Por lo menos yo jamás habría puesto el nombre de “la Casa del Saber” sino una “Casa para Todos”, una “Casa de Lengua”. Y allí entonces se está promocionando que todos los eventos que se puede realizar que pueden dar esos eventos en esa casa. Yo le decía la profesora Nina Friedemann y a otros estudiosos uno de los papeles más grandes que jugamos es peinado, vestido, música. El tema más fundamental para nosotros ha sido los nombres. Porque los nombres y apellidos que tenemos hoy en los palenques son de origen italiano y español, pero los nombres que reinan en Palenque el 99% de los nombres anteriormente casi sólo eran palenqueros y africanos. Figúrate en Palenque consigues apellidos africanos pero de pronto consigues apellidos como Víctor Simarra Reyes.² Como dicen en palenquero, “yo vi” es “yo vido” en la lengua palenquera. Pero entonces a mi mamá le decía “maíña”. Figúrate eso que salvaron para hoy es como estamos. Porque si no, no hubiese sido así. Allí estábamos totalmente renegados y figúrate en algunas cosas que yo he hablado con Yves Moñino es que el papel más grande que jugaron los portugueses y los españoles en la trata negrera fue cuando empezaron a hacer su negocio. No fue esclavitud por esclavitud. Eso fue un negocio. Participaron negros y blancos y todos. Pero lo bueno que hicieron los españoles y los portugueses es que nos rescataron de la división. Porque en África tengo entendido que hablaban 6.600 lenguas. Nos dieron una sola lengua cuando nos trajeron hasta acá. Nunca, porque el lenguaje prima a que tú puedas interactuar. Si yo estoy en Estados Unidos yo voy a Miami, a California, me puedo

² Estos apellidos son recientes, no son originales de África.

comunicar con casi todo el mundo por los latinos. En otros lugares sería más dificultoso.

JM: La lengua es fundamental. ¿“La Casa del Saber” sirve de escuela también? Además de tradiciones, lengua y bailes, los que son importantes para el pueblo y su presentación al exterior, ¿qué más estudian los niños? ¿hasta qué edad estudian en el centro y en la escuela?

VS: En Palenque hay hasta la primaria. O sea, terminan preescolar, primaria y secundaria. Y ahora tenemos en caso que en diez años hay una corporación que se llama el “SENA” y hay otras entidades que van a llevar maestros a suministrar cursos porque ya tenemos la gana de que participen. Un 90% de la comunidad está entrando en proceso de prepararse. Cuando yo era niño, no había interés de que los niños se prepararan a nivel intelectual sino a nivel de campo porque se mostraba el poder potencial que uno se estaba preparando para providenciar y administrar su cosecha, su finca. Las señoras se preparaban para ir al mercado. Nosotros podemos hablar de un mercado muy desconocido todavía [Figura 4]. Por lo menos en este momento flotan una cantidad de mujeres palenqueras que pasan a formar parte de casi todos los países latinoamericanos, casi todo el país o sea 32 departamentos. Se van a Cartagena a trabajar. Por lo menos en los años 20 todavía nosotros aquí en Colombia se sabía muy poco de nosotros pero era poco lo que aportábamos fuera de la comunidad, o sea cuando hicieron el Canal de Panamá algunos palenqueros se fueron a Panamá unos compañeros de Palenque y algunas familias se quedaron allá. En los años 20 hicieron lo que fue la llamada Zona Bananera que queda unos ciento y pico kilómetros de Palenque y se fueron muchos, y a Venezuela que queda unos trescientos cuatrocientos kilómetros de Maracaibo. Y nos fuimos poco a poco. Eso es lo que hacíamos. También regresábamos a Cartagena o a Barranquilla. El primer barco fue en 1910. Por lo menos hoy tenemos, figúrate, hasta hace 25 no era posible estudiar la lengua (palenquera) porque se reían de nosotros cuando salíamos fuera del pueblo. Nos decían que no sabíamos hablar y esa vaina nos hizo retardar poco nuestras habilidades lingüísticas. En este momento ya nosotros nos dimos cuenta de que hablando dos lenguas uno vale por dos. Uno tiene más posibilidades. En esos momentos nos decían que no sabíamos hablar. Era muy doloroso y la gente se estaba quedando retardada. Pero ya parece ser que hicieron un nuevo centro de la lengua palenquera donde uno puede estudiar la lengua. Declararon un artículo en la ley en Colombia en la Constitución del 91 [Artículo 13] que nos dio un arrabal, aunque no lo siento muy pleno, habla de los derechos de los afro, habla de los derechos de las comunidades negras, hablar de la educación. Han venido cosas muy importantes que se están haciendo en todo el país y en América, no sólo en Palenque.

JM: El lingüista Yves Moñino ha dicho que la lengua palenquera es una mezcla de un solo idioma, el kikongo (el que se habla en Angola), con el español y unas cuantas palabras de portugués. ¿Hay algunas palabras o frases que te interesaría enseñar a nuestro público?

VS: Claro. La gracia es eso. Hablar de Palenque es hablar de la lengua. ¿Qué quieres decir? Dime.

JM: ¿Cómo se dice “hola”?

VS: “Hola” es “hola”. ¡Los gringos también dicen “hola”! Pero “hoy” es “abué”, “aána” que es “mañana”, “asina” es “así”, “cumé” es “comer”, “cumina” es “comida”, “colé” es “correr”, “aló” es “arroz”, “gaína” es “gallina”, “mamó” es “mamón”, “limó” es “limón”, “blanda” es “blanca”, “mboca” es “boca”. “Yovíctor” es “Víctor”, “Yokako” es “José”.

JM: ¿Cómo se dice “quiero aprender la lengua palenquera”?

VS: Como usted es profesor y enseña lengua y soy estudiante digo “piacha lo que anda

enseña etulé” dice el profesor que enseña al estudiante. O si quiero decir “mi afecto profesor”, digo “piache” si es hombre, o si es mujer “piacha”. Si el estudiante es “etulé” es equivalente a “yo soy”. Al doctor le digo “makio”, que es médico para mi cerdo, y mi cerdo, que ahora se me está volando, a él, al cerdo le digo “yangurí”. Y la vaca es “ngombe”.

JM: Soy consciente de que los espectáculos de baile son una presentación especial para los que vienen de afuera. ¿Los niños y adolescentes bailan y cantan la misma música entre sí? ¿Es algo que siguen practicando hasta la mayoría de edad?

VS: En Palenque, la música es la expresión de la comunidad. Para nosotros, la música no es sólo el baile, sino la música está con nosotros hasta el último día de la muerte. O sea, es el presente y el pasado, el pasado, el futuro y el presente. O sea, para nosotros la música está en todo momento. No se sale en ningún momento. O sea si se muere una persona o si nace una persona se pone música. La música es muy importante para nosotros.

JM: “El baile del pavo y la pava” parece, para muchos que vienen de afuera, muy sexual, sobre todo porque se aprende desde muy niño [Figura 3]. Entiendo que es de origen bantú, un grupo de culturas que no tienen los mismos tabúes que existen en otras culturas.

VS: Claro.

JM: También entiendo, según la interpretación de la profesora Maglia, que es una “manifestación vertebral” de la cultura palenquera [181]. ¿Puedes explicarnos por qué?

VS: Los bailes o los tipos de danza que se aplican en cada una de las sesiones posiblemente que te puede presentar un grupo folklórico, “la pava y el pavo”, el noventa por ciento lo hace chicas y chicos muy jóvenes como tienen ese atrayente muy sexual. Entonces a medida que uno va explicándole y están haciendo los movimientos puede parecer muy duro. Pero esto es una expresión de lo que es cómo se podían aprender desde el momento de esclavitud la sexualidad que aplican las mujeres en las danzas. Eso es la habilidad de poder, como dicen, atraer un varón, como los peinados como te digo, son muy importantes. Y la sexualidad—¿quién no se atrae cuando una mujer baila o un hombre y una mujer están bailando una cumbia? Eso es lo que atrae. O sea cuando una persona bien baila ¿no? Si no tiene ritmo, no tiene swing, está fuera de lo que está siguiendo y cuando lo hacen bien los chicos quieren demostrarlo. Por eso los africanos cuando bailan los hombres y las mujeres muestran esa sexualidad corporal y todo es sabrosura.

JM: Claro, forma parte de muchísimos bailes. El monumento de Benkos Biojó es el símbolo más icónico de San Basilio [Figura 5].³ ¿Qué representa para ti y para los palenqueros Biojó? ¿Cuál es su legado hoy?

VS: Por lo menos para mí, quien descubre un país o un pueblo sigue siendo su figura. Para nosotros Benkos es un campeón. Es fundamental para los negros en América. Al fundar el primer pueblo libre de América Benkos mostró un liderazgo valiosísimo. Todo lo que está sucediendo hoy en Latinoamérica, todo lo que está sucediendo con la democracia, con el presidente Barak Obama en Estados Unidos es un legado de él. Sí se puede. Cada uno de nosotros tiene el poder de implementar una meta. O sea, Benkos fue un pensador y por eso hoy Benkos hace para nosotros hoy como palenqueros un futuro. Colombia tiene hoy 50 millones de habitantes. El campeón de boxeo Antonio Cervantes Reyes es un legado de él. Este pueblo mantiene 300 años de lucha, con una lengua, con un ritmo como tiene Palenque, más de 300 años como lo ha hecho Benkos

³ Schwengler ha mostrado que la historia de Biojó no tiene base en la historia documentada, sino en tradiciones que comenzaron en el siglo XX (116).

Biojón, como lo han hecho todos los palenqueros, mantener un legado hasta en el Pacífico Colombiano con el Currulao, con esas cosas, eso es muy importante. No es un sueño, es un logro para siempre.

JM: Él es un modelo para la comunidad. Me enteré de Palenque a través de otro monumento a Biojón, la novela de *Changó el gran putas* de Manuel Zapata Olivella. ¿Llegaste a conocer a Zapata? ¿Sabes si él visitó Palenque?

VS: Claro.

JM: Obviamente, la representación de Biojón en la novela presenta Palenque como una comunidad heroica y rebelde. ¿Crees que es problemática esta representación de la comunidad?

VS: Claro. Por lo menos alcancé conocer a Zapata y a su hermana Delia Zapata y Juan Zapata y conocí a Edelia Zapata. Los Zapata conocieron Palenque. Llegaron a conocer palenqueros en Chambacú. Vivieron en cualquier lado del mundo. Fue cónsul a diferentes países. Era en el siglo pasado uno de los hombres afro más importantes, no sólo en la literatura sino una mediación presidencial para nosotros. Ellos son muy emblemáticos para nosotros, pero de la novela no te cuento mucho. Él ha sido muy importante porque figúrate él y su hermana han sido los primeros que han promovido grupos folclóricos del Palenque hacia el mundo, por lo menos Paulino Salgado pasó mucho tiempo con esa familia y eso era tan importante. Figúrate que ha venido pasando mucho tiempo y los que hablaron de las tradiciones de aquí eran los Olivella. Hasta ese momento no se representaba nada de nosotros. Eran tan importantes que los hombres y las mujeres de esta zona del país que tú viste tiene una corporación que se llama Fundación Manuel Zapata Olivella. Es tanto que guardan afecto a él en Washington que un grupo de latinos tienen allá una Corporación que se llama Manuel Zapata Olivella. Entonces lo que quiero decir es que Zapata Olivella no sólo es palenquero sino es muy importante en Colombia y Estados Unidos.

JM: O sea, ¿que Manuel Zapata Olivella llegó a conocer Palenque a través del trabajo de su hermana? ¿cómo llegó a conocer Palenque Zapata?

VS: No, no. Manuel era mayor que sus hermanas. Era más palenquero que yo. Nació primero que yo. Fue uno de los primeros que trabajó en Palenque dando a conocer su música y su gente. El segundo hombre que llegó a hablar del Palenque fue Aquiles Escalante y después Jaggermann y vino una cantidad después como [el francés] Yves Moñino y Nina Friedemann y Castillo y Roselli y otros de Estados Unidos.

JM: ¿Corre el lector de la novela de Zapata, o el visitante que viene de afuera, el peligro de ignorar los problemas que enfrentan los palenqueros hoy como la pobreza y la discriminación?

VS: Si hablamos de la problemática en general, el problema es que los palenqueros somos conscientes a estas alturas de todo lo que pasa. En este momento nosotros somos legado de africanos. Hay cosas que nos molestaron tanto en su momento. Por lo menos yo como hombre negro si no hubiera la trata negrera nunca hubiera venido a América. Yo hubiera sido otro. Pero esos efectos de la vida de la vivencia humana tenía que darse eso. Entonces nosotros cuando nuestros ancestros, también en Cuba, se rebelaban con cimarronajes revolucionarios y decidieron “o nos quedamos en esta ruina donde estamos o salimos” y tomaron consciencia. Ésta es la experiencia humana. Y pasó lo que pasó. En este momento ya nosotros tenemos cómo llegar a la casa presidencial o a la administración, pero yo te digo que pasaron muchos tiempos, pero tres siglos casi, nosotros nunca hablamos de presidencial. Estaba negado a que nosotros fuéramos personas de bien, que nos quedamos hombres porque matábamos o nos mataban porque éramos rebeldes, que éramos todo eso cuando uno dice “rebelde”. Pero cuando te dije que en un momento en su efecto el gobernador de Cartagena se dio cuenta que quería con unos curas... Domingo no sé quién e hicieron un grupo de hombres, Sandoval y

esos que llegaron a Palenque a catequizar, nos terminaron degradando poniéndonos nombres y apellidos y nosotros aceptándolo, pero hoy en día pasó lo que tuvo que pasar, por lo menos hasta ahora. Nosotros hablamos de territorio pero un hombre como yo, yo vivo en Colombia y en América yo no dejo que me lleve nadie de esta tierra porque yo sé que en las Américas todos los hombres negros el día que sea del siglo pasado o de hoy deben de saber que ellos son descendientes de africanos y que venimos de Tanzania, Namibia, el Congo, adonde sea, pero África. Aquí nos están poniendo a pelear por tierra, pero en este espacio bienvenido sea en este rincón de Colombia. Pero si hablamos de desplazamiento tú tienes que tener consciencia de de dónde tú vienes. A partir de allí debemos comenzar a interactuar. Como te dije, soy colombiano. Tengo pasaporte colombiano, el lugar donde nací es aquí, pero quisiera que pensaran que somos descendientes de África y nos hicieron salir. Por eso en la música hay alusión a los langa-langas o lo que sea del África, pero mira es tanto el efecto que cuando llegamos a la conferencia, cuando ya Marcelo me preguntó y cuando hicimos ese viaje o sea ya con esas personas hice conexión. En nuestra conversación me preguntaste cuál es la diferencia entre el turismo y lo que hago es algo que invoco. Es una vocación. Tenemos en estas Américas los hombres negros hay muchas diferencias entre los hombres negros y blancos en su pensamiento pero lo que hago es afirmarte aquí o en cualquier parte del mundo es que mis fronteras están cerradas con soldados cuando no hay esa energía. Pero las fronteras que yo tengo son las murallas, ahora me voy a China y hay la Muralla China y el Muro de Berlín y los muros están cerrados cuando no hay energía. Cuando hay energía no importa un bleo si es blanco, negro, amarillo, rojo, o sea todos los por hoy para mí son bienvenidos los seres humanos o sea todos tenemos presentación. Para mí no hay discriminación en nada. Yo pienso que eso debe ser así porque lo que pasó pasó. Esto que tenemos hoy es América, negros y blancos. Todos nosotros, *black and white*.

JM: Ahora hablemos del futuro. Otro de nuestros anfitriones, Brian, es sobrino de Víctor. Su sueño es ser alcalde de Cartagena. ¿Qué planes tiene Brian para la ciudad y para Palenque?

VS: No sólo Brian. Hay otras amigas palenqueras hoy que, el problema de los palenqueros y las palenqueras hoy en día son visiones más amplias. No son esas visiones de que no podíamos llegar a Cartagena sino por primera vez llegó un alcalde negro [Campo Elías Terán Dix, véase Tadorda Herrera]. Figúrate cómo los pueblos se levantan. Otro impacto fue la llegada de Obama a la presidencia de los Estados Unidos, Martin Luther King y otros negros. Poco a poco llegaron hombres y mujeres al senado. Así se constituyen los sueños del futuro, de la esperanza, o sea a ninguno le puede decir que es sólo un sueño. Ahora ellos quieren. Pero lo que pasa en nuestra política son las finanzas. O sea si uno no tiene dinero, no llega. Pero es porque la corrupción es el peor mal de una nación o de un pueblo.

JM: Brian nos llevó al cementerio de la comunidad y nos explicó que hasta recientemente los palenqueros enterraban a sus muertos en casa. ¿Puedes explicarnos por qué? También, al hablar de los ritos funerarios, ¿puedes explicar qué es el lumbalú?

VS: Bueno, el lumbalú es el rito más antiguo que tenemos los palenqueros. El lumbalú parece que es la presencia del pasado. Si se muere alguien, es el pasado. El lumbalú es cuando uno escribe un testamento y el lumbalú se hace como expresión de juramentos verbales. Todo eso se da porque en Palenque reinaba lo que se llamaba "palabra de hombre". O sea cuando se decía "vamos a hacer esto" eso se daba. Los entierros en Palenque no se hacían dentro de las casas. Se hacían en el suelo en el camposanto, en el cementerio. En la casa se hacían los velorios. Era allí donde se hacía el baile del pavo de acuerdo a la tradición de las mismas personas creyentes del folclor. Se llama el lumbalú. Y además los jueces del lumbalú son de generaciones. Entonces pueden ser

cuadro o amigo mío los que tienen diecisiete años y quieren compartir conmigo. Los vivos que son más de cincuenta personas el colectivo actual. Somos responsables por lo que se llama el seguro social. El seguro social nunca llegó a Palenque, nunca fue parte de nuestra sociedad, pero el lumbalú hace parte de los velorios. Hoy se juntan para recoger fondos y se co-financia la muerte de esa persona, llevarle el ataúd. Ahora hemos pasado por movimientos sociales. Entonces comenzaron las organizaciones sociales, pero aún se sigue practicando el lumbalú. Ya esta nueva generación con esta mentalidad está diciendo que eso está pasado de moda. Una mujer como mi mamá no admite que en su muerte no haya lumbalú. Es lo que ella conoció y sigue viva la historia oral. No se puede decir en español.

JM: ¿No se puede decir en español?

VS: El lumbalú no se ha podido describir totalmente en español. Hay cincuenta, sesenta palenqueros que saben decirlo. Hoy estamos intentando hacer la traducción al español porque el lumbalú se dice en lengua palenquera y tenemos poco tiempo.

JM: Visitamos la casa de Rafael Cassiani Cassiani, un músico famoso de Palenque que ha viajado por todo el mundo. ¿Puedes contarnos sobre la vida de él y su importancia para Palenque? Puedes hablar sobre la música palenquera en general y el Festival de Tambores en particular? Además, ¿cómo comenzó el son en Palenque? Comencemos con Rafael.

VS: Se habla que en los años veinte de que en Colombia y especialmente en el Caribe colombiano, en el departamento de Bolívar, se hizo un proyecto de cañicultura y en ese proceso de cañicultura trajeron unos amigos cubanos que vinieron a trabajar en la ingeniería y sembrar la caña. Allí en los años veinte, veintiuno, llegaron a tierras palenqueras. Esos terrenos pasan a ser parte de Palenque de San Basilio. Ya en los finales de los años veinte y al comenzar los años treinta la influencia de los cubanos de La Habana pasan no sólo a trabajar sino a descansar y hacer intercambios y tener consulta con palenqueras y palenqueros y ellos logran llevar su ventaja musical. Y así empiezan a hacer la influencia de la música. Y los palenqueros fueron a trabajar allí y llevaron esa influencia. En el veintiocho la influencia ya comienza a tomar medida con Cassiani, con Simaongo, Desiderio, con Valdés. Una cantidad de amigos. Un montón de palenqueros, no sólo Rafael. Esto es un legado energético. Todos los palenqueros que entraron en proceso de la zafra que llaman en Cuba nosotros también llegamos a hacer nuestros aportes en esos trabajos. Y se fue creciendo.

JM: Chévere. ¿Puedes hablar del Festival de Tambores y de su importancia para la comunidad?

VS: Claro. El Festival de Tambores. En su inicio había un amigo que se llama Juan Pablo Cassiani. En la década de los ochenta, él llega a hablar de esos programas, de un festival de tambores de Palenque. Por eso la modernidad llega y nunca absorbe lo natural y luego hacen una organización social y esa organización se llama Corporación de Festival de Tambor. ¿Por qué los festivales son importantes en la comunidad? Porque los festivales tienen el efecto de poder mostrar todo lo que se da en la práctica por lo menos lo tradicional en el festival. Nosotros los palenqueros no hemos sido conocistas, o tener los detalles de cosas antiguadas en el museo, pero en el festival ya hay posibilidad de llevar todo lo ancestral a la muestra y allí nosotros regresamos a hablar de los peinados, de las comunidades tradicionales. Hay una recopilación de lo tradicional. Hoy en día hay conferencias y festivales. Se hacen recuentos históricos.

JM: O sea, ¿es una memoria viva y no un museo de artefactos muertos?

VS: John, mira, el problema es que como he dicho uno almacena todo en la computadora. Se consigue todo lo que se quiere conseguir en este mundo. El fenómeno mío es que los libros cuando los leo los absorbo. Lo absorbo cuando escucho a alguien. Y eso me da habilidades para para hablar el léxico o para discutir cosas. Conmigo han

pasado cosas. Yo conozco a los que hicieron la primera grabación de música palenquera. Por lo menos una de las personas de Palenque en los últimos treinta años que ha recibido a casi cincuenta personas que vienen de Estados Unidos ha sido este señor Víctor Simarra quien los ha llevado. O sea, aquí en Palenque no hay hotel, no hay residencia, pero todo en la vida se puede cuando se quiere. Cuando llevé a Usted a Palenque yo con mi señora cocinamos. Te digo que pasaron trescientos dos años para que un palenquero publicara un libro de recetas ancestrales y ese señor se llama Víctor Simarra. Yo en casi todos los documentales primarios que hicieron en Palenque en los últimos veinte años del siglo pasado, este señor hace parte. Yo, en mi vida fui más de cien veces a las universidades más de mil quinientas veces a los colegios para así hablar con los estudiantes en los últimos cuatro años. Pero en mi vida nunca había podido estudiar o participar en ningún programa educativo pero he podido presentar en todas la universidades de mi país compartiendo con todos los amigos. Cada uno está dotado con lo que está dotado. Hay una mujer que yo admiro que se llama Rigoberta Menchú. Es de Guatemala y es indígena. Por lo menos uno de los hombres que admiré en sus años fue a Fidel Castro. Y me hizo tanto daño porque yo creyendo tanto en sus discursos y sin conocer Cuba y no quise ir a Estados Unidos en un momento. Pero en este momento pienso en los seres humanos cuando uno habla bien de alguien o mal de alguien. Es interesante, cuando se habla mal de alguien, si me dicen "John es muy malo", digo "primero debo hablar con John". Uno debe aprender de la vivencia. Yo tengo espacio en una emisora dos veces al año, espacio para hablar de lo que me dé la gana, pero acorde porque cuando uno llega y habla debe llevar un aporte, de llevar un aporte a las personas. Así también se puede lograr cosas.

JM: El barrio Getsemaní de Cartagena, como San Basilio, comenzó como palenque y sigue siendo un barrio humilde pero con una cultura muy rica. Dicen que intereses poderosos quieren comprar áreas extensas del barrio para crear hoteles de lujo y borrar esa comunidad tal y como existe hoy ¿qué sabes de esta controversia y qué paralelos existe entre Getsemaní y San Basilio?

VS: Getsemaní es el primer palenque de Cartagena y en todo el departamento de Bolívar. Allí supuestamente estaban los menos favorecidos que se escapaban de la trata negrera. Lo que pasa es que allí todavía se sigue con eso que llaman la resistencia de la tradición oral. Ahora está la resistencia allí en el barrio ese. Ahora están intentando a destruirlo, no sólo destruirlo sino que abandonar lo tradicional para lo comercial.

JM: ¿Qué desafíos y oportunidades presentan el contacto entre Palenque y sus invitados del exterior—los turistas, los académicos y las organizaciones internacionales como la UNESCO?

VS: Mira, John, lo que está presentando todo eso es lo que llamamos en mi país "resentimiento". ¿Por qué te digo "resentimiento"? Cuando yo estoy en mi casa y está al lado de la tuya, tú tienes casi todos los beneficios uno piensa que la suya es mala y piensa que tú no estás haciendo cosas importantes. Si tú conversas conmigo o con mi comunidad, en este momento nosotros tenemos conflictos con casi todos los pueblos alrededor, pero las personas del exterior que han llegado, tanto como la ONU, todas las corporaciones como la UNESCO, todo eso ha sido de tal importancia porque si no hubiese sido así, todavía hubiéramos estado como hace trescientos años atrás. Y todo visitante para nosotros es de tal importancia como dice el habitante o visitante que no "representa" entre comillas. Pero para mí todos los visitantes representan. Porque deben traer un beneficio. Todos. Hay que asumirlo. Nosotros no podemos asumir que todos los días hace sol—en otro día está nublado. Porque si no, el mundo no serviría para nada. Duele mucho cuando tú estás por donde yo voy pasando y no me vas a visitar y dices "yo no me voy a quedar en tu casa". Cuando uno no va en la casa del otro, eso lastima mucho, porque todo en su afecto cuando vienen muchos americanos y no entran

en tu casa eso es duro. Es duro no para el colectivo sino para la misma casa. Mi mamá entendía esa problemática. Mi señora entendía a media caña. Mis hijos no entendían eso porque no tienen esa vivencia. En este momento en el barranquito, en el lugar donde yo vivo llegan cien y todos son bienvenidos y los estimo. O sea figúrate todavía en el 54 cuando vinieron los primeros visitantes a investigar Palenque fueron pocos. Cuando la gente no respeta algunos espacios o algunas creencias como nosotros tenemos el santo patrón y mi mamá me contaba que es miembro de la familia y lo respeto ahora. Es el santo patrón. Vino un señor a hacer su investigación y dijo “ni que San Basilio ni que nadie” y escupió la cara y escupió al santo y lo arrojó al suelo y salió del pueblo por la falta de respeto. Por eso los países tienen fronteras, para que haya como regular algunas cosas. En los negocios hay ciertas normas. Lo único es que ahora, figúrate, eso es la vida pasada.

JM: ¿Puedes hablar más sobre tu nuevo proyecto [*Comida palenquera para el mundo*, 2014]?

VS: Lo más afectivo para mí ahora es este libro de cocina palenquera que voy a presentar en Virginia y llegar hasta la China y compartir en las universidades de mi país y en todos los medios de comunicación. Eso me parece halagador. Yo pienso que antes nunca había tal libro de culinaria. Tenía este sueño y participaron todos los miembros de la comunidad. El 17 vamos unos 13 o 14 de Palenque a irse a la China a hacer un taller. En América nos mandamos a Canadá, Estados Unidos, Colombia. Cuando mi colega argentino, de Estados Unidos, Canadá. El palenquero, argentino, Bariloche, Nueva Orleans, Kansas City, los de Canada. Eso va a ser muy sabroso. Hay que tener sueños y que nade debe pensar que no puede alcanzar metas. Lo interesante es pensar que sí se puede. Y de verdad una gran felicitación en nombre del pueblo palenquero para usted que esté interesado y todos los amigos que hicieron visita. Cada cosa tiene su sitio y su momento. Y el momento mío es de terminar eso ahora este mes y luego ponerme en contacto con todos mis hermanos, no los que he conocido sino los que voy a seguir conociendo yo. De verdad, agradecido de que hayas tenido la amabilidad de llamarme y de poder comunicarnos. Ojalá que todos los millones de seres humanos pudiésemos contactarnos. Yo pienso que no necesitaríamos policías ni ejércitos. Los países gastarían menos dinero en cosas que no se deben usar como pólvora y peleando por fronteras y peleando pendejadas.

JM: Gracias por todo, Víctor.

Universidad de Alabama en Birmingham

Figuras

1. Víctor Simarra y John Maddox
2. La Casa del Saber
3. El baile del pavo y la pava
4. Mural en el Barrio Getsemaní (Vértigo Grafitti, Doce9) de una palenquera tradicional.
5. Estatua de Benkos Biojo en Palenque
6. Hombres y casa palenqueros

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PALARA

The Creative World of Samiri Hernández Hiraldo

Samiri Hernández Hiraldo has a B. A. in anthropology from the University of Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras and a masters and doctorate also in anthropology from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. For her masters and doctoral studies, she had considered concentrating on ethnopoetics, but she ended up specializing in religion and doing fieldwork in a “black” town in Puerto Rico. It was as if she needed first to resolve something about religion and race/skin color at a very personal level even if from a more academic (and/or objective) perspective. She had experienced complex racial relations between the two sides of her family. For some time she thought her father’s white family was superior to her mother’s family. The Americanized and “sophisticated” Baptist church tradition of her father’s side of the family, as opposed to the Catholic-*espiritista*, then Pentecostal, tradition of her mother’s side of the family, helped encouraged this way of thinking. She also felt she owed it to her country because anthropological studies, especially in religion and race, were clearly lacking.

She has taught at various colleges and universities, including the University of Michigan and Florida State University. She has written academic articles, book chapters, and book reviews in English and Spanish. These anthropological writings mostly deal with religion in Puerto Rico and the Afro-Latino/Afro-Puerto Rican experience in the United States. They also look closely at the issues of transnationalism, migration, politics, identity, race, and gender. Her book *Black Puerto Rican Identity and Religious Experience*, published in 2006 by University Press of Florida, was reprinted last year.

Hernández Hiraldo has been writing poetry since high school in Puerto Rico. During her undergraduate and graduate studies, she continued to write some poetry. She was enjoying the greater opportunity it provided for free expression and creativity. Still, her writing of poetry remained peripheral. However, this started to change at about eight years ago because of some personal changes in her life and an increased sense of urgency to connect with the community, especially the marginalized, through personal oral narrative and writing.

Her creative writing includes more than a thousand poems for adults and children in English and Spanish, eleven fiction books for children, and two semi-biographies. None of them have been published yet. In the last few years, she has worked diligently to prepare her writing, especially her poetry for publication. She has been an enthusiastic member of a writers group and have welcomed and benefitted from comments, suggestions, and critique. She was awarded a spot on the 2012 Paz Prize for Poetry shortlist for the collection, “Entre borrozas guardarayas” (Between Blurry Boundaries).

Her poetry obviously reflects her travels to the Caribbean, South America, Africa, and her anthropological background by directly referring to places and events and addressing issues and realities around the world: What make us different, similar, and uniquely human. Also, a good portion of it relates to the same issues she has worked in her academic writing. An important goal at this point in her life is to publish her poetry for the large audience, to establish herself as a creative writer, and to continue to seek ways to use poetry to help build community.

“My Hair Isn’t Bad”

Ella podrá tener el pelo ondulado o con vuelta, hasta un poco rizo, pero malo no (She can have her hair wavy or even frizzy & curly, but not bad)- My mother

My skin is light like my father’s
Obviously not as mixed as my mother’s
My freckles Oh, my freckles!
a reminder Such a reminder!
of my recessive genes My “other” ancestry?
 (“ . . . but many white *americanos* have freckles much worse than me.”)

My hair, definitively not my skin
is the thing under constant scrutiny
by both sides (usually women)
My mother’s mostly dark-skin My father’s mostly light-skin
especially when, cut in layers, humidity
makes it kinky & shorter, to look *malo*
in spite of the occasional heat *tratamientos* (“Never relaxers!”)*
done at the beauty salon
and the *Alberto VO5* gel and coconut oil
Mami keeps putting on it

My hair, of course
is darker than the skin of people
 bien trigueño, negro, bien negro, moreno, prieto
But again, color isn’t the main issue
but that my hair isn’t straight & smooth like that of a “real white.”
Ni la herencia india taína lo ha podido salvar.

Because of my hair, I am not really from either side
Am I from both at the same time?
Am I in between? Is that right?
What does it accentuate? What does it strike?
What purpose does it serves and for whose sake?
Am I really who I am whatever it takes?

*According to my mother, having a relaxer was to admit that I had bad hair.

“Después de *Roots* y alguna que otra plegada línea escolar”

Veo
Entre los muelles de tu espalda
La sombra
De algún infloresto precipicio

Sus grietas
Profundamente marcadas
Cuentan una a una
La indigestión de tan estrépito maleficio

No encuentro otra salida
Como la de pensar
En otra destajada avería-
La de víctima en su salvífica-urgente travesía

Sigo viendo
Entre los muelles
De tu “negra” espalda
La desusada y trunca luz
Que casi no aparece
Sobre las olas de mis “blancas” y bien cocidas mangas

Queriendo curar
De alguna manera, abierta, clara
Olvidando la brocada distancia
Tu dolor
Sin tanto testimonio, sin tanto aviso
Entre bienaventuradas almohadas
Tejidas, empezando por tí mismo-
Como el mar en desperdicio

“Saltamontes con otra piel (disque en su usual negrura)”

Sobre aguas oceánicas, sí oceánicas
con historias de conquista en nombre de por lo menos oro y caña
fueron forzados ciertos hombres y mujeres-almas
confundidas, con la imaginación quebrada
sobre el agrio oleaje de látigos y cruel espada
respirando desmenuzada esperanza
empapados de lágrimas de juerguista frustración e insistente y exhausta rabia
hasta llegar a orillas del destierro de la carne
de los huesos; de originales cundeamores sueños

Pero el tibio viento, sí el viento
también supo tejer galeante paisaje entre insistentes derrumbes y encajados lamentos
el deseo por un nuevo pulso al compás de un distinto velero
hacia otra enclavada historia
desafiando cual errática
cual presente multitudinal trayectoria

*Que el designado barco sea de distintos colores y de todos o de ninguno
y que todos los corazones se rindan ante el radiante horizonte
saltando sobre el liberante mar de frescos terruños
bajo el caribeño, inigualable, casi celestial crepúsculo*

“Habiendo cruzado las aguas”

[L]a trampa del mestizaje como teoría ocultaba la diversidad . . . - Dr. Jesús Cucho García

¿Qué hubiese sido
de la carreta de René Marqués
sin por lo menos dos o tres
de sus ruedas-
Otra historia puertorriqueña?

O-O-O-(o)

¿Qué hubiese sido de mí
si me hubiese quedado niña
si hubiese vivido en Puerto Rico
después de los veinticinco?

Un guión
en mi nombre completo
entre el apellido paterno y el materno-
Pudieran añadirse otros más
milagrosamente más pequeños
O convertirse en uno prodigiosamente extenso

Conocí a la pareja casi perfecta
él por ser punto, ella aparte
Tan sólo uno o dos espacios de por medio-
Ella dominicana y él puertorriqueño

Sus hijos un cuarto haitianos
(Ahora igual que siempre) Tres puntos suspensivos

**La Carreta* is a 1953 play written by René Marqués about the migration of Puerto Rican peasants from the countryside, to Puerto Rico's capital city of San Juan, to The Bronx in New York.

“¿Cómo es que la fama de un santo se deba a la del diablo?”

*Vejigantes son coloridas figuras con máscaras en varios festivales puertorriqueños. El estilo de la vestimenta se asemeja a un murciélago. En el festival de Santiago en el pueblo mayormente negro de Loíza, en Puerto Rico, ellos representan a un diablo carnavalesco.

¿Cómo es que la fama de un santo
se deba al pisoteo de muerte de soldados moros?
Auto-defensa, la guerra,
no la cualquiera, la espiritual
contra el paganismo, el pecado, la misma muerte (eterna).
Ahora cual simbólica,
emblemática de festivales,
elaboraciones alterno-históricas

¿Cómo es que la fama de un santo
pasa de España, a Loíza, a Connecticut?
Su nombre, Santiago Apóstol
¿Español, negro loiceño, boricua, puertorro?
El moro ¿El blanco quitándole al otro,
de mixta a mixta piel, “entre nosotros”?
Los vejigantes, de la orilla al centro
en honor a la necesidad, al dinero
El diablo protestando y al mismo tiempo riendo-
Loiceño, negro o no, cualquiera de nosotros

“Four Candles at New H(e)aven’s Table, the Last One the Thickest & Tallest”
To Menén Osorio

Vodou dolls in display
(She’s judged. . .)

Vodou dolls in display
(as pagan,)

A black skin covered with white
(as one of those instruments of Satan)

Around the time of the Festival of Santiago (St. James),
dolls have to, again, be clarified as religious-cultural-folklore artifacts.
She, as a faithful Catholic, as one of the founding-members of the festival,
the daughter of a Loizan cook and a Loizan fisherman. A hard worker & decent
woman,
a dedicated mother, a nice person; a believer, *un ser humano como otro cualquiera*.

“There Isn’t Always a Perfect Vice Versa”

Rumbles of slavery
transiting from here to there (and *vice versa*)
agonized “the bottom of my heart”
with undisputed mastery (in good Spanish, *destreza*)

The groove was notoriously clear
about *someone else’s* affair of shame
How could anybody pollute their soul with each beat,
“That’s life; it can never be changed”?

It was like exonerating myself
with such easy syncopated exposé
of letter-by-letter knowledge from books, the Internet
(accompanied by black & white cartoons, full-color trailers)

But as I got closer, almost skin to skin
without any physical pain, without much conscientious notice-
A miracle of some sort!
The (or)deal turned into an (urgent)deal

The exorcism of my level of comfort
of comparing myself (in the very present tense)
with “those past others,”
like comparing bananas with plantains

“Donde los tiempos dejan de desmenguar”

Conocí a masones
antes de conocer de su organización.
Leyendo supe algo. Por cierto,
sin ser la única bajo la clasificación:
SIN SUFICIENTE CONOCIMIENTO. Hace algunos años,
secretos almacenados sustituyendo la acostumbrada religión
como quien no aprende una nueva y alternativa versión
(de la vida). Aunque supe del abuelo de mi prima
de apellido Estrada, hasta pastor bautista,
con su bigote bien afinado, bien pintado y cierto porte de “gente de dinero,”
españolista.
Como también de mujeres, por ejemplo en el pueblo de Adjuntas añadiéndose a la lista,
de su trabajo comunitario y perspectiva socio-crítica.

Recientemente supe por *Facebook* de mi gran amigo y compañero de *high school*,
“todavía” en Puerto Rico apesar de la terrible economía, el crimen, y la cómica política.
“Quien lo diría. . . mi buena amiga en la Florida.
Mejor me quedo sirviendo en mi islita”
(sin insinuar que yo no sirvo desde *acá*).

La piel de mi amigo es negra . . . realmente marrón
pareciendo otra nueva excepción (mucho más aceptable que un negro gobernador).
De hecho sigue siendo líder de su legión,
con la esperanza de un nuevo y mejorado Puerto Rico
bien arraigada un poco más arriba de su ni tan apretado pantalón.

PALARA

“Caracoles”

¿Quién todavía los acumula
después de haberlos contado
como si fuesen cachispas de coco bajo lupa en aumentado tamaño,
gandules esgrana'os, pepitas de algarroba, pichones raros?

¿Quién todavía los sueña
después de su insostenible y pulposa pérdida
como el alma que se cree
entre cenizas quietas?

La lluvia
la vida
cuestan. El pasado
a cambio del presente.
Por eso hay quienes

aún los leen tactilmente-El futuro
sentados a la orilla de Yemayá.
Y del otro lado
del río seco, hasta sin su imaginable corriente molina y eléctrica.

**The *Publication of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association*
(PALARA) invites submissions for the Fall 2015 number**



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

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