

WRITING FOR THE SILENCED:
SLAVERY, MEMORY, POLITICS, AND JUSTICE IN AFRO-LATIN AMERICAN
LITERARY NARRATIVE

By

Jacob Charles Brown

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Approved:

William Luis, Ph.D.

Celso Castilho, Ph.D.

Earl Fitz, Ph.D.

Emanuelle Oliveira-Monte, Ph.D.

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In remembrance of the victims of slavery and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade

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¹ “It takes a village to raise a child” is commonly attributed as an African proverb, but its actual origins are debated. Scholars suggest that it might be from Kajita (Wajita) or Kiswahili (Goldberg). It could also be a misattribution that reflects the West’s tendency to generalize the vast and diverse continent that is a central concern of this dissertation.

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¡Ashé! / Axé!

CONTENTS

Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
List of Figures	vii
Introduction. Slavery in Latin America: By and Beyond the Numbers	1
Chapter 1. Slave Narratives in Latin America: Nineteenth Century Cuba and Brazil	23
I. The Only Extant Slave Narrative in Spanish America? Juan Francisco Manzano's <i>Autobiografía</i>	33
II. “Written and Revised from His Own Words”: <i>Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua</i>	64
III. An “Original Brazilian Romance”: Maria Firmina dos Reis’s <i>Úrsula</i>	95
Chapter 2. Literary Cimarrones and Cimarronas: Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Afro- Caribbean Narrative	128
Part 1. Rooted in Struggle: Twentieth Century Afro-Cuban <i>Testimonio</i>	134
I. Esteban Montejo, Author of <i>Biografía de un cimarrón</i>	142
II. Slavery in Afro-Cuban Women’s Narrative: Daisy Rubiera Castillo’s <i>Reyita, sencillamente</i>	179
Part 2. “Re-Membering” Black Women: History and Twenty-First Century Afro-Puerto Rican Fiction	200
III. Slavery Un-Disguised: Mayra Santos-Febres’s <i>Fe en disfraz</i>	214
IV. Slavery from <i>las Negras’</i> Perspectives: Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro	234
Chapter 3. The Antislavery Continent: Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Afro-South American Narrative	256
I. The African Socrates: Benedito José da Silva in the Posthumously Published Manuscripts of Carolina Maria de Jesus	271
II. Colombia’s “Biggest” New-Slave Narrative: Manuel Zapata Olivella’s <i>Changó, el gran putas</i>	308
III. The “Lost Autobiography” of Luísa Mahin: Ana Maria Gonçalves’s <i>Um defeito de cor</i>	338
Conclusions. Silence’s Echoes: The Ongoing Struggle for Justice in the Present	356
References	387

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. 10 panels from <i>Angola Janga</i> (D'Salete 390-392) | 354-355 |
| 2. Arroyo Pizarro, <i>Pelo bueno</i> 12-13 | 379 |
| 3. Instagram post by soublettraulin (Soublett López) | 381 |

INTRODUCTION

SLAVERY IN LATIN AMERICA: BY AND BEYOND THE NUMBERS

...the major ‘African American Experience,’ as it were, unfolded not in the United States, as those of us caught in the embrace of what we might think of as ‘African American Exceptionalism’ might have thought, but throughout the Caribbean and South America...

-Henry Louis Gates, Jr.²

The impact that slavery has had on Latin American culture and society is incalculable.

The numbers that we do have come from public records made available online by *Slave Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (Eltis and Richardson). Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes in his book *Black in Latin America* (2011) that “Between 1502 and 1866, 11.2 million Africans survived the dreadful Middle Passage and landed as slaves in the New World... of these 11.2 million Africans, according to Eltis and Richardson, only 450,000 arrived in the United States... About 4.8 million Africans went to Brazil alone” (2). The astonishment that Gates, the premier scholar of African American history in the United States, expresses in recounting these figures suggests the need for continued efforts to decenter the US in its own view of the African diaspora. Gates has promoted a greater consciousness of Afro-Latin American people, culture, and history in the United States through not only his book but also his PBS television series also entitled *Black in Latin America* (2011), but there is still much work yet to be done.

Updates to *Slave Voyages* reflect even greater numbers of enslaved African Americans in Latin America than the ones Gates discusses in his book. An estimate of 1,061,524 captured Africans forcibly embarked on slave ships under the Spanish flag, plus 5,848,266 under the

² *Black in Latin America*, 2.

Portuguese empire (and, after 1822, Brazilian empire). Of these approximately 7 million people, only about 6 million (5,984,739) arrived in Spanish America and Brazil. These numbers show that the Spanish and Portuguese / Brazilian empires were the leading participants in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in terms of gross numbers. They were also the first to traffic enslaved Africans beginning in 1501. Great Britain, the Netherlands, the United States, France, and Denmark / Baltic also entered the Trans-Atlantic slave trade 50 years later in 1551, but Spain and Portugal's combined total represent the majority of the more than 12.5 million (12,512,337) captives who embarked to the Americas over the span of nearly 4 centuries, from 1501 to 1875. Most significantly of all, these numbers also reveal a glimpse of the horrors of slavery. 10,702,656 are estimated to have disembarked, meaning that nearly 2 million people (1,809,681) died in route to the lands their captors called the Americas. More statistics suggest that of the average 309 enslaved people who embarked on a single vessel, 12% died during voyage. The average length of the Middle Passage was 60.4 days. Most captives were male, but 35.5% were women and 21.5% were children (Eltis and Richardson).

The impact of slavery cannot be measured in years and numbers alone. The figures provided by *Slave Voyages* are only estimates. They do not account Africans who were enslaved and trafficked illegally. They do, however, suggest that Africans' presence in Spanish and Portuguese Latin America was especially significant. The approximately 6 million or more Africans who were enslaved in the Americas were not just victims of enslavement but also agents of history who brought their diverse languages, religions, and customs with them. Despite systematic efforts to erase their identities through colonization, their cultures blended with European and indigenous American cultures in a process called transculturation (Ortiz 457). Inherent within this process of cultural mixture is a process of not only mixture but also violent

oppression. Many aspects of African cultures in Latin America have survived, but the trauma of slavery and ongoing racial oppression in the present cannot be overstated. The figures in *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* are not just numbers but individuals whose stories have been largely silenced. Literature is therefore a powerful tool for understanding the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the people whose lives it impacted beyond even the most sophisticated databases.

Slavery in Afro-Latin American Literature

El libro es símbolo de la principal fuente para combatir la esclavización de la mente.
-Carlos Guillermo “Cubena” Wilson³

Afro-Latin American literature is broadly defined here as literary fiction and nonfiction written or orally dictated by black/Afrodescendant authors from Latin America. My definition also includes Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua, an African whose oral testimony describes slavery in Brazil. Afro-Latin American literature shows that Africans and their descendants, or Afrodescendants,⁴ have contributed to Latin America through every aspect of its culture, not just popular culture such as food, music, and dance but also literary narrative and intellectual thought. Afro-Latin American literature is as formally diverse as any other literary category, comprising of diaries, legal documents, letters, poetry, theatrical plays, slave narratives written or dictated by enslaved and formerly enslaved black authors, *testimonios* or testimonial novels that are also written or dictated by black authors, short stories, novels, neo-slave narratives, children’s books, film scripts, social media posts, song lyrics, graphic novels, and more.

³ *Los nietos de Felicidad Dolores*, 7.

⁴ The term Afrodescendant emerged from the 2000 Regional Conference of the Americas, celebrated in Santiago de Chile, that “sanctioned and normalized the category of ‘Afrodescendants’ as a group with legal, cultural, and ethical implications in the arenas of international justice and human rights” (De la Fuente and Andrews 9). It is synonymous with “Black” and “Afro-Latin American” in the index to *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction* (616).

The rich diversity of literary genres under the umbrella of Afro-Latin American literature reflects an equally rich diversity of themes, but the dominant recurring theme that is explored in all these genres is slavery and black people's struggle for freedom. This is no coincidence but rather is because black writing in Latin America is rooted in resistance. The earliest forms of black writing in Latin America were written to denounce slavery, and Afrodescendant authors have continued to combat the anti-black racism at its root long after abolition. From the colonial era through the present, slavery is not just a dominant theme but the dominant theme in Afro-Latin American literature. This is not the same as saying that it is the only theme in Afro-Latin American literature, nor the only important one. Literature itself is an important testament to Afrodescendants' vast contributions to Latin American culture. The poetry of Nicolás Guillén and Nicomedes Santa Cruz, for example, reflect the rhythms of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Peruvian music. Nevertheless, even in these and countless examples, many of which will be discussed at much greater length in this dissertation, the contributions of black people to Latin American culture are never separate from the history of slavery that brought them there in the first place.

Literature is therefore one of the greatest slavery archives that exists today. It should be taken seriously by scholars and the public as an approach to the past and its relationship with the present. Contemporary historiography examines historical sources such as newspapers and legal documents as part and parcel of social and political discourse, not as an "objective" window into the past. To name two prominent examples in recent scholarship Paulina Alberto's *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (2011) and Celso Castilho's *Slave Emancipation and Transformations in Brazilian Political Citizenship* (2016) turn primarily to print newspapers to explore how black Brazilians' struggle for freedom shaped the nation's intellectual thought. Just as the press can reflect Latin American history, so can the literary press.

US historian Hayden White challenges the artificial separation of fiction, history, truth, and imagination in *Metahistory* (1976). Algerian-born French philosopher Jacques Rancière writes that “the real must be fictionalized in order to be thought” in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (38). The line between history and literature has been blurred not just by Western poststructuralism but also by Afrodescendant fiction itself. US-based Afro-Panamanian novelist Carlos “Cubena” Guillermo Wilson (1941-) attests to the political significance of fiction in his signature shield at the beginning of his books. One of the symbols in the *Escudo Cubena* is a book, “símbolo de la principal fuente para combatir la esclavización de la mente” (7). Education is the principal source to combat the enslavement of the mind, but in the context of his literary novels, “El libro” is a testament to the importance of the literary imagination as the symbol of education.

There are many scholarly books that examine slavery in African diasporic literature, but none that explores the theme of slavery through such a broad approach to Afro-Latin American literature. Richard Jackson’s *Black Writers in Latin America* (1979) is a foundational work that presents Afro-Hispanic authors to an English-speaking academic audience, but it analyzes their works within a US ideological framework. By reading each work through the lens of black radicalism instead of its own historical, national, and cultural context, *Black Writers in Latin America* misinterprets the political subversiveness of the early masters whose supposedly assimilationist writing in and of itself represented a challenge to pro-slavery hegemony. William Luis’s *Literary Bondage: Slavery in Cuban Narrative* (1990) represents a correction of Jackson by tracing the origins of the Cuban novel to the Afro-Cuban poet Juan Francisco Manzano’s personal account of his suffering under slavery. Manzano’s autobiography galvanized the antislavery narrative tradition in Cuba, but Manzano’s singular narrative also had an impact on literature by black authors in various Latin American countries all the way through the twenty-

first century. This dissertation therefore widens its focus even more to observe some of the ways in which antislavery narrative crosses national boundaries to achieve international influence.

The country-by-country approach to writing books on slavery in literature also obscures how many national literary canons are tied to their own antislavery narrative traditions. For example, *Literary Bondage* argues that the roots of twentieth century Cuban literature can be found in nineteenth century antislavery narrative, but early antislavery narrative has shaped literature in many national contexts, not just Cuba. Just as Cuban literature emerged from the antislavery narrative tradition of the Del Monte literary circle, Haitian literature “sprang directly from the Haitian Revolution, by Haitians,” namely Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines (Jenson 1).⁵ In the United States, “The narratives of ex-slaves, as Arna Bontemps pointed out, became the very foundation upon which so very many subsequent canonical African American fictional and non-fictional narrative forms were based” (Gates, *The Classic Slave Narratives* xvii). One such form in the United States is the “neo-slave narrative,”⁶ but there are also fictional narratives of slavery by contemporary black authors in Latin America. These, too, draw from not just national but also international antislavery narrative traditions. Antonio Tillis’s *Manuel Zapata Olivella and the “Darkening” of Latin American Literature* (2005) and John Maddox’s *Challenging the Black Atlantic: The New World Novels of Zapata Olivella and Gonçalves* (2020) address international significance of Afro-Latin American narrative (especially in the works of Manuel Zapata Olivella), but these books are also limited by a primary focus on one or two authors.

⁵ In her book *Beyond the Slave Narrative: Politics, Sex, and Manuscripts in the Haitian Revolution* (2011), Deborah Jenson argues that the Haitian literary tradition was not built on the slave narrative tradition but “the heteroclitic corpus of political texts and correspondence, political memoirs, and early Creole poems” (1).

⁶ See Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* and Maddox, “The Black Atlantic Revisited: Ana Maria Gonçalves’s *Um defeito de cor* in The Neo-Slave Narrative Genre issue of *Callaloo*.

This dissertation therefore takes a broad comparative approach to analyzing slavery in Afro-Latin American literary narrative. It includes a wide corpus of black authors from the Spanish Caribbean and South America to highlight the similarities in the development of antislavery narrative internationally. Jackson's article "Remembering the 'Disremembered': Modern Black Writers and Slavery in Latin America" (1990) also includes literature from several Latin American nations (including Brazil, which Jackson excluded from *Black Writers in Latin America*). Since 1990, there has been a proliferation of not only academic studies on slavery but also a "boom" of Afro-Latin American literary narratives that deal with slavery. Major examples that are analyzed here include but are not limited to *Reyita, sencillamente* (1997), by Daisy Rubiera and María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno (Cuba); *Fe en disfraz* (2009), by Mayra Santos-Febres, *las Negras* (2012) by Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, and "Guanábana Cimarrona" (2019) by Yvonne Denis Rosario (Puerto Rico); *Diário de Bitita* (1986) and "O Sócrates africano" (1994) by Carolina Maria de Jesus, *Ponciá vicêncio* (2003), by Conceição Evaristo, *Um defeito de cor* (2006), by Ana Maria Gonçalves (Brazil); *Malambo* (2001), by Lucía Charún-Illescas (Perú). This dissertation also looks at widely canonized poetry and graphic novels from the countries just mentioned, but my primary focus is the relationship between slavery in twentieth and twenty-first century Afro-Latin American narrative and its origins in antislavery narrative traditions stemming primarily from the nineteenth century.

While in no way exhaustive, this study's breadth reflects the vast diversity of black perspectives on slavery across time and gender and national divides. In other words, Afro-Latin American narrative reveals the cultural plurality of Latin America but also within the Afro-Latin American community itself. Chapter 1 looks at Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía* (1835) and *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* (1856). These texts have been cited as the "only

slave narratives” in Latin America, but Maria Firmina dos Reis’s *Úrsula* (1859) shows that black women also wrote counternarratives to slavery during the nineteenth century through the medium of fiction. These documents are significant because they depict slavery from the perspectives of black authors who survived and witnessed it, but they were also shaped by white editors and the dominant literary and political discourses of their times.

For this reason, this dissertation looks beyond the nineteenth century, as well as beyond Cuba and Brazil. Chapter 2 examines the archetype of the *cimarrón* and *cimarrona* in Afro-Caribbean testimonial and fictional novels from twentieth and twenty-first century Cuba and Puerto Rico, respectively. Chapter 3 analyzes slavery in a swath of Afro-South American nonfiction and fiction narratives from Peru, Colombia, and especially Brazil. Slavery implies white supremacist ideology, the exploitations of bodies through forced labor, rape, the deprivation of education, and the assumption that black people could not learn to read and write in the first place. These conditions prevented all but a few Afrodescendants from writing about it in Latin America through the nineteenth century. Even those who did were at least partly “silenced” by their editors (Manzano) and transcribers (Baquaqua), or by conditions that compelled authors to publish anonymously (Dos Reis). Twentieth and twenty-first century Afro-Latin American authors have continued writing for the silenced by telling the multifaceted stories of the enslaved beyond the boundaries of nineteenth century antislavery discourse.

Despite their many differences, these works have the effect of preserving black Latin Americans’ collective social memory of slavery. Memory is not politically neutral but rather in this case corrects the erasure of slavery from the nationalist versions of history in Latin America. Throughout Latin America there is a powerful myth that widespread racial mixing (*mestizaje* in Spanish and *mestiçagem* in Portuguese) is the proof and product of racially harmonious societies.

Each nation has its own expression of this myth. Alejandro de la Fuente writes, “From the official ‘cosmic race’ ideology of José Vasconcelos’s Mexico, the Venezuela ‘café con leche’ of poet and politician Andrés Eloy Blanco, the harmonious Los-tropical civilization of Gilberto Freyre’s Brazil, to the mulatto Cuba of Fernando Ortiz and Nicolás Guillén, the Latin American nations seemed to embrace *mestizaje* as their very essence and as their creative solution to the racial problem” (“From Slaves to Citizens?” 155-6). These ideologies emerged in the twentieth century as a counter-discourse to scientific racism and colonialism. Whereas Western science during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries pathologized racial mixture, Latin American nations officially embraced their largely mixed populations as a source of pride. They thereby inverted the colonial script by casting themselves not as “inferior” to “developed” nations but rather morally superior to them. In embracing racial mixture, Latin American nations constructed a narrative of exceptionalism vis-à-vis the official racist policies and practices of segregation in the United States, apartheid in South Africa, and the holocaust in Europe.

However, the dominant political identity of racial mixture has had the effect of obscuring Latin America’s historical suppression of its Afrodescendant populations beginning with slavery. In this way, the enslaved in Latin America have been doubly silenced, not only by slavery itself but also the denial of its severity and ongoing aftermath by dominant political myths of racial harmony. In short, the denial of racism in Latin American culture has contributed to its survival.

Slavery in Afro-Latin American literature is thus not just about the past. Acknowledging slavery and its legacy of racism is a necessary step toward achieving justice in the present. Of course, literature is not the only arena in which the dominant political narratives of racial harmony are being challenged. Just as contemporary Afro-Latin American literature is rooted in the fight against slavery in Latin America, so too do the anti-racist efforts of activist groups;

print and online journalism; representation in film, television, and social media; museums and educational institutes; and so on. Nevertheless, the importance literature cannot be overstated. Books are widely accessible through libraries, bookstores, and online. It does not necessarily require special access to archives or expensive travel. It has the power to empower black readers and educate readers of diverse backgrounds through the timeless art of storytelling. Perhaps most importantly, literature represents a truer version of history than the dominant historical narratives of Latin America because it is more inclusive of black voices. The importance of understanding literature as an authentic source of collective memory will only grow as black authors continue writing truth to power with regards to the history of slavery and racism in Latin America. Recognizing Afro-Latin Americans' contributions to literature is a fundamental part of comprehending black people's contributions to the human story that binds us all.

This dissertation's trajectory analyzes slavery in Afro-Latin American literature from the nineteenth through the twenty-first century, but this does not mean that black people were absent from literature in previous centuries. The following section contextualizes the significance of black authorship within an even greater literary history of slavery in Afro-Latin American narrative. Black people were primarily the objects of Iberian writing in colonial Latin American literature, but they also represented their own perspectives as writing subjects.

Black Representation in Colonial Latin American Literature

The representation of black people in Latin American literature is not an innovation of the nineteenth century but is as old as the Iberian conquest of the Americas. *Blacks in Hispanic Literature* (1977), edited by Miriam De Costa-Willis, indicates some fundamental examples of black representation in colonial Hispanic-American literature. The first mentioned is Álvar

Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios*, which narrates the aftermath of Pánfilo de Narváez's disastrous Spanish expedition to colonize La Florida. In "African Footprints in Hispanic-American Literature," John F. Matheus writes that "In the early days, contemporary with the conquistadores, the Negro appeared, even as did Black Stephen, the Moor, Estévanico [sic], who wandered with the shipwrecked Spanish sailor Cabeza de Vaca and led Coronado in a fruitless attempt to find the golden Seven Cities of Cibola." More than merely wandering, however, Estebanico (many times simply referred to as "el negro" in the text), acts as a leader to the wreck's four sole survivors, including his captor, Andrés Dorante. *Naufragios* therefore illustrates how the shipwreck topples the hierarchy in colonial Spain between Christians and Moors like Estebanico, "negro alárabe, natural de Azamor," (Núñez Cabeza de Vaca 222). The other survivors depend on Estebanico's intelligence for their survival. Núñez Cabeza de Vaca writes that "El negro les hablaba siempre; se informaba de los caminos que queríamos ir y los pueblos que había y de las cosas que queríamos saber" (195). The text's significance therefore derives not only from its proto-ethnographic representations of indigenous life and customs in present-day Florida, Texas, and Mexico, but also as one of the earliest sources of black literary representation in Hispanic-American literature. Given that the events of *Naufragios* take place largely in North America, it might also represent one of the earliest sources of black literary representation in the present-day United States, too.

In addition to mentioning Estebanico, John Matheus also analyzes "African footprints" in the poem known as Chile's national epic, *La Araucana* (1569), by Alonso de Ercilla, in which he argues that the Spanish add insult to the defeat of the Araucanas' defeat when they appoint a "negro gelofo, mal vestido" to execute their leader, Caupolican (qtd. in Matheus).⁷ While one

⁷ The term "gelofo" may refer to a tribe of Muslim West Africans notorious amongst the Spanish for their rebelliousness to the yoke of slavery: "En la época, los 'gelofoes' o 'jolofes': que corresponden a los 'wolofes,'

might be tempted to simply contrast this negative representation of blackness with *Naufragio*'s positive representation of Estévanico, within the larger context of *La Araucana*'s project of lauding the “noble” character of the defeated over their unworthy conquerors, the real target are not enslaved Africans at all, but rather the Spanish and their vulgarity in choosing a slave to execute a king.⁸ In the rest of his article, Matheus analyzes black representation in nineteenth-century texts such as *Martín Fierro* (1872), Argentina's national epic poem by José Hernández, and Cuban antislavery novels including *Francisco, Sab*, and *Cecilia Valdés*. However, there is more that could be said about black representation before the nineteenth century.

Bartolomé de Las Casas confesses in his *Historia de las Índias* (which he finished writing in 1559) that he had advocated for African slavery in the Spanish colonies, a position that he regretted at the time of writing. Since his superiors did not wish to absolve enslaved Natives from Spanish colonists in Santo Domingo, Las Casas recollects, he petitioned the king to import enslaved Africans to substitute enslaved indigenous people, whose population was on a crash course toward “destruction,” to borrow his own phrase.⁹ Bartolomé expresses his regret over having suggested importing enslaved Africans to alleviate enslaved Indigenous peoples’ suffering in the Spanish colonies, pleading ignorance instead of bad faith (“mala conciencia”) to excuse his soul from eternal damnation.¹⁰

vecinos del Senegal actual, ya estaban islamizados, y, trasladados al Nuevo Mundo, se mostraban por ello muy reacios a la esclavitud, fomentando a menudo motines que ponían en peligro a la sociedad colonial” (Tardieu).

⁸ “Our interest in this colossal canvas of war and courageous struggle is the picture the author gives of the Negro selected by the Spaniards to execute Caupolican, intrepid chief of the invincible Araucanian Indians, glorified by Ercilla along with Lautaro as the real hero of the poem, in depreciation of the Spanish leaders, against whom he was infuriated” (qtd. in Matheus).

⁹ See “Bartolomé de las Casas and the African Slave Trade”: “porque algunos de los españoles desta isla dixerón al clérigo Casas—viendo lo que pretendía y que los religiosos de Sancto Domingo no querían absolver a los que tenían indios si no los dexaban—que, si les traía licencia del rey para que pudiesen traer de Castilla una docena de negros esclavos, que abrirían mano de los indios, acordándose desto el clérigo...” (qtd. in Clayton 1537-1538).

¹⁰ Deste aviso que dio el clérigo, no poco, después, se halló arrepido, juzgándose culpado por inadvertente, porque como después vio y averiguó, según parecerá, ser tan injusto el cautiverio de los negros como el de los indios, no fue discreto remedio el que aconsejó que se trajesen negros para que se libertasen los indios, aunque él suponía que eran

Las Casas's change of heart and mind came after reading Portuguese chronicler Gomes Eanes de Azurara. Writing in retrospect in *Historia de las Índias*, Las Casas condemned his "license to bring Negro slaves to the Indies" because, "seeing how unjust the Portuguese were in taking slaves... he realized how unjustly and tyrannically Africans were taken slaves, in the same fashion as Indians" (Clayton 1529). Just as Las Casas witnessed firsthand the capture and mistreatment of indigenous peoples in the Caribbean islands, Gomes Eanes de Azurara writes about his eyewitness account of the African slave trade in his *Crónica do descobrimento e conquista da Guiné* (1453). In contrast with the heroic tone with which he describes the Henrique II's conquest of the land and people he encountered along Africa's West coast, he describes a scene from the slave market with sympathy for the conquered: "Mas qual seria o coração, por duro que ser pudesse, que não fosse pungido de piedoso sentimento, vendo assim aquela companhia; ca uns tinham as caras baixas, e os rostos lavados com lágrimas, olhando uns contra os outros; outros gemendo mui dolorosamente, esguardando a altura dos céus" (De Azurara 98). Despite De Azurara's sympathy for the captured Guineans, he argues that their Christianization justifies their capture: "eu que esta história ajuntei em este volumen, vi na vila de Lagos, moços e moças, filhos e netos daquestes, nados em esta terra, tão bons e tão verdadeiros cristãos como se descenderam, do começo da lei de Cristo, por geração, daqueles que primeiro foram baptizados" (98). De Azurara's depictions of the Portuguese invading Guinea and capturing its people demystified Las Casas's prior assumption that enslaved black people were prisoners of "just war."¹¹ Despite his argument that the means of capture justify the

justamente cautivos, aunque no estuvo cierto que la ignorancia que en esto tuvo y buena voluntad lo excusase delante el juicio divino. (Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias* 474).

¹¹ For a greater explanation of the concept of "ius belli" (just war) in Las Casas's work, see *Escritura y derecho canónico en la obra de fray Bartolomé de las Casas* (2011) by José Alejandro Cárdenas-Bunsen.

ends of baptism, De Azurara's chronicles convinced Las Casas that the Spanish had enslaved the Natives of America just as illegitimately as the Portuguese had enslaved the natives of Guinea.

"Justification" for the capture of Africans on the grounds of Christianization had unparalleled consequences on slavery in Portuguese America. According to estimates by *Slave Voyages*, Brazil imported over 5 million enslaved Africans during its colonial and Imperial periods—more than any former European colony in the Americas (Eltis and Richardson).¹² Just as Las Casas had done in the sixteenth century in Spanish America, the Jesuit priest Padre Antônio Vieira also denounced the legitimacy of indigenous slavery in the following century. Unlike Las Casas, he maintained the legitimacy of African slavery throughout his writing life, not only on the grounds of Christianization, but also to defend Portuguese hegemony in Brazil against their Dutch rivals. Vieira advocated for Portuguese colonists' improved treatment of enslaved Africans, not for their liberation, as his *Sermão da nossa Senhora do Rosário XXVII* (1633) illustrates. On the one hand, the sermon compares the bodies and souls of blacks and whites as equal under God: "estes homens não são filhos do mesmo Adão e da mesma Eva? Estas almas não foram resgatadas com o sangue do mesmo Cristo? Estes corpos não nascem e morrem, como os nossos?" (qtd. in Sebe Bom Meihy, "Ética Colonial e a Questão Jesuítica" 24). However, the sermon also defends the legitimacy of African slavery on the condition that it facilitate the education and eternal salvation of the captives: "sendo pecadores, aos negros restava rezar pelo perdão e que na eternidade eles poderiam ser redimidos. Escravidão, para os africanos, seria, pois, forma de purificação dos pecados" (Sebe Bom Meihy, "Ética Colonial e a Questão Jesuítica" 23). In addition to defending African slavery on religious grounds, on July 2, 1691, Vieira argues in a letter to the king of Portugal that merely predinating to black people in

¹² The exact estimate is 5,099,816. (Eltis and Richardson).

Brazil without the institution of slavery of Brazil would lead to the “total destruction of Brazil,” alleging that “conhecendo os demais negros que por este meio tinham conseguido o ficar livres, cada cidade, cada vila, cada lugar, cada engenho, seriam logo outros tantos Palmares, fugindo e passando-se aos matos com todo o seu cabedal, que não é outro mais que o próprio corpo” (qtd. in D’Salete 278).¹³ The sermons and letters of Vieira represent black people in Portuguese America paradoxically as both victims of the colonists’ treatment, and as potential threats to Portuguese control over Brazilian territories during the colonial era.

Afrodescendant women are the topic of another canonized seventeenth-century man of letters, the Bahian poet Gregório Matos Guerra. Characteristic of colonial Latin American literature, Matos’s poems are full of contradictions when it comes to representing black people. They especially represent the colonial male gaze’s interpretation of black women’s bodies. The beauty of the “mulata” is praised in the poem entitled “Huma graciosa mulata filha de outra chamada Maricotta com quem o poeta se tinha divertido, e chamava ao filho do poeta seu marido.” However, the poem’s flattery of her beauty belies its ridicule that she gives birth to her own stepfather’s children.¹⁴ Her supposed promiscuity, according to the poetic voice, represents society’s decadence at large, but the tragedy of the situation could also be read as a grotesque representation of Afrodescendant women’s lack of control over their bodies in colonial Brazil. The speaker’s desire for the figure of the “mulata” are further twisted by the theme of revulsion toward black women’s bodies for “reeking of fish” in “Anatomia horrorosa que faz de huma negra chamada Maria Viegas.” Just as black people enter Chilean literature as an expression of

¹³ See the graphic novel *Angola Janga* (2017), by Marcelo D’Salete. Vieira’s words represent the Portuguese hegemony against which the Quilombo dos Palmares fought through the beginning of the eighteenth century.

¹⁴ “Por vida do meu Gonçalo, / Custódia formosa e linda, / que eu não vi Mulata mais linda, / que me desse tanto abalo: / quando vos vejo, e vos falo, / tenho pesar grande, e vasto / do impedimento, que arrasto, / porque pelos meus gostilhos / fora eu Pai dos vossos Filhos / antes que vosso Padrasto” (Teodoro Grillo 78).

Spanish vulgarity in *La Araucana*, black women enter colonial Brazilian literature as objects of simultaneous desire and disgust through the colonial gaze of Matos's "satirical" verses.

Black people were thus represented in colonial Latin American writing in ways that were often stereotypical and dehumanizing, thus serving to "justify" their enslavement. However, black men and women also used the language of their colonizers to negotiate, expand, and question the roles and characterizations they had been assigned. Particularly, black authors played an increasingly central role in literature as a challenge slavery in Latin America. One of the most outstanding examples of colonial Brazilian self-representation is, perhaps, of Vieira himself. He is considered the best writer of prose in the seventeenth-century Portuguese Empire, and it has been suggested that he possibly could have been of African descent.¹⁵ Regardless of Vieira's racial identity, religious writing even before Vieira had served as a way in which black authors criticized the condition of forced labor in colonial Latin America. The autobiographical diaries of Afro-Peruvian Úrsula de Jesús (written by the nuns in the Convent of Santa Clara during the 1640s and 1650s) discuss the spiritual revelations at the center of her "spiritual diary" (published as *Las almas del purgatorio* in 2012). In addition to spiritual matters, George Reid Andrews shows in his book *Afro-Latin America: Black Lives, 1600-2000* (2016) that *Las almas del purgatorio* also contain descriptions of the narrator's former enslavement:

As a slave and then as a free servant, Úrsula's work regimen consisted of *días trabajosísimos* (days filled with labor) spent cooking and cleaning. Beyond her duties to the convent at large, she was often asked to do additional work for individual nuns, who

¹⁵ See *The Negro in Brazilian Literature* (1956): "His biographer states that Vieira's paternal grandmother was a mulatto, and he suggests that his great-grandmother may have been an African slave. Perhaps it is because of this ancestry that the Jesuit is able to say that the Negroes of Cabo Verde are different only in color from Europeans" (Sayers 40). Could the conflict in Vieira's writing—between sympathy for black people and his insistence on their continued enslavement—therefore reflect an internal conflict over how to view his own African ancestry?

came ‘asking me to run errands, others, to cook this or that for them... These things take away the little time I have’ and prevented her from devoting herself to Jesus with the passion and intensity that she desired” (Andrews, *Afro-Latin America* 48).

In other words, hard labor was a constant in Úrsula de Jesús’s life even after she was no longer enslaved. As a “free” servant, she still bore the responsibilities of errands and cooking that went beyond the duties of her fellow nuns. She was therefore still treated unequally, and this inequality stunted her spiritual growth and limited her freedom. These complaints are significant in that they critique her condition of servitude as it relates to her race. *Las almas del purgatorio* therefore represents an early form of antislavery writing in Latin America.

Legal documents from the American colonies of Spain and Portugal further illustrate the emergence of black writing subjectivity in Latin America. These documents have overwhelmingly to do with the institution of slavery. One of the most significant is a letter written by Esperança Garcia in 1770, directed to the president of the Província de São José do Piauí, Gonçalo Lourenço Botelho de Castro. Although the document is only one page, Elio Ferreira de Souza has compared the letter with slave narratives (including Manzano’s *Autobiografía*) and has called it the founding document of Afro-Brazilian literature.¹⁶ In the letter, Garcia introduces herself as “[uma] escrava de V.S. dadministração do Cap.^{am} Antº Vieira de Couto, cazada” (qtd. in Ferreira de Souza 1). She describes that she was taken from the farm where she lived with her husband to work as a cook, where she was treated, where she was treated “very badly” (“mto mal”). Beyond this introduction, the letter shows its two purposes: “A Primeira hé q. ha grandes trovadas de pancadas enhum Filho meu sendo huã criança q. lhe fez

¹⁶ About the letter, Ferreira de Souza writes that “A epístola em estudo é certamente um dos registros escritos mais antigos da escravidão no Brasil, escrito pelo próprio escravo negro, no nosso caso uma mulher negra e cativa, Esperança Garcia, o que confere à narrativa epistolar citada acima o *status* de uma escritura da gênese literária afro-brasileira” (3).

estrair sangue pella boca, em mim não poço esplicar q Sou hu colcham de pancadas, tanto q cahy huã vez do Sobrado abacho peiada; por mezericordia de Ds escapei” (qtd. in Ferreira de Souza

1). The descriptions of the mistreatment Garcia and her son had suffered at the hands of her captor set up her petition to relocate back to where she had lived before her displacement.¹⁷ In this second part of the letter, Esperança states not only the urgency of leaving her current living situation but also returning to the previous estate from which she had been removed. The reason is not only to escape abuse but also to reunite with her husband and baptize her daughter. In this way, what stands out about Garcia’s letter is its humility. Garcia’s letter does not petition for her freedom but merely permission for her to return to her family. The letter is signed, “De V.Sa. sua escrava Esperança Garcia,” thereby implying that it was indeed written by Garcia herself (qtd. in Ferreira de Souza 1). Although only 24 lines including Esperança Garcia’s signature, the significance of her petition letter cannot be overstated. It represents a founding document of black writing in colonial Brazil and illustrates how enslaved black people—and, in this case, an enslaved black woman—used discursive strategies (and writing by their own hands) to negotiate their interests with their colonizers in Latin America.¹⁸

Texts like Ursula de Jesús’s and Esperança Garcia’s are indeed rare in colonial Latin America, but documents transcribing black voices also represent black writing subjectivity. This is one of Jane Landers’ principal arguments in her article “Cimarrón and Citizen” in *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America* (2006). While secular and religious

¹⁷ “A segunda estou eu e mais minhas parceiras por confeçar a tres annos. E huã criança minha e duas mais por Batizar. Pello q Peço a V.S. pello amor de Ds. e do Seu Valim.¹⁰ ponha aos olhos em mim ordinando digo mandar a Porcurador que mande p. a Faz^{da} aonde elle m. tirou p.^a eu viver com meu marido e Batizar minha Filha” (qtd. in Ferreira de Souza 1).

¹⁸ Ferreira de Souza calls Esperança Garcia’s letter the genesis of Afro-Brazilian literature: “A epístola em estudo é certamente um dos registros escritos mais antigos da escravidão no Brasil, escrito pelo próprio escravo negro, no nosso caso uma mulher negra e cativa, Esperança Garcia, o que confere à narrativa epistolar citada acima o *status de* uma escritura da gênese literária afro-brasileira” (Ferreira de Souza 3).

records such as censuses and parish registers serve as sources for her analysis of maroon communities or *palenques* outside the Spanish dominion, she argues that “Most important” are that Africans themselves “were sometimes literate in several languages and, just as indigenous groups did, they quickly learned and adapted to the Spanish legal culture.” Black subjects wrote petitions and correspondence to royal officials and to the king, made proclamations of fealty, initiated legal suits and property transactions, and left wills. Their verbatim testimonies also come to us through civil and criminal proceedings, which Spanish notaries recorded and read back to the sworn witness for verification, alteration, or amendment. If Africans could not speak Spanish, court officials used translators, just as they did for non-Spanish speaking witnesses of other ethnicities. This may have added new layers of linguistic filters but was, nonetheless, an effort to understand and record the voice of Africans. (Landers, “Cimarrón and Citizen 114-115)

The example Landers specifically refers to in her article is a peace treaty, commissioned by Viceroy Luis de Velasco II in 1608, after over thirty years of conflicts between the Spanish settlements and *palenques* in Veracruz, Nueva España. In the treaty, the Friar Balthasar de Morales writes the conditions of the treaty dictated by “los Negros simarrones” themselves, including the freedom of all who fled “hasta el mes de septiembre proximo passado y los de entonces aca se bolveran a sus dueños” (“Cimarrón and Citizen” 133). Landers argues that “Terms such as these became the pattern for later peace treaties with maroons and legitimization of their free black towns,” including, I would add, the Quilombo dos Palmares in Brazil—although the *palmarinos* did not accept Portugal’s treaty, choosing instead to fight until the end.¹⁹

¹⁹ D’Saelte’s *Angola Janga* illustrates (literally) that Palmares did not accept Portugal’s conditions of forcing some of its members to return to slavery.

Nineteenth Century Afro-Latin American Narrative

Pieces of the past like Garcia's petition and Viceroy Velasco II's treaty represent early examples of black voices in colonial Latin America. Together, these documents show that there are testimonial accounts of slavery from the perspectives of the enslaved in Spanish and Portuguese America during the colonial era. Legal documents such as Viceroy Velasco II's treaty and Esperança Garcia's letter show that Afrodescendants in Latin America resisted slavery through oral and written documents during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively, but the nineteenth century represents a significant leap in the development of black writing in Spanish and Portuguese Latin America. Writing was an especially important site of antislavery resistance during this century in which slavery in Latin America both reached its crescendo and, legally, drew its final breath. Much has been written about how there are few or even no slave narratives in Latin America, but these declarations obscure the ways in which Afrodescendants have in fact spoken out and written against slavery in Latin America. Chapter 1 therefore proposes that black authors have influenced and been influenced by the genre known in African American and Caribbean studies as the slave narrative during the nineteenth century. Although not the first examples of black antislavery writing in Latin America, as I have shown in this introduction, *Autobiografía* by Juan Francisco Manzano, *An Interesting Narrative: The Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua*, and *Úrsula* are not only the longest but also the most sophisticated to date. In the following chapter, I compare them with the slave narrative because of their potential to expand our understanding of this term beyond the Anglophone world. Beyond slave narratives that are more well known in the United States, these texts contribute to a greater literary picture of slavery in the Americas.

Deborah Jenson's book *Beyond Slave Narratives* makes a case against applying the label "slave narrative" outside of the Anglophone world:

The slave narrative, when taken as the gold standard of literary testimony from the socioracial substrata of Western colonialism, obscures the existence of genres other than the slave narrative that *were* produced, through complex and mediated processes by French colonial slaves, former slaves, and their descendants in the early postcolonial period. (Jenson 3)

In addition to the diverse Haitian revolutionary writings that Jenson studies, legal documents such as Esperança Garcia's letter, mediated texts (such as the "simarrones" list of demands), and letters such as the poet and abolitionist lawyer Luís Gama's "Carta a Lúcio de Mendonça" (1880) demonstrate the vast diversity of Afro-Latin American narrative with regards to form. However, another form of erasure occurs when we limit the definition of the slave narrative to "the Anglophone world" and overlook that slave narratives are also the products of "complex and mediated processes" (Jenson 1). Black authors indeed did represent slavery in longer narratives in Latin America, whether written by the enslaved (such as in Manzano's case) or dictated by a freedman (such as in Baquaqua's). Charles Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. acknowledge their contributions to the slave narrative: "There are well over one hundred book-length slave narratives, authorized and documented, printed and reviewed by the proponents of the abolition of slavery in England and America, France and Germany, Cuba and Brazil" (xxx). Furthermore, whereas the slave narrative form shaped both Manzano and Baquaqua's testimonies of slavery in Latin America, their testimonies in turn shaped the literary landscape in North America.

Black voices “speak” through not only nonfictional accounts of slavery but also antislavery fiction like Maria Firmina dos Reis’s novel *Ursula*. There is biographical evidence that suggests the author herself was of African descent. The novel’s black characters draw from not only non-fictional narrative elements but also, plausibly, other novels like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Harriet Beecher Stowe was influenced by Frederick Douglass, whose first book *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) was plausibly influenced by Richard Robert Madden’s English-language edition of Manzano’s autobiography (1840). The slave narrative, in other words, represents a network of antislavery narrative that was not exclusive to the United States and British West Indies but included an important presence in Latin America.

CHAPTER 1

SLAVE NARRATIVES IN LATIN AMERICA: NINETEENTH CENTURY CUBA AND BRAZIL

In the process of imitation, revision, and repetition, the black slave's narrative came to be a communal utterance, a collective tale, rather than merely an individual's autobiography. Each slave author, in writing about his or her personal life experiences, simultaneously wrote on behalf of the millions of silent slaves still held captive throughout the Caribbean, Latin America, and the American South. -Henry Louis Gates, Jr.²⁰

In *The Classic Slave Narratives*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that each slave author “wrote on behalf of the millions of silent slaves still held captive throughout the Caribbean, Latin America, and the American South,” but the emphasis of the “classics” on African American and West Indian authors belies the ways in which black authors in the Spanish Caribbean and continental Latin America wrote and spoke for themselves. Nineteenth century Afro-Latin American literary narrative was influenced by and more importantly contributed to the genre of literature known today, for better or for worse, as the slave narrative.²¹ The question of authorship is notoriously slippery in slave narratives, but Afro-Latin Americans’ contributions to antislavery discourse suggest that—contrary to poststructural thought—it matters tremendously “who’s speaking” (Foucault 1490). Recognizing Afro-Latin Americans is essential to a broader understanding of black resistance transnationally. This chapter examines the production, reception, and circulation of slave narratives outside of the traditional scope of the English-speaking world to illustrate their importance in Spanish and Portuguese America.

²⁰ *The Classic Slave Narratives*, xiii.

²¹ Issue could understandably be taken with the term “slave narrative” because slavery is a condition, not an identity. This dissertation uses the term enslaved to describe people in bondage, but it preserves the term “slave narrative” to describe the literary genre widely understood to refer to autobiographical firsthand accounts of slavery written or dictated by the enslaved and formerly enslaved.

If we imagine slave narratives simply as autobiographies literally written by the hands of the enslaved, then the timeline of nineteenth-century Afro-Latin American slave narratives would begin and end in 1835, when Juan Francisco Manzano finished writing the document later known to scholars as *Autobiografía*.²² Not despite but rather because of this apparently singular Hispanic American slave narrative, scholars of Latin American slavery often look “beyond the slave narrative.”²³ However, in doing so they have overlooked the possibilities for considering the genre and its important place in Latin American literary production. Latin Americanist historians especially have taken to the painstaking task of mining archives for traces of the enslaved in the forms of Church registries (recording events such as baptism, marriage, and death) and secular documents such as notarial records, legal records, and royal orders. By stitching together and interpreting these pieces of the past, present-day historians reconstruct the lives of Afrodescendant Latin Americans. Their tireless work in archives on both sides of the Atlantic has enriched databases such as the *Slave Societies Digital Project* with an overwhelming number of fragments of the lives of enslaved and free Africans and their descendants. Digital databases will only gain more and more importance as they grow, and as scholars continue to discover and interpret more and more fragments of the lives of the enslaved.²⁴ By recovering and interpreting these findings, historians are engaged in the important work of constructing a clearer and more detailed historical picture of slavery in Latin America with little help from book-length autobiographical narratives.

²² José L. Franco was the first to publish a complete rendering of the “original manuscript” in Cuba under the title *Autobiografía, cartas y versos de Juan Francisco Manzano* (1937). See William Luis’s edition of *Autobiografía del esclavo poeta y otros escritos* (19).

²³ See Deborah Jenson, *Beyond the Slave Narrative: Politics, Sex, and Manuscripts in the Haitian Revolution* (2011).

²⁴ See the *Slave Societies Digital Archive*, directed by Jane Landers.

The supposed paucity of slave narratives in comparison with the United States and the West Indies might already teach lessons about the differences between “Anglo” and “Latin” America. Whereas many North American slave narratives such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* narrate their subjects’ escape to the North, there was no “North” to escape to for the enslaved in Latin America—except in the extraordinary case of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua, whose “biography” relates his arrival in the free state of New York in 1847 after being enslaved for two years in Brazil. Once on land after disembarking from his second captor Clemente José da Costa’s ship, the *Lembrança*, Baquaqua makes a dash for freedom:

There was a plank from the ship to the shore. I walked across it and ran as if for my life, of course not knowing whither I was going. I was observed during my flight by a watchman who was rather lame, and he undertook to stop me, but I shook him off, and passed until I got to a store, at the door of which I halted a moment to take breath. They inquired of me what was the matter, but I could not tell them, as I knew nothing of English but the word F-r-e-e. (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 173)

Baquaqua’s landing in New York on a ship named *Lembrança* (Memory in Portuguese) might serve as a metaphor for the way in which Baquaqua’s memory of slavery in Brazil was preserved because of his fortuitous arrival in the United States. If he had returned to Brazil, he would have remained enslaved and would not have had the opportunity to tell his story. Here I use the word “tell” on purpose, since not a word of *An Interesting Narrative, Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* (1854) was “written” by Baquaqua himself, but rather “Written and Revised from his own Words, by Samuel Moore.”

We might therefore exclude the Baquaqua's narrative from comparison from Manzano's *Autobiografía* since (as its title already suggests), it is not an autobiography, and it was originally published in English. *Autobiography*, too, was originally published in English as it "Life of the Negro Poet, Written by Himself" in 1840. The circumstances of both these narratives' publication suggest common ground. While New York and Boston became publishing hubs for antislavery material in the nineteenth century, antislavery literature promoters like Domingo del Monte were being exiled, and Cuban novelists like Anselmo Suárez y Romero, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, and Cirilo Villaverde published their antislavery novels abroad in the face of censorship in Cuba. In Brazil, it was necessary for Maria Firmina dos Reis to publish *Úrsula* anonymously. A *escrava Isaura* was published in Brazil, but it was published about a decade before abolition and centers an enslaved protagonist that passes as white. Manzano's autobiography and Baquaqua's biography are therefore a reflection of how it was virtually impossible to publish antislavery literature that centered the perspectives of enslaved black people in nineteenth-century Latin America. *Autobiografía* and *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* share more than just similar conditions under which they were first published. Together they challenge the slave narrative as an "North American" or "Anglophone" concept, as it is typically conceived, by inviting us to think of Latin America's involvement in the development of nineteenth-century antislavery narrative in "American" literature beyond the United States. Nicole Aljoe, in her introduction to *Journeys of the Slave Narrative in the Early Americas*, describes modern scholarly definitions of the slave narrative as "flexible and inclusive," citing how in 1985 Charles Davis and Henry Louis Gates Jr borrow Marion Wilson Starling's definition of slave narratives as the "'written and dictated testimonies of the

enslavement of black human beings”” (Aljoe and Finseth 3).²⁵ Under this broad definition, Starling compiled a bibliography of over 6,006 slave narratives from the United States and Great Britain (Aljoe and Finseth 3). The apparent relative scarcity of slave autobiographies in Latin America should not daunt us from thinking of the slave narrative as an Inter-American and Trans-Atlantic phenomenon involving Latin America’s reception and influence.

The slave narrative does not refer to a fixed genre, but rather to form of shorthand that contemporary critics assign *a posteriori* to texts whose themes and narrative strategies resemble each other when studied in comparison. The term slave narrative is anachronistic. Not even “classics” like *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* were published as “slave narratives.” Rather, in their times, they were published as “interesting” ones to engage the (white) reading public in antislavery ideology through compelling stories or “histories,” such as *The History of Mary Prince*. The “truthfulness” of such narratives and histories engaged in similar authenticating strategies, such as the endorsement of a white editor’s prefix and variations of the sub-title “written” (or related) in her / his “own words.” Throughout the nineteenth century these texts came to echo one other, but they also have significant differences among them, coming primarily from London before the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833 and the Northern United States before the American Civil War in 1865. For example, not all texts that are routinely categorized as “slave narratives” are “written by themselves.” While this phrase was “a crucial argument in the discourse of race and reason,” as Henry Louis Gates argues, slave narratives also have come to encompass oral narratives written by a second author, such as *Twelve Years a Slave*, written by David Wilson and based on Solomon Northup’s oral testimony (*The Classic Slave Narratives* xiii). In sum, the definitional boundaries of slave

²⁵ See *The Slave’s Narrative* (1985)

narrativity are mutable. They include not just “autobiographies” but also mediated texts, as well as texts beyond the United States as North American scholars have expanded their horizons.²⁶

Excluding Latin American texts from academic discussions about slave narratives obscures the ways in which Africans and their descendants—whether through writing or through speaking—did in fact represent slavery in Latin America from their perspectives in nineteenth-century literature.²⁷ “Slave narratives” from both Latin America and the Anglophone world dialogue with and build upon one another. Juan Francisco Manzano wrote an autobiographical narrative in response to a mandate from Domingo del Monte, who not only distributed the manuscript amongst his trusted inner circle, but also sent it to Anselmo Suárez y Romero. Suárez y Romero “corrected” and “copied” Manzano’s manuscript, possibly anticipating that it would be translated by Richard Robert Madden. Based on this copy, Madden wrote and published “Life of the Negro Poet, Written by Himself.” By serving as the urtext and source material to Madden’s rewritten “translation,” Manzano’s writing, and Suárez y Romero’s rewriting, illustrate the slave narrative as a bridge between the Anglo and Hispanic worlds. This bridge between the Anglo and Hispanic worlds ran both ways. On the one hand, it is plausible that Del Monte was aware of the English-Caribbean tradition of slave “histories” when he requested Manzano to one of his own. However, the text that Manzano wrote not only impacted Cuban literature and its incorporation of realist and antislavery elements. Through Madden’s participation in the 1840 World Antislavery Convention in London and the publication of “Life of the Negro Poet” in the same year, it is plausible that Manzano’s autobiographical text served as a kind of blueprint for subsequent slave narratives. Published just five years after Manzano’s,

²⁶ See Nicole Aljoe’s *Creole Testimonies* (2012), which analyzes “slave narratives” in a British West Indian context.

²⁷ “Although the narratives are mediatory in nature, it is important not to view these narratives as ‘corrupted and inferior forms,’ but rather to read them as Creole texts emblematic of the dialectical relationships of power in the slave system” (Aljoe, “Slave Narratives of the Caribbean and Latin America”).

such *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) was written under the direction of William Lloyd Garrison, who also attended the World Antislavery Convention with Madden and was aware of the “The Life of the Negro Poet.” In this way, the voice of the “Cuban slave poet” echoes not only throughout antislavery literature in Cuba but also North America.²⁸

Another two-way bridge between Anglo and Latin America may be found in *An Interesting Narrative. Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua*, written by Samuel Moore. Like *Autobiografía, Biography*, too, challenges the exclusion of Latin America from the slave narrative in two important ways. The text narrates Baquaqua’s experience in bondage outside of the Anglophone world (first his capture in West Africa and then slavery in Brazil). Baquaqua’s first-person narration is unique in that its subject is an African who was (illegally) captured in his homeland and sent across the Atlantic Ocean to the Brazilian empire. The text also draws attention to itself as a construction of multiple voices since it in fact has two narrators: not only Baquaqua but also the text’s author (or, to borrow a term from the *testimonio* genre, *gestor*), Samuel Moore. He begins the *Biography* by relating to the reader what Baquaqua had described to him about the “manners and customs” of his homeland. In the middle of the narrative, however, the narration shifts primarily from Moore’s to Baquaqua’s, in which the latter narrates his capture, difficult journey in the Middle Passage, and life in Brazil. Although filtered through Moore’s writing, *Biography* nevertheless involves Baquaqua’s “authorship” as well, since the text relies on both the information Baquaqua supplies and Moore’s interpretation of it. Baquaqua is therefore a precursor to the *testimonio* genre of Latin American writing since Baquaqua plays the role of the text’s *informante*, and Moore plays the role of the *gestor*. It is appropriate to

²⁸ I am indebted to William Luis’s direction for this key argument. He develops Manzano’s influence on *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in “Life and Works of the Enslaved Poet Juan Francisco Manzano” (unpublished manuscript).

compare *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* with the *testimonio*. Just as Robert Stepto calls the slave narrative an “umbrella term” for many types of narratives (3), Elzbieta Sklodowska describes the *testimonio* as a “término-paraguas que englobaba—pero en realidad encubría—las diversas ramificaciones de la narrativa no-ficticia” (1-2). *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* thus illustrates overlap between the slave narrative and *testimonio* genres. Its title even resembles Miguel Barnet and Esteban Montejo’s *Biografía de un cimarrón*, which I discuss in Chapter 2. There is evidence in the text and the surrounding context to suggest the possibility that Baquaqua’s alliance with the Free Baptist Mission society may have been merely a means to return home in Africa.

For these reasons, Baquaqua exercises authorship over the text, even though he did not literally write it. The collaboration and conflict over Baquaqua and Moore’s voices in of *Biography of Baquaqua*’s corroborate Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy’s assessment of it as “the only known Brazilian slave narrative” (4). John Maddox also remarks that “Brazil’s only slave narrative, the life of Mahommah Gardo Baquaquah [sic] (1824-1857)—who lived in Haiti, the United States, and Canada as well—was only translated into Portuguese in 2014,” but fragments of Baquaqua’s narrative have been translated into Portuguese since the 1980s (Hunold Lara 269). Through translations, republications, and even a play based on *Biography* in Brazil, interpretations and adaptions of the text have re-signified it as a Brazilian, despite the ways in which the original text reflects Moore’s argument that the United States must abolish slavery so that the nation might rightfully become a “messenger of mercy to the dark land of [Baquaqua’s] birth” (184). Such rhetoric has been suppressed in contemporary translations, interpretations, and adaptations of *Biography*, but recognizing its presence and role in shaping the text is fundamental to understanding not only the work itself, but also what Aljoe calls the “dialectical

relationships of power” at work in nineteenth-century antislavery discourse (“Slave Narratives of the Caribbean and Latin America”).

Beyond Manzano and Baquaqua’s personal testimonies, Maria Firmina dos Reis’s novel *Úrsula* shows that Afrodescendant women made significant contributions to the circulation of antislavery discourse in and outside of Latin America through the medium of literary narrative. Although published in 1859, it was all but forgotten until being “rediscovered” over a century later, by Horácio de Almeida. Since then, scholarship has based the novel’s significance principally on the author’s biography, calling it a foundational work of Afro-Brazilian literature and the first antislavery novel by an Afro-Brazilian woman. However, reading the novel strictly for what it is does not do justice to what the novel does. Just as Manzano’s *Autobiografía* and Baquaqua’s *Biography*, *Úrsula* transposes the oral world of enslaved Africans and their descendants into the Occidental world of writing through the form of the Romantic novel. Its antislavery stance—and the fact that it is expressed by the novel’s enslaved characters themselves—is significant within the literary history of Brazil and Latin America. Even more significant still is the way in which the novel creates solidarity amongst black and non-black people in Brazil by giving them a common enemy in Fernando, a plantation- and slave-owner who whose power turns him into a monster. His villainy comes from his treatment of everyone, regardless of race, as his subjects and his slaves.²⁹ Enraged by Úrsula’s rejection of his “louca paixão,” he not only murders his rival suitor Tancredo (who is white) and his servant Túlio (who is black), but also punishes “Preta Susana” (who is the title character Úrsula and her mother Luisa B.’s slave), for trying to protect them. All of Fernando’s victims, including the fair and innocent Úrsula herself, are testaments to the atrocities of the slave system and the destruction

²⁹ From the text, “O commendador estava afeito a mandar, e por isso julgava que todos eram seos súbditos ou seos escravos” (Dos Reis 232).

that it leaves in its path, despite Susana's testament to Úrsula and Luisa's kindness to her as her mistresses. In this way, the themes of love, tragedy, and horror in *Úrsula* serve as narrative strategies that do more than just portray its black characters sympathetically. The Gothic elements of Romantic fiction also serve to call readers to see the abolition of slavery as bound up with their own liberation from the evils of seignorial society that still haunt Imperial Brazil, especially the rural Northeast.

Úrsula's thematic complexity surpasses its critics' readings of the novel and places it in contact with the slave narrative genre. Its themes and motifs reflect similarities between Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was popular not only in the United States but also internationally around the time of *Úrsula*'s publication. Stowe herself wrote in letters to Frederick Douglass that his own slave narrative had had a profound impact on her writing. Both novels' supplications to readers to see black people as their brothers and equals and slavery as an affront to Christianity. Their depictions of black suffering merit comparisons with not only slave narratives like Douglass's but also Manzano's and Baquaqua's. Moreover, Manzano's narrative had an indirect influence on Douglass's vis-à-vis William Lloyd Garrison, who had participated in the World Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840 in London. This means that Manzano's *Autobiografía* therefore also had an indirect influence on *Úrsula*. Just like Manzano and Baquaqua's narratives, Maria Firmina dos Reis's works are often read as the product of black experience, but they also illustrate Afrodescendant authors' participation in an international, multi-lingual, and trans-genre dialogue that shaped antislavery discourse in the nineteenth century. Despite their important differences, *Autobiografía*, *Biography*, and *Úrsula* represent some of the most sophisticated representations of slavery in Latin America. Their authors

contributed to a vast network of antislavery discourse that transcends national and linguistic borders that encompasses the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking worlds.

I. The Only Extant Slave Narrative in Spanish America? Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía*

Autobiografía, by Juan Francisco Manzano (1797-1853), is known as the “only extant slave narrative in Spanish America” (Boutelle, “The Most Perfect Picture of Cuban Slavery” 528).³⁰ This sort of declaration is made under the basic assumption that slave narratives are a type of autobiography, but scholars of slave narratives distinguish the two genres. In his book *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*, Robert Stepto argues that “Slave narratives are full of other voices which are frequently just as responsible for articulating a narrative’s tale and strategy... Their primary function is, of course, to authenticate the former slave’s account; in doing so, they are at least partly responsible for the narrative’s acceptance as historical evidence” (Stepto 3). In other words, slave narratives definitionally involve white editors who played the role of authenticating black people’s written and spoken accounts of slavery. *Autobiografía* reflects Stepto’s definition of slave narratives because even the original manuscript contains many voices—not only Manzano’s, but also the authors who influenced, mandated, edited, copied, and rewrote it. In other words, *Autobiografía* is not one text but many texts, reflecting the work of not one author but many authors. There are many extant slave narratives in Hispanic America, if only through the many versions of *Autobiografía*.³¹

³⁰ There are many similar declarations in academic scholarship. Richard Jackson calls *Autobiografía* “really the only slave autobiography we have in Latin America” (*Black Writers in Latin America: Cross Cultural Affinities* 132). The modernized Spanish version by Ivan Schulman refers to *Autobiography of a Slave* “the only known autobiographical account of Latin American slavery” (Manzano).

³¹ The “original” handwritten manuscript (with Anselmo Suárez y Romero’s markings) is located at the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí in Havana, and a copy of Suárez y Romero’s version (by Nicolás Azcárate) is in the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University (Luis, *Autobiografía* 11).

Manzano's letters to Domingo del Monte throughout his process of writing the manuscript illuminate the reasons he wrote it in the first place. Del Monte had mandated an autobiographical narrative in which Manzano was to highlight episodes of his life that reflected the brutal conditions of slavery in Cuba. Despite the difficulty of the assignment, Manzano wrote a handwritten manuscript in 1835, the same year that Del Monte had requested it. Since Manzano was an auto-didact, the original manuscript contains spelling errors and no paragraph breaks. Manzano's writing thus represents a stream-of-consciousness style more closely related to oral language than the norms of written language (Luis, *Autobiografía* 33). In 1839, Anselmo Suárez y Romero "corrected" the original manuscript (Luis, *Autobiografía* 75). Even the "original" manuscript thus bears Suárez y Romero's markings. In addition to writing over Manzano's manuscript, Suárez y Romero also produced a rewritten copy of it in 1839. Richard Robert Madden took Suárez y Romero's copy to England and translated it in English (Luis, *Autobiografía* 46) under the title "Life of the Negro Poet, Written by Himself. And translated from the Spanish by R. R. M." (1840).³² The year of publication of Madden's version is important because it is the same year that the World Antislavery Convention was held in London. There, Madden presented his learnings in Cuba as evidence that slavery in Cuba was "as elsewhere, a destructive and atrocious system in every respect" (251).³³ Between these words in *Proceedings of the General Anti-slavery Convention* and Madden's own words in *Poems by a Slave in the Island of Cuba*, we might conclude that Manzano's manuscript was not only meant

³² Also see Mullen, *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave*. "Life of the Negro Poet, Written by Himself" is a section of Madden's complete text, whose full title is *Poems by a Slave in the Island of Cuba, Recently Liberated; Translated from the Spanish, by R. R. Madden, M.D. With the History of the Early life of the Negro Poet, Written by Himself; to Which are Prefixed Two Pieces Descriptive of Cuban Slavery and the Slave-Traffic, by R. R. M.* (Mullen 35)

³³ These words are credited to John Sturge in response to Madden's "Cuban Slavery" (qtd. in Madden 251).

to circulate amongst members of Del Monte's *tertulia* in Cuba but also serve the international abolitionist movement, whose main seat of power was located in England's capital.

The *Proceedings* show that one of the convention's goals was to combat the idea of a "mild" form of slavery in Cuba and Brazil that had served as a basis to justify and uphold the continuation of slavery in present-day Latin America. It also shows that, in addition to moral and religious interests, England's economic interests in condemning slavery outside its imperial borders were to control the prices of sugar—which, after the Haitian Revolution, was being produced primarily in Cuba and Brazil—so that its own colonies could compete. Sugar produced by slave labor was cheaper than sugar produced in the British West Indies. When Manzano wrote a version of his life's story centered on the misfortunes he suffered, he was therefore not only responding to Del Monte's mandate, but also serving Madden's to create a "perfect picture of Cuban slavery," that would be regarded as irrefutably true since it was "written by" no one other than a former slave (qtd. in Mullen 37). In its "corrected" form, Madden's *Poems by a Slave in the Island of Cuba* testified not only to the brutality of Cuban slavery, but also, in Madden's words, to "vindicate the character of negro intellect" and show that "the blessings of education and good government are only wanting to make the natives of Africa, intellectually and morally, equal to the people of any nation on the surface of the globe" (qtd. in Mullen 37). To accomplish this to an implied English audience, Madden needed to present a polished and therefore significantly edited version of Manzano's original writing. To have represented Manzano's manuscript faithfully would have been to undermine Madden's design for it. Madden's *Poems* responded to the objective of the convention to provide evidence of the brutality of slavery in the overseas colonies of Spain and in the Western Hemisphere beyond the Anglophone World

(Madden 238-9). *Poems by a Slave in the Island of Cuba* therefore represents all those still enslaved in not only Cuba but the Americas at large.

The ways in which Manzano's manuscript changed over time and overseas helps us to think of slave narratives as an Inter-American and Trans-Atlantic construction that both influenced and was influenced by Manzano's writing. In other words, *Autobiografía* not only challenges the idea of the slave narrative as an "Anglo" or "North American" genre but also reinforces the concept of the slave narrative as distinct from autobiography because of the multiple voices contained in its many versions. Just as many voices are present within *Autobiografía*, Manzano's voice echoes out throughout Cuban literature. Manzano's manuscript directly impacted its readers in Del Monte's literary circle and thus shaped the idea of a Cuban national literature that grew from it. Novels such as Suárez y Romero's *Francisco* (written in 1839) are more directly (and obviously) inspired by Juan "Francisco" Manzano, but *Autobiografía*'s influence extends beyond early nineteenth-century Cuba. The very idea of Cuban literature and the international Latin American *testimonio* genre share roots in *Autobiografía* and the antislavery literary movement to which it contributed during the 1830s.³⁴ Madden's translation contributed to the reification of the slave narrative tradition in the English-speaking world. Through the World Antislavery Convention, "Life of the Negro Poet, Written by Himself" had contact with influential US abolitionists in attendance such as William Lloyd Wright, who mandated that Frederick Douglass write a narrative like Manzano's.³⁵ These US slave narratives, in turn, influenced antislavery novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, whose international success impacted Latin America through the press³⁶ and perhaps helped to inspire

³⁴ See William Luis's *Literary Bondage* (1990).

³⁵ See Luis's "Life and Works of the Enslaved Poet Juan Francisco Manzano" (unpublished manuscript).

³⁶ See Celso Castilho's The Press and Brazilian Narratives of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: Slavery and the Public Sphere in Rio de Janeiro, ca. 1855 (2019).

antislavery novels like *Úrsula*. In this way, *Autobiografía*'s influence makes a wide round trip, from Latin America to England, and to North America and back.

Despite all the expansive, overlapping, and complex interests that produced and “multiplied” Manzano’s text, it also expresses Manzano’s personal mandate to write it in exchange for his freedom, which Del Monte and his literary circle and friends helped purchase in 1836. *Autobiografía* itself reflects the agency of the writer through the way in which Manzano ultimately used it to the end of “authoring” his own freedom. Manzano’s autobiographical narrative document is therefore one of the most important, sophisticated, and influential of the nineteenth century or any century, both in and outside of Cuba. However, Manzano is an author of more than just his personal experiences under slavery. *Autobiografía* describes Manzano’s process of teaching himself to write by copying poems by the Spanish Romantic poet Juan Bautista Arriaza. In the manuscript, Manzano writes that Arriaza’s poetry, with its contrasts between elation and the depths of despair, resonated with the story of his own life: “la poesia en todos los tramites de mi vida me suministraba versos analogos a mi situasion ya prozpera ya adversa” (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 326). In other words, through the sweeping heights and plummeting depths of Romantic feeling and writing, Manzano had found a language apt for expressing “every aspect of his life,” as well as an escape from the horrors of daily life under slavery through poetry. Freedom and captivity are themes that appear and reappear in his verses and even five act tragic play, *Zafira* (1842). Just two years later, in 1844, Manzano was accused of having participated in the Ladder Conspiracy³⁷ and imprisoned for one year, never publishing again. Although free again, in other words, Manzano was rendered as silent as he had been

³⁷ The “Conspiracy of the Ladder” refers to Cuba’s repression of Blacks due to a conspiracy that they would rebel. Both Manzano and Madden were accused of participating in the conspiracy by another Cuban poet of color, Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés, better known as Plácido. (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 76).

before teaching himself to read and write in his young adulthood. Nevertheless, his poetry continues to be an important part of his antislavery legacy and deserves our attention. Juan Francisco Manzano is best known for his personal narrative but is first and foremost a poet.³⁸

Autobiografía's Poetic Precedents

Over a decade before completing the manuscript narrating his life in 1835, he published poems in Havana papers such as *Diario de la Habana* and *Aguinaldo Habanero*,³⁹ as well as two books of poems entitled *Poesías líricas*, in 1821, and *Flores pasageras* [sic], in 1830. Although no copy of the latter has yet been found, several poems copied in Nicolás Azcárate's notebook were published in *Flores pasageras* (Luis, *Autobiografía* 75).⁴⁰ At a basic level, Manzano's poems are crucial in the timeline of *Autobiografía*'s realization because they gave him status as a well-known poet in Cuba and eventually, toward 1830, led to he and Domingo del Monte's meeting.⁴¹ As someone who was both able to write and was familiar with slavery through having lived it firsthand, Manzano would have been the perfect candidate to take on the project of writing an autobiographical narrative—regardless of the ambivalence Manzano shows to have felt about the matter in his letters to Del Monte.⁴²

³⁸ The following section is indebted to William Luis's Spring 2017 graduate seminar on the Life and Works of the Enslaved Poet Juan Francisco Manzano. Luis's unpublished manuscript entitled "Life and Works of the Enslaved Poet Juan Francisco Manzano" contains a chapter in which he compares Arriaza's "El pescador" and Manzano's "El hortelano." He also reconstructs the content of *Flores pasageras* in the same chapter. Any similarities that may appear between Luis's unpublished manuscript and this dissertation are coincidental. The primary source of my research is Luis's *Autobiografía del esclavo poeta y otros escritos* (2007).

³⁹ For a complete list, see Luis, *Autobiografía del esclavo poeta*: "Diario de la Habana (1830,1831, 1838, 1841), *El Diario de Matanzas* (1830), *La Moda o Recreo Semanal del Bello Sexo* (1831) y *El Pasatiempo* (1834-1835), y años después, tras conseguir la libertad, en *El Aguinaldo Habanero* (1837), *El Álbum* (1838), *Faro Industrial de la Habana* (1834, 1849) y *La Prensa* (1842) (14).

⁴⁰ "Publica *Flores pasageras* [sic], del cual no se ha encontrado un ejemplar" (Luis, *Autobiografía* 75).

⁴¹ "Para esta fecha conocía a Domingo del Monte" (Luis, *Autobiografía* 75).

⁴² See "Cartas" in Luis, *Autobiografía* (119-129).

Juan Francisco Manzano learned to write while he was enslaved by Nicolás de Cárdenas y Manzano, who suggested that he pursue a pastime corresponding to his “class” like sewing (Luis, *Autobiografía* 326).⁴³ Only some of Manzano’s poems are explicitly about slavery, but all of them represent a counter-discourse to white supremacy. According to Henry Louis Gates, the mere facts of black writing and authorship contradicted nineteenth-century justifications of slavery based on the myth of black people’s supposedly “natural intellectual inferiority”:

the mastery of literacy signified a measure of metaphysical freedom in the realm of the slave, willfully kept illiterate by the masters and their laws, laws that were enacted to perpetuate the myth that persons of African descent were either not actually human beings or were human beings fundamentally different or inferior to their kinds of human beings, destined by nature to be enslaved, in perpetuity. (Gates, *Classic Slave Narratives* xii)

Manzano’s poetry therefore offers one approach to including Manzano within a greater conversation surrounding slave narratives in the Anglophone world. Like Manzano’s autobiographical narrative, many of his poems experienced “textual multiplications” through the many different editions, publications, and re-publications they went through (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 82). Stylistic and mechanical differences aside, the poems generally reflect the style of Romanticism popular at the time in both their form and content. The idyllic poem “El hortelano” indicates that it is an “imitación de Arriaza” (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 138). However, “El hortelano” is not just a mere imitation of Arriaza, but rather more specifically a rewriting of the poem “La impresión primera o el pescador” from Manzano’s own perspective. Manzano borrows

⁴³ mi señor p^r. los q^e. beian desde las sinco con mi tren de escritura q^e. yo pasaba todo el tiempo embrollando con mis papeles no pocas veces me sorprendió en la punta de una mesa q^e. abia en un rincon imponiendo dejase aquel entretenimiento como nada correspondiente a [] mi clase q^e. buscarse q^e. coser (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 326).

several elements from Arriaza. In form, both “El pescador” and “El hortelano” are composed of ten octosyllabic quatrains in consonant rhyme.⁴⁴ In content, “El hortelano” changes the setting of “El pescador” from the sea to the garden, the subject from the fisherman to the gardener, and the beloved from “la bella Silvia” to “la linda Lesbia.” Just as Arriaza’s fisherman repeats “mi Tesoro es mi barquilla, mis redes sólo mi amor,” Manzano’s gardener addresses his carnations as his pleasure and the rose as his only love: “que es mi delicia el clavel / la rosa solo mi amor” (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 138). Manzano’s gardener remains faithful to his garden until “la linda Lesbia” passes through it. Challenged by the intruder’s beauty, the “pobrecillo hortelano” says to her that she will never hear her song in his “*rabel*” (a medieval Spanish instrument) but, looking into her eyes, then says goodbye to his garden for good: ““A Dios rosa, adios mi flor / a Dios, Lozano clavel / que hallo solo en el vergel / dulces preceptos de amor”” (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 140). Through “El hortelano,” we get a glimpse into the learning process that his autobiographical manuscript describes.

Manzano did not merely copy Arriaza’s poems but rewrote them using imagery, experiences, and feelings familiar to the poet. The adaptation of classic poems is not derivative but rather a rich tradition with prominent precedents in the Hispanic and Lusophone worlds. Just as Luís de Góngora wrote sonnets revising Garcilaso de la Vega, and in turn Gregório Matos rewrote poems by Góngora, Manzano participates in this tradition of not merely imitating but adapting and learning from the masters. For example, Manzano’s “El hortelano” is no more derivative of Arriaza’s “El pescador” than Matos’s “A Maria de Povos, sua futura esposa” is derivative of Góngora’s “Ilustre y hermosísima María,” or Góngora’s “Mientras por competir

⁴⁴ Or “romances octosílabos con rima abrazada y consonante” (Luis, *Autobiografía* 61).

“con tu cabello” is derivative of Garcilaso de la Vega’s “En tanto que de rosa y Azucena.”⁴⁵

Perhaps the most noteworthy change from “El pescador” to “El hortelano” is the way in which Manzano uses captivity—a condition with which Manzano was all-too-familiar—as an expression for the feeling of love. As William Luis notes, “El hortelano” probably reflects autobiographical aspects of Manzano’s life, such as “La linda Lesbia,” possibly representing Marcelina Campos (Luis, *Autobiografía* 75). Furthermore, the poem makes use of the condition of slavery as an expression of love: “Cuando alguna flor lozana / amortigua el sol, yo digo: / tal hiciera amor conmigo / en su esclavitud tirana” (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 139). In these important stanzas, the poem draws attention to the way in which Manzano not merely copies but rather appropriates Arriaza and Spanish Romanticism’s themes of love and nature as expressions of his own condition as a “slave to love.” Although he (initially) declares that he shall never suffer the same cruel fate as the flower, which has been “enslaved” by its love for the sun,⁴⁶ the poem concludes, ironically, that this is precisely what happens when Lesbia passes through his garden. The poem itself makes no such direct correlation between Manzano and his literal condition of bondage, but rather uses slavery as a strong metaphor for love, which Manzano calls “esclavitud tirana” to illustrate its all-consuming and domineering power. This powerful reflects the all-consuming and domineering power of not only love but also slavery itself.

Further themes of flight, love, and nature populate Manzano’s poems, illustrating his wide poetic expression despite his limited resources and formal education as a renegade autodidact. Manzano’s poems use the language, devices, and conventions of Spanish

⁴⁵ For an analysis of how Gregório de Matos borrowed from Luís de Góngora, see David Haberly’s “Colonial Brazilian Literature” (56). For an analysis of the ways in which Góngora’s “Mientras por competir con tu cabello” borrows from and revises Garcilaso de la Vega’s “En tanto que de rosa y Azucena,” see Mary Malcolm Gaylord’s “The Making of Baroque Poetry” (231).

⁴⁶ “Pero jamás de su ardor / sufriré el destino cruel / que mi delicia el clavel / la rosa solo mi amor” (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 139).

Romanticism to give voice to feelings of sadness (“Una hora de tristeza”),⁴⁷ and desperation (“Desesperación”),⁴⁸ as well as a form of escape through music (“La Música”),⁴⁹ beauty (“La Rosa”),⁵⁰ and dreams of flight (“Un sueño”).⁵¹ These themes applied to the context of his life are not politically neutral but rather take an antislavery stance. Some of his poems deal more explicitly with antislavery themes than others. The poem “La esclava ausente,” represents a discussion in which an enslaved woman condemns her captor’s subjugation, crying out, “¡Dueño duro inhumano, hombre terrible! / ¿Por qué a tan triste suerte me condenas?” (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 171). After their meeting toward 1830, Domingo del Monte encouraged this bolder side of Manzano’s antislavery poetry, which may be seen in “Treinta años,” a poem that Manzano read as an invited guest to Del Monte’s literary *tertulia* in 1836. In the poem, Manzano reflects that the “terror” of his past under slavery pales in comparison to what lies ahead (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 137). Although presented in 1836, Manzano wrote the poem even before he met Del Monte, since he would have been nearly forty years old then. In any case, the poem may have been sufficient to move those in attendance to pitch in and purchase Manzano’s freedom.⁵² Although therefore serving to free Manzano, his presentation of “Treinta años” also illustrates Del Monte’s interests in promoting a proto-national literature that would give voice to those still in bondage in the Spanish colony of Cuba.

The impact of Del Monte’s literary project may also be seen in Manzano’s only published play, *Zafira* (1842), which is closely based on an anonymous Spanish play by the same name and with a similar plot. However, one important addition in Manzano’s version is the character of

⁴⁷ Luis, *Autobiografía* (162).

⁴⁸ Luis, *Autobiografía* (152).

⁴⁹ Luis, *Autobiografía* (155).

⁵⁰ Luis, *Autobiografía* (153).

⁵¹ Luis, *Autobiografía* (144).

⁵² For a list of contributors, see Luis, *Autobiografía* (341-2).

Noemí, a “eunuco negro” who serves the Arab princess and prince Zafira and Selim, and who stands out for his noble and selfless character, despite his status as a slave. Like “El hortelano,” *Zafira* should not be read as a mere copy but rather a rewriting of the original on which it is based. The addition of Noemí is a significant one because it represents part of a greater literary project of antislavery narrative in Cuba led by Domingo del Monte. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Cuba was Spain’s most profitable overseas colony. After the Haitian Revolution, Cuba filled the void in sugar production and was able to produce it at low costs by exploiting enslaved labor. Del Monte’s project of representing black people sympathetically was therefore both anti-colonial and anti-slavery. As a literate slave, Manzano was an ideal candidate to be the voice of the oppressed in Cuba. Manzano’s entire oeuvre reflects Del Monte’s vision for a distinctly Cuban literature that championed freedom for the enslaved, but *Autobiografía* stands out for responding directly to Del Monte’s request for a slave’s personal history.

Manzano’s *Autobiografía* and Authorship

Manzano wrote his autobiographical narrative in the same year that Domingo del Monte requested it, in 1835. Manzano is therefore the author, but the nature of Del Monte’s request had a profound impact on the text itself. Manzano wrote *Autobiografía* with Del Monte as his implicit reader to satisfy his assignment to write a “historia” of his life that would highlight the ways in which he had suffered under slavery. *Autobiografía* thus reflects a question at the heart of current academic debates over the authorship of nineteenth century slave narratives: given the power that Del Monte held in his relationship with Manzano, “whose text” does it really represent? Anselmo Suárez y Romero’s and Richard Robert Madden’s versions of Manzano’s autobiographical narrative change the order of events represented in the original manuscript,

downplay Manzano's spontaneous moments of happiness, and heighten the narrative's sense of injustice. William Luis's *Literary Bondage* observes that "the Spanish and the English versions differ":

The original narrates a lost coin in which the marquesa de Prado Ameno accuses Manzano of stealing. Manzano claims that the coin was given to him by his master, don Nicolás, who is unable to recognize it as his. If this unfortunate event can be misconstrued as a possible Manzano lie, the translation clearly heightens the unjust punishment of a slave. It narrates not the coin incident but the more brutal punishment Manzano receives for having taken a geranium plant leaf. (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 95)

Sylvia Molloy's article "From Serf to Self: The Autobiography of Juan Francisco Manzano" (1989), also published as a chapter in *At Face Value: Autobiographical Writing in Spanish America* (1991), borrows from Luis's analysis of differences between versions of *Autobiografía*. She argues that the purpose of these textual manipulations is to foreground Manzano's victimhood over his personhood, to simplify Manzano's complex self-representation, and to turn his writing into "the exemplary story of the 'Cuban slave'" (Molloy, "From Serf to Self" 407). However, Manzano is not merely an "exemplary slave" but an extraordinary author whose work was shaped by his benefactors but ultimately reflects an exceptional literary voice.

The person in Manzano's life who had the most profound influence on his autobiographical narrative is Domingo del Monte (1804-1853). Writing years later from exile in 1845, he reflects in his essay "Dos poetas negros: Plácido y Manzano" that he prefers the poetry the latter over the former. While Plácido's verses perhaps reflect a greater technical superiority, Del Monte writes, Manzano's poetry reflects a deeper sense of humanity and better represents the voices of the oppressed in Cuba. Del Monte's reflections might seem strange given that

Manzano's poetry represents, not only "el lamento arrancado del corazón del oprimido," but also the highly stylized conventions of Spanish Romanticism that Del Monte wished to leave behind in favor of realism (85). In any case, it was Del Monte's antislavery "aesthetic and philosophy" behind the special task that he had assigned to Manzano, the level of which the (then) enslaved poet had never confronted. Del Monte requested that Manzano write an autobiographical account of detailing the misfortunes of his life. The ensuing narrative that has come to be known simply as *Autobiografía* would contribute to Del Monte's young literary movement, reflecting his vision of a burgeoning Cuban literature founded upon a realist aesthetic and antislavery ideology.

Manzano used this opportunity to the end of personal liberation from slavery. However, his letters, and the text itself, show that freedom came at a high personal cost for the poet. He wrote letter correspondences to Del Monte in 1834 in which he expresses affection for and servility toward Del Monte, as well as an interest in bargaining for his freedom.⁵³ These letters were recovered and copied—with apparently significant alterations to grammar, structure, and spelling—in a notebook written in 1852 by Nicolás Azcárate. In the letter to Domingo del Monte dated June 25, 1835, Juan Francisco Manzano gives evidence that Del Monte had himself requested that Manzano write an autobiographical narrative. He begins the letter, "Mi querido y Sr. Don Domingo: recibí la apreciable de su merced, fecha 15 del corriente, y sorprendido de que en ella me dice su merced que hace tres o cuatro meses me pidió la historia" (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 125). In addition to the mere fact that Del Monte had personally requested Manzano's "historia," Manzano attests to the difficulties that he faced in writing it:

⁵³ See Manzano's letters to Del Monte in Luis, *Autobiografía*: "Habana 16 de Octubre de 1834: Esperanzas y lamentaciones unas: motive por qué me iba resfriando en el trato de las musas otras: como se me ofreció la coyuntura de ganar mi libertad y como se desvaneció todo, en otra: y de este modo una relación de cómo vivo desengañado de algunas felices ideas que me hicieron respirar tranquilo algunos días: pero visto después con esto sólo lograría excitar la sensibilidad del hombre en quien no he advertido la menor variedad, desistí de enviárselas a su merced..." (120-1).

no puedo menos de manifestarle que no he tenido tal aviso con tanta precipitación; pues en el día mismo que recibí la del 22 me puse a recorrer el espacio que llena la carrera de mi vida y cuando pude me puse a escribir, creyendo que me bastaría un real de papel, pero teniendo ya escrito algo más aunque saltando a veces por cuatro y aun por cinco años, no he llegado todavía a 1820: pero espero concluir pronto, ciñéndome únicamente a los sucesos más interesantes. (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 125)

In other words, Manzano's task of writing his own life had gotten away from him. Whereas he had intended to write a short document, he ended up writing much more. When Manzano writes that he has tried to focus strictly to the "most interesting events" of his life, to which might he be referring? The remainder of the letter makes it clear that Domingo del Monte was most interested in receiving a personal narrative primarily detailing Manzano's suffering under slavery.

Manzano attests to the task being so personally taxing that he had nearly given up on several occasions: "He estado más de cuatro ocasiones por no seguirla. Un cuadro de tantas calamidades no parece sino un abultado protocolo de embusterías; y más cuando desde tan tierna edad, los crueles azotes me hacían conocer mi humilde condición" (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 125).

Despite Manzano's preoccupation that Del Monte might view his manuscript as nothing more than a bulk of lies for having suffered so greatly and so often under the lash of slavery, it was precisely Manzano's descriptions of his suffering that Del Monte was after.

Manzano's letters to Del Monte are echoed by Harriet Jacobs's decades after. Their similarities show that, during the nineteenth century, it was not unusual for white antislavery advocates to solicit personal narratives from literate black people who were or had been enslaved. Likewise, it was also not unusual for black authors to express less enthusiasm for exposing their trauma in a book than their well-meaning counterparts. *Incidents in the Life of a*

Slave Girl that it was the abolitionist movement that not only shaped her narrative but urged her to write it in the first place. In the “Preface by the Author,” Jacobs writes that “When I first arrived in Philadelphia, Bishop Paine advised me to publish a sketch of my life,” even though she admits to her own apprehension with regards to undertaking the task. Whereas she writes that the reason for her apprehension is that she believed herself to be “altogether incompetent for such an undertaking,” she also continues that “it would have been more pleasant to me to have been silent about my own history” (qtd in Gates, *The Classic Slave Narratives* 407). In other words, Jacobs suggests that she resisted writing *Incidents* not because of its intellectual but emotional difficulty. Further evidence shows that she was beset by many people, including friends, who pressured her into lending her voice to the cause, despite the toll such a task may take on her personal safety and well-being. One such friend, Amy Post, author of the “Appendix,” attests to her role in *Incidents*’s realization:

I repeatedly urged her to consent to the publication of her narrative; for I felt that it would arouse people to a more earnest work for the disentailment of millions still remaining in that soul-crushing condition, which was so unendurable to her. But her sensitive spirit shrank from publicity. She said, ‘You know a woman can whisper her cruel wrongs in the ear of a dear friend much easier than she can record them for the world to read.’ Even in talking with me, she wept so much, and seemed to suffer such mental agony, that I felt her story was too sacred to be drawn from her by inquisitive questions, and I left her free to tell as much, or as little, as she chose. Still, I urged upon her the duty of publishing her experience, for the sake of the good it might do; and, at last, she undertook the task.
(qtd. in Jacobs 616)

A picture of a conflicted Jacobs emerges from her preface and Post's appendix, one in which Jacobs struggles to publish the intimate (and, during the nineteenth-century, taboo) details of her suffering, not because of any sort of personal "incompetence," but because doing so would mean reliving the trauma of slavery and the psychological, physical, and sexual abuses to which it subjected her. Jacobs changes the names of people in her book and adopts a pseudonym, Linda Brent, to avoid becoming an object of public commentary and criticism.

Harriet Jacob's letters echo Manzano's, thereby illustrating a common pattern between slave narratives across the Americas. Beyond Manzano's letters, the manuscript itself reflect the difficulties Manzano faced writing the document. *The Slave's Narrative* (1985), edited by Charles Davis and Henry Louis Gates, shows that Manzano has long been discussed within the context of "American" slave narratives, even if these discussions usually highlight the ways in which *Autobiografía* does not so much "fit in" as much as it stands out. Susan Willis's chapter entitled "Crushed Geraniums: Juan Francisco Manzano and the Language of Slavery" attributes *Autobiografía*'s apparent "ignorance of form," "breakdown at the level of the paragraph," and "flagrant disregard for sentence punctuation" to the supposed lack of a defined audience (204). Analyzing the passage in which Manzano is punished by being locked up alone in a coal pit at twelve years old, Willis argues that "The words tumbling out in a rush, these lines, while written some twenty years later, bear the stamp of fresh experience as if they were spoken by the young Manzano only moments after being removed from the pit and allowed to seek comfort in his mother's waiting arms" (206). In other words, the broken and fragmented narration itself attests to the ways in which the enslaved are broken down and fragmentated:

The lack of sentence divisions gives the narrative a hurried and unreflected appearance as if the narrator wanted to say everything at once — the rats, the ghosts, the damp, the

darkness, the stench, the people who might have helped him, and those who intensified his suffering — all are given in the form of narrative raw material, which another, more literary hand, might have transformed into a coherent narration. It is this disregard for literary convention, the result of the narrator's separation from an audience, which differentiates Manzano's narration from the North American slave narratives. (Willis 206)

Whereas *Autobiografía* does demonstrate a non-normative paragraph and sentence structure, Manzano's letters show that he had a concrete implicit reader in mind, Domingo del Monte. *Autobiografía*'s narration therefore cannot be said to be "the result of the narrator's separation from an audience," as Willis argues. Rather, the narration's oral and stream-of-consciousness qualities are the fruit of Manzano's struggle to meet Del Monte's expectations for him to convert a lifetime of unprocessed memories and traumas into a coherent narrative. Del Monte's influence over *Autobiografía* therefore might upset the inclination to think of *Autobiografía* as distinct from "the North American slave narratives." The difficulty that Manzano faced in writing his narrative is like the difficulty Harriet Jacobs also did later in writing *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Both authors' letters and the narratives themselves illustrate the similarly difficult task of writing a slave narrative from an emotional and psychological standpoint.

William Luis's recreation of Manzano's handwritten manuscript in *Autobiografía del esclavo poeta y otros escritos* furthers invite us to think of the similarities between *Autobiografía* and "North American" slave narratives. As opposed to José L. Franco's 1937 version, which Willis analyzes, Luis's version of Manzano's manuscript attests to Manzano's painstaking process of learning to read and write. Both Franco's and Luis's versions show that Manzano achieved literacy by himself in Nicolás de Cárdenas y Manzano's study, spending his nights

copying his captor's handwriting and Arriaza's verses. However, Luis's *Autobiografía y otros escritos* includes an appendix with a transcription of the handwritten manuscript that more faithfully represents Manzano's writing because it does not include Suárez y Romero's corrections as if they were Manzano's own writing. The appendix also includes a photo scan of Manzano's manuscript that reveals Manzano's refined and elegant handwriting. Manzano learned to write by copying Nicolás Cárdenas y Manzano's handwriting despite his discouragement:

tomaba sus libros de retorica me ponía mi lección de memoria la aprendía como el papagallo y ya creía yo q^e. sabía algo pero conosía el poco fruto q^e. sacaba de aquello pues nunca abia ocasión de aser uso de ello, entones determine darme otro mas util q^e. fue el de aprender a escribir este fue otro apuro no sabía como empesar no sabía cortar pluma y me guardaría de tomar ninguna de las de mi señor sin embargo compre mi taja pluma y plumas compre papel muy fino y con algun pedaso de los q^e. mi señor botaba de papel escrito de su letra lo [] metía entre llana con el fin de acostumbrar el pulso a formar letras iba siguiendo la forma q^e. de la q^e. tenía debajo con esta imbecilidad antes de un mes ya asía renglones logrando la forma de letra de mi señor causa p^r. q^e. hay cierta identidad entre su letra y la mia contentísimo con mi logrado intent me pasaba desde las cinco hasta las diez ejercitando la mano. (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 326)

Passages like these in which *Autobiografía* describes Manzano's auto-didactic process describe Manzano's initiation into the world of letters. They also reflect just how limited Manzano's education was and, therefore, how great his effort must have been in producing the manuscript. Scenes in which Manzano describes how he learned to read and write, despite the will of others, places *Autobiografía* in communion with canonical slave narratives like Frederick Douglass's

and Harriet Jacobs's. Like both Douglass's and Jacobs's narratives, Manzano's was not one that he would have selected to have written unprompted, but rather through the encouragement of an antislavery advocate—in this case the eminent literary figure Domingo del Monte. The specificity of Del Monte's request for the “historia” of Manzano's life shaped the handwritten manuscript later known through subsequent publications simply as *Autobiografía*. His autobiographical narrative itself gives evidence that Manzano was writing in response to Del Monte's request in self-referential moments such as when he writes, “sería osioso pintar cual andaría yo entre la tropa de nietos de mi señora” (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 300), rewritten in Madden's version as, “It would be tedious to detail the particulars of my childhood” (qtd. in Mullen 81). What interested Del Monte, Suárez y Romero, and Madden were episodes in Manzano's life that would serve as counterarguments to slavery in Cuba. Manzano begins his narrative with “una serie de felicidades” during his early life, but he also demonstrates awareness that this is not the object of his narrative. In one early paragraph, he brushes over moments of happiness as “p^r menores” and concludes the paragraph abruptly (“pero pase”). In the next page, the narrative shifts dramatically when at twelve years old he begins to suffer terrible abuse under the Marquesa de Prado Ameno (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 301, 302).

Manzano, like any other writer, had many influences. Del Monte was not Manzano's only influence, but his “original” manuscript was most shaped by Del Monte's assignment and letter correspondence. Indeed, were it not for his request, *Autobiografía* would not exist at all. This is a common element of slave narratives. In addition to *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, another example written after Manzano's is *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845). In his preface to Douglass's narrative, abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison writes that he convinced Douglass to lend his voice to the antislavery cause. When Douglass acquiesced despite

apprehension, Douglass wrote that he “has very properly chosen to write his own Narrative” (305). In her article entitled “Canonicity, Genre, and the Politics of Editing: How We Read Frederick Douglass,” Rachel Blumenthal observes that Garrison’s attempt to control and co-opt Douglass’s narrative led to their falling-out. Douglass’s autobiography after *The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass* condemns Garrison for leaving him in charge of the “facts” but taking credit for “the philosophy.” Blumenthal thus argues that “we should see slave narratives as not just reflections of the author but also as part of the abolitionist project that guided their writing” (178). Just as Douglass’s first book is “in part a product of William Lloyd Garrison,” *Autobiografía* is in part a product of Domingo de Del Monte. However, Del Monte is not the only voice present in *Autobiografía*. Arriaza’s poetry nourished the poet’s diction and sensibility, and Manzano’s handwriting reflects that of educated elites like Nicolás de Cárdenas y Manzano. Anselmo Suárez y Romero and Richard Robert Madden also played a role in shaping the text.

Multiple Mandates: Del Monte, Suárez y Romero, and Madden

Further editions of *Autobiografía* reflect the voices of even more “authors.” In addition to reflecting Del Monte’s guidance, Manzano’s handwritten manuscript bears the literal marks made by Anselmo Suárez y Romero. While the original manuscript contains Del Monte’s voice through his direction of the manuscript, Suárez y Romero’s “corrections” might be read as the physical manifestation of the document’s alterations. Even the “original” manuscript therefore represents an altered and mediated text. In addition to marking the manuscript, Suárez y Romero also wrote a “copy” of it. He did not copy Manzano’s word for word or even paragraph for paragraph, but rather rearranged the order in which Manzano presented the events of his life.

According to *Literary Bondage* and *Autobiografía y otros escritos*, when Richard Robert

Madden parted from Cuba to return to the United Kingdom, Madden took Suárez y Romero's copy with him and translated it into English. The evidence of Suárez y Romero's changes may therefore be found in "Life of the Negro Poet, Written by Himself" (1840). Because of the changes they made to Manzano's original manuscript in not just copying and translating Manzano's manuscript but rewriting it in the process, Suárez y Romero and Madden, respectively, become "authors" of *Autobiografía* as well. Moreover, while William Luis argues that Suárez y Romero anticipated that his copy would be translated by Madden, I add that Madden's translation reflects the discursive strategies and conventions of slave narratives. Showing an English-speaking audience that slavery was just as terrible if not worse in Latin America benefitted Del Monte, Suárez y Romero, and Madden's common cause of furthering the case for outlawing the slave trade through English international law.

Manzano's manuscript and "Life of the Negro Poet" are similar but separate texts. For example, the order of events begins to bifurcate after Manzano attacks the mayoral to defend his mother. In the original manuscript, Manzano writes, "pero pasemos en silencio el resto de esta exena dolorosa" (312). Madden's version—and, as Azcárate's notebook suggests, Suárez y Romero's copy—echoes Manzano's words faithfully: Madden writes, "but let us throw a veil over the rest of this doleful scene" (88). Here, both the manuscript and the translation suggest that Del Monte had asked for not just any kind of autobiographical narrative, but rather one in which Manzano was to highlight "exenas dolorosas," thereby giving a sort of written performance of his suffering under slavery. However, the scenes that follow in both versions are different. In Madden's, Juan Francisco follows la Marquesa into the garden and "took unconsciously, a small leaf, one alone of geranium, thinking only of making verses" (88). When the Marquesa discovers this, she strikes him on the face and delivers him to the overseer Don

Lucas Rodriguez. He is then locked up in the “stocks” overnight, and in the morning the overseer and another slave tie his hands “like a criminal” (qtd. in Mullen 89). In the handwritten manuscript, this episode of the geranium does not occur until much later. Furthermore, the words Manzano uses to describe it are significantly different. Manzano writes that his hands were tied, not like a “criminal,” but rather like Jesus Christ: “mis manos se atan como las de Jesucristo” (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 321). Upon noticing the difference, one might ask: why did Madden move this episode up in the chronology of Manzano’s life? Why might he have changed the diction from “Jesucristo” to “criminal”? Was Madden in fact responsible for these changes at all, or rather does “Life of the Negro Poet, Written by Himself” represent a faithful translation of Suárez y Romero’s rewritten copy of Manzano’s “original” manuscript?

The answer to these questions can be found in Nicolás Azcárate’s notebook, “*Obras completas de Juan Francisco Manzano esclavo de la Isla de Cuba*, cuaderno copiado con letra y puño de Nicolás Azcárate y hallado a mediados de la década de los ochenta en la Biblioteca Sterling de la Universidad de Yale” (Luis, *Autobiografía* 11). A side-by-side comparison of Madden and Azcárate’s versions suggests that they are both based on Suárez y Romero’s copy since, as William Luis suggests in the introduction to *Autobiografía del esclavo poeta y otros escritos*, both narrate the same events in the same order. Whereas Madden writes that Manzano’s hands were tied like a “criminal,” Azcárate’s version says that they were tied like “Jesu Cristo,” thereby suggesting that Suárez y Romero’s version preserved Manzano’s original diction, albeit changing the spelling from “Jesucristo” in the original. Subtle yet provocative changes like these aside, if both Madden and Azcárate’s versions reflect the same order and are based on Suárez y Romero’s copy, then for what purpose did Suárez y Romero change the order in the first place? He himself may suggest a possible response to this question. In a letter to Del Monte dated

August 20, 1839, Suárez y Romero describes Manzano's "Auto-biografía" as a "cadena de infortunios" (qtd. in Luis *Autobiografía*, 50). In doing so, Suárez y Romero does not so much objectively describe Manzano's manuscript as he does his reading of it, as well as the guiding principle by which he wrote a "corrected" copy. Indeed, Luis also suggests that Suárez y Romero placed an even greater emphasis on the misfortunes of Manzano's life, one after the other, with hardly any reprieve except for his stint in Don Nicolás's home and his eventual escape from the Marquesa's estate. Suárez y Romero flattened not only Manzano's syntax, spelling, and grammar—thereby erasing evidence of Manzano's struggle to write the manuscript—but also the psychological complexity of Manzano's relative "privilege" compared to other enslaved black Cubans: "los cambios introducidos por Suárez y Romero realizan notablemente sus castigos y sufrimientos. Tales cambios reducen la oscilación pendular entre los momentos de agonía y de felicidad dentro del sistema esclavista, y agrupa aquellos repletos de tormentos y horrores en secuencias de acciones tal vez descomunales para el lector interesado" (Luis, *Autobiografía* 57).

Luis produces this analysis, not from a direct reading of Suárez y Romero's copy, but rather from a reading of Azcárate's notebook. He argues that the similarities between Azcárate's copy on the one hand and Madden's translation on the other suggest that they share the same source in Suárez y Romero's corrected "copy" of Manzano's original manuscript. Of Suárez y Romero's original "copy," Luis writes that "se extravió en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX," but even though the original was lost, it can still be found in not only Azcárate's notebook not only located at Yale but also published in Luis's *Autobiografía del esclavo poeta y otros escritos*.

Recognizing the writers, copiers, and translators of the many versions of Manzano's *Autobiografía* does not detract from Manzano's authorship but rather enriches its possibilities for interpretation. As Luis argues, the many versions of *Autobiografía* should be read as autonomous

texts (Luis, *Autobiografía* 20), but the common denominator among them all is Manzano's writing. The literary critic becomes a historian in interpreting the texts to tell the story of how they were written. William Luis suggests that Suárez y Romero may have even copied Manzano's manuscript with Madden as his implied reader: "Es probable que Suárez y Romero fuera consciente de que la versión que él estaba corrigiendo iba a ser entregada al abolicionista inglés, y que hubiera tenido la perspicacia de aclarar ciertas ideas que no eran necesarios para un lector hispanoparlante de aquella época" (*Autobiografía* 47). Luis bases this argument on a reading of Azcárate in which he notices that, whereas in the handwritten manuscript Manzano writes that the Señora Doña Joaquina treated him like a "niño" (qtd. in *Autobiografía* 304), Azcárate writes that she treated him like a "niño blanco" (qtd. in *Autobiografía* 87). This subtle change from the original version to Azcárate's shows that Suárez y Romero had anticipated that his "copy" was for an audience outside of Cuba.⁵⁴ If indeed a reading of Manzano's "Autobiografía(s)" suggests that Suárez y Romero prepared Manzano's manuscript for Madden's translation and publication into English, might we go further by questioning if Del Monte had not requested a personal history from Manzano in anticipation that it would be translated by Madden to begin with. As we know, Del Monte made the request to Manzano through a letter in 1835. Just one year later, in 1836, Madden arrived in Cuba. During Madden's time in Cuba from 1836 to 1839, Madden interviewed Del Monte and transcribed the interview in *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave*. In addition to his duties as a commissioner in the mixed court on matters of slavery (a position to which he was appointed in 1836), he participated in Del Monte's literary *tertulias* once in Cuba (Mullen 7). Could it have been more than mere convenience that

⁵⁴ "Era obvio para cualquier individuo que viviera en la Cuba decimonónica que la palabra 'niño' se refería a un niño blanco, ya que a los esclavos de corta edad no se les atribuía el calificativo de 'niños' y se les identificaba por el color de la piel. Pero la versión de Azcárate aclara el tipo de niño, tal vez para que el lector extranjero entendiera que se trataba de un 'niño blanco'" (Luis, *Autobiografía* 47).

Del Monte had requested that Manzano write a personal history the same year Sir Thomas Buxton asked Madden to assist him in a campaign to end the Spanish involvement in the Atlantic slave trade? Did Del Monte request that Manzano write a personal history in prose—perhaps an odd request when one considers that Manzano was known for his poetry—in anticipation of Madden’s arrival? Since Madden suggests that Del Monte was a known figure to the convention in *Proceedings*,⁵⁵ might he have anticipated that someone—whether Madden or someone else—would have translated Manzano’s “historia” into a “History”?

Regardless of whether Del Monte requested Manzano’s autobiographical narrative with the intention of having it translated into English, the stars do seem to have aligned for Madden to write *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave*. Edward J. Mullen argues that not just Del Monte but Madden, too, acted as a “catalyst” for the emergent Cuban antislavery literary movement:

... it was in an effort to supply him with documentation for the influential London Anti-Slavery Society that del Monte urged Anselmo Suárez y Romero to complete the important abolitionist novel *Francisco: el ingenio o las delicias del Campo* (*Francisco: The Sugar plantation or the Delights of the Country*) as well as urging Francisco Manzano to complete his famous autobiography” (Mullen 10).

A potential problem for this argument is that Manzano had already begun writing his “historia” before Madden’s arrival in 1836, according to Manzano’s letter on June 25, 1835 (Luis 2007, 125). Furthermore, Madden writes in his preface to *The Life and Poems* that “A Collection of Poems written by a slave recently liberated in the Island of Cuba, was presented to me in the year 1838, by a gentleman of Havana,” i.e., Domingo del Monte. Suárez y Romero indicates in his

⁵⁵ Probably referring to Del Monte, Madden is quoted in the *Proceedings*, “I have known men of great intelligence, one in particular, whom it was of great consequence to have been well-informed on this subject [of Cuban slavery], and whom I myself accompanied over several estates in various parts of the country (...)” (221). Furthermore, Madden suggests that “this gentleman (...) is known to this Convention” (221).

letter to Del Monte on August 20, 1839, that he had not prepared the copy that Madden would later translate, just in time for the 1840 World Antislavery Convention in London. Therefore, there is reason to cast doubt that Del Monte had requested that Manzano write a personal narrative expressly for the English abolitionist cause. Rather, Manzano's "historia" coincidentally served both Del Monte's express goal of declaring literary independence from Spain, and Madden's service to England's moral and economic interests in abolishing slavery beyond their West Indian colonies. In other words, Manzano's writing well served both men's distinct but related antislavery agendas, independently of whose mandate it "really" was.

While Del Monte circulated Manzano's handwritten manuscript amongst his trusted circle of friends, Madden "dressed" it according to the discursive norms and conventions of slave "histories." The title of Madden's book, *The History of the Early Life of the Negro Poet, Written by Himself*, contains cues that would have alerted an implied English-reading audience in the nineteenth century as to what sort of text it is. Manzano's letters to Del Monte, dated June 25 and September 29, 1835, use the same word in Spanish, "historia," to describe the document Del Monte had requested.⁵⁶ Although modern critics have assigned the term "slave narrative" to describe slave autobiographies and transcribed oral testimonies, during the nineteenth century such texts were called "Histories" (such as *The History of Mary Prince*) or "The Life of" a slave (such as in the case of *The Life of Olaudah Equiano*). As Mullen notes, Madden followed many other already-established discursive norms and conventions of "slave narratives," such as the preface designed to dispel doubts about the text's authenticity.⁵⁷ In addition to these

⁵⁶ Manzano writes to Del Monte, "... hace tres o cuatro meses me pidió la historia..." (Luis Autobiografía, 125).

⁵⁷ "Madden was particularly aware of this problem and consequently provided rather detailed information about the authenticity of the text in his preface to *Poems by a Slave*. This device was characteristic of eighteenth-century North American slave narratives, which were generally prefaced by introductory remarks that confirmed the moral character of the author and the truthfulness of the facts by a respected white person" (Mullen 21).

observations, the title takes advantage of the authenticating strategy of “Written by Himself,” further showing that, even if *Autobiografía* was not “born” a slave narrative, it became one through Madden’s translation, rewriting, and particular way of framing it, even including poems to by Manzano to attest to his faculties of sensibility and reason for an abolitionist public. England had abolished slavery in most of its colonies in 1833, but Madden’s work shows that the antislavery movement did not dissipate but shifted its focus to abolishing and policing the slave trade and slave practices across the Atlantic World. After returning from Cuba, Madden’s paper entitled “Cuban Slavery” in the *Proceedings of the General Anti-slavery Convention* significantly contributed to the Convention’s cause of organizing and rallying antislavery advocates against slavery outside of the English Empire’s borders, especially in Cuba and even in Brazil. “Cuban Slavery” takes aim and denounces the notion that “negro slavery has always had in the Spanish dominions ‘a peculiar character of mildness’” (214). To “disabuse the public mind” of such a false notion, popularly accepted within and outside of Cuba, he argues that the Spanish laws that supposedly ensured the equal treatment of slaves were routinely ignored and mocked. Drawing from his experience as an appointed judge living in Havana, he reports that overseers regularly mistreated and even murdered slaves with impunity. Although he does not mention the “Slave Poet” explicitly, he does mention similar cases that he claims to have witnessed firsthand. Published in London, “Oct. 21, 1840,” *The Life and Poems* was published a few months after the Convention, held from June 12-23 of the same year (qtd. in Mullen 36). Therefore, one way of reading *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave* is as an extension of his talk on “Cuban Slavery” at the convention. “Life of the Negro Poet” also attests to the impunity with which the Marquesa de Prado Ameno brutally, repeatedly, and arbitrarily punished Manzano. Such excessive punishment was in fact illegal in the Spanish laws in Cuba, but “Life of the

Negro Poet” reinforces Madden’s point in his speech at the Convention that such laws had no effect on society.

Despite their many differences, each of the many copies, editions, and translations of *Autobiografía* concludes with Manzano’s legal yet still daring escape.⁵⁸ Given the ineffectiveness of antislavery laws generally, it is unlikely that they would have protected Manzano from retribution. Manzano’s *Autobiografía* is thus ultimately not just a narrative of oppression but resistance. Far from a stereotype of the “noble slave,” he is a pioneer and a precursor of the figure of the *cimarrón* in Cuban literature, as I will discuss in Chapter 2. Though his work reflects the influence of Del Monte, Suárez y Romero and Madden, his story is simultaneously also all his own. To suggest otherwise is to de-center the writer from his own narrative and rob his work of its value. Manzano’s narrative is ultimately one about the affirmation of his self-worth by choosing to leave his life of torment despite the consequences it could bring under Cuba’s racist colonial regime. His success at presenting his life’s story to his audience does not suggest his subservience but further underscores his status as a bona fide Cuban author. The proof is the influence that his narrative has had not only inside but also outside of Cuba.

***Autobiografía*’s Influence Within and Beyond Cuba**

It is hard to overstate Manzano’s importance nationally or internationally. Manzano’s autobiographical narrative played a major role in the construction of Cuban narrative. The “original” manuscript circulated within the *tertulia delmontina* and represents one of the

⁵⁸ “The royal decree of December 23, 1789, imposed fines on masters who abused their slaves. Section 10 of the decree states that excessive punishment would result in the confiscation of the slave. In certain cases, it was permissible for the slave to escape and seek protection from an authority figure...” (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 91).

foundational texts of the Cuban antislavery narrative tradition. Although not published in Cuba until 1937 by José L. Franco, the “original” manuscript circulated within Del Monte’s tertulia and directly influenced early works such as Suárez y Romero’s *Francisco*, Félix Anco y Bosmeniel’s *Escenas de la vida privada en la isla de Cuba* and “Un niño en la Habana” (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 2). *Autobiografía* also represents a precursor to later “Cuban” antislavery novels published abroad such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda’s *Sab* (Spain, 1841) and the final version of Cirilo Villaverde’s *Cecilia Valdés* (US, 1882). It even has influenced twentieth and twenty-first century Afro-Latin American literature. Miguel Barnet’s *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966) carries the Del Monte tradition of exposing the ills of slavery and had a significant impact on Latin American literature through the establishment of the *novelat testimonio*. Moreover, Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Puerto Rican novels from the twenty-first century directly cite Manzano’s *Autobiografía* as an important influential work.⁵⁹ While many famous *testimonios* such as Elena Poniatowska’s *Hasta no verte Jesús mío* (1969) and Elisabeth Burgos’s *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú, y así me nació la conciencia* (1983) do not deal with the subject of black slavery, the roots of the *testimonio* reach down into the Cuban antislavery narrative tradition that *Autobiografía* played a significant role in shaping.

Autobiografía was shaped by the authenticating strategies and conventions of the slave narrative in “Life of the Negro Poet.” Likewise, the slave narrative was shaped by “Life of the Negro Poet” through the latter’s influence. In the introduction to *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave*, Mullen observes similarities between Madden’s text and what is, in the United States, perhaps the most well-known slave narrative of them all, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, published five years after *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave* in 1845:

⁵⁹ See *Um defeito de cor* (2006), by Ana Maria Gonçalves and *las Negras* (2016), by Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro. I discuss their references to *Autobiografía* in subsequent chapters.

There are a number of striking similarities between the Manzano *Autobiography* and the North American slave narrative. These can be well illustrated by briefly focusing on the parallels between the Cuban work and the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. In the first place, both books are buttressed by considerable supporting materials (prefaces, letters, appendices) which no doubt reflect the intervention of abolitionists in their printing. Both appear to be informed by a similar alienating vision of society, and rather closely parallel each other in terms of their structure (organizational pattern). Both begin with the narrator's account of his genealogy, and move on to describe a 'loss of innocence' when the narrators are catapulted from the protected world of childhood to experience the full rigors of slavery. There is, too, a similar realization of the alternatives to slavery which leads to a dramatic escape. It is not only the presence of similar stylistic devices, recurrent imagery, and a careful selection of events to maintain a narrative momentum which ultimately links these works; but also—perhaps more importantly - both narratives project a similar portrait of psychological and physical torment firmly rooted in the alien-exile theme which has characterized much of black literature from the early times to the present (Mullen 25).

The similarities between Manzano and Douglass's narratives may be more than merely coincidental. In addition to sharing similar influence, it is plausible that the prior influenced the latter. William Lloyd Garrison, who commissioned Douglass's narrative, attended the World Antislavery Convention with Madden in 1840. Both Garrison and Douglass knew Madden and Manzano's work, but they confused Manzano with Plácido: "Since Madden did not publish Manzano's full name in his translation, several American writers, among them Amelia E. Barr and William Wells Brown, confused Manzano with the better-known mulatto poet, Plácido

(Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés, 1809-44), producing curious hybrid biographical sketches of the writers” (Mullen 12). Garrison’s own abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* published an article entitled “The Martyr Poet Placido [sic],” which reads, “It may be interesting to our readers to know, that in Placido, they renew their acquaintance with a poet with whom, and his writings, they are in some degree familiar. He was, we believe, the author of the compositions published a few years ago under the title of *Poems by a Cuban Slave*, and edited by Dr. Madden” (qtd. from Boutelle, “Imagining Juan Placido, Imagining Cuba” 9). This excerpt shows that Garrison had read Manzano’s autobiographical narrative, even if he assumed it was Plácido’s.

Autobiografía disturbs the commonly held notion that “slave narratives” represent a purely North American or Anglophone construct. “Life of the Negro Poet” was known and read in the most influential abolitionist circles in the English-speaking world. *Autobiografía* thus demonstrates the important role of Afro-Hispanic literature in the construction of what would eventually come to be called the “slave narrative” in retrospect. In her book *Ambivalence and the Postcolonial Subject: The Strategic Alliance of Juan Francisco Manzano and Richard Robert Madden*, Gera C. Burton argues that Juan Francisco Manzano’s firsthand account of slavery, as well as the two men’s personal relationship during Madden’s stint as superintendent of liberated Africans in Havana, strengthened Madden’s argument against slavery in Cuba: “In his address to the Convention, Madden began by contesting the report presented to the French Parliament by Alexis de Tocqueville on July 23, 1839, and subsequently widely circulated, which concluded that slavery in the Spanish colonies was of a distinctly ‘mild’ characteristic” (Burton 35). Although entitled “Cuban Slavery,” Madden’s address to the World Anti-Slavery Convention denounced not only slavery in the Spanish colonies but also in the “Brazils.” In the concluding statements of his address, Madden states that

I would earnestly desire to impress these facts on the minds of all who are interested in the question of negro emancipation; that the abolition of slavery in our colonies, has given great advantages to those colonies where slavery exists. And if it is in vain to expect a beneficial result from our efforts, *while slavery flourishes in Cuba and the Brazils* [my emphasis], and leans on the sympathy and support of countries like America and the colonies of France, whose interests are identified with theirs. (Madden 238-9)

Through the inclusion of Brazil, Madden's address was meant to represent the enslaved not only in Cuba but in all Latin America. Manzano is not mentioned explicitly in "Cuban Slavery," but his personal testimony of slavery was on Madden's mind since *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave* was published in the same year. Although the only extant autobiographical narrative written by an enslaved Cuban, *Autobiografía* (in all its forms) is not the only text that might challenge the notion of the slave narrative as a purely North American phenomenon, nor the only one interpreted to represent the voices of the enslaved in Brazil.

II. "Written and Revised from His Own Words": *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua*

One of the most "Interesting" documentary representations of Brazilian slavery was not written in Brazil at all, but rather in the United States by an evangelical Baptist pastor: *An Interesting Narrative. Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua, A Native of Zoogoo, in the Interior of Africa. (A Convert to Christianity)*, published in 1854.⁶⁰ Because part of the

⁶⁰ The full title is "An Interesting Narrative. Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua, A Native of Zoogoo, in the Interior of Africa. (A Convert to Christianity.) With a Description of that Part of the World; Including the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants, Their Religious Notions, Form of Government, Laws, Appearance of the Country, Buildings, Agriculture, Manufactures, Shepherds and Horsemen, Domestic Animals, Marriage Ceremonies, Funeral Services, Styles of Dress, Trade and Commerce, Models of Warfare, System of Slavery, &c., &c. Mahomma's early life, His Education, His Capture and Slavery in Western Africa and Brazil, His Escape to the United States, from thence to Haiti (the City of Port au Prince,) His Reception by the Baptist Missionary there, the Rev. W.L. Judd, His Conversion to Christianity, Baptism, and Return to his country, his Views, Objects and Aim. Written and Revised

“Biography” narrates slavery in Brazil from Baquaqua’s point of view, the text has gradually become a topic of interest in Brazil. Silvia Hunold Lara published a fragment of *Biografia de Mahommah G. Baquaqua*, translated by Sonia Nussenzweig, in the March 1, 1988, edition of the *Revista Brasileira de História*. It begins with Baquaqua’s first encounter with a white man and ends with his resolution to undertake mission work in Haiti. Whereas the personal “I” (or “eu”) throughout the selection refers only to Baquaqua, the pro-US, pro-colonial, and anti-Brazilian discourses of Moore and the Free Will Baptist Society permeate the text alongside the antislavery discourse. While the translation and the original criticize slavery in both Brazil and the United States, the United States is portrayed as a refuge and haven from the horrors Baquaqua suffered in Brazil under the control of a cruel baker and an even worse sea captain.

The incomplete translation has led some to confuse the text as an autobiography written by Baquaqua,⁶¹ but the text would more accurately be classified as neither autobiography nor biography, despite its title, but rather under the slave narrative umbrella. Robin Law and Paul E. Lovejoy ’s assessment of the text as the “only known Brazilian slave narrative” obscures the ways in which Afro-Brazilians have long denounced slavery in writing. The text indeed falls under the slave narrative umbrella insofar as it resists facile categorization as historical or a literary document, Baquaqua’s voice or Moore’s, and as biography or autobiography (4). *An Interesting Narrative* resists classification as a biography because about halfway through the pamphlet, it contains passages narrated in the first person by Baquaqua himself. However, *Biography* is not an “autobiography” because it was not written by Baquaqua, but rather by Samuel Moore, esq. Although Moore assures the reader that *Biography* is “Written and Revised

from his own Words, By Samuel Moore, Esq., Late publisher of the ‘North of England Shipping Gazette,’ author of several popular works, and editor of sundry reform papers” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 87).

⁶¹ *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* has been referred to as an autobiography in the Brazilian press: “Em sua autobiografia, Baquaqua revela como era ser escravo no Brasil” (Coutinho).

from [Baquaqua's] own Words," this is an authenticating strategy commonly seen in slave narratives. Robert B. Stepto argues that the multiple voices within the slave narrative are what define it as such. Abolitionists "From Behind the Veil" played the function of authenticating black people's written and spoken accounts of slavery: "Slave narratives are full of other voices which are frequently just as responsible for articulating a narrative's tale and strategy... Their primary function is, of course, to authenticate the former slave's account; in doing so, they are at least partly responsible for the narrative's acceptance as historical evidence" (Stepto 3).

Therefore, like *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave* or *Narrative in the Life of Frederick Douglass*, the text constructs its authenticity on the endorsement of a white abolitionist and the personal testimony of—in this case—an African who was formerly and illegally enslaved in Brazil. Just as Manzano's voice is prompted by Del Monte's request and filtered through Suárez y Romero's corrections in *Autobiografía*, so too is Baquaqua's voice prompted by his dialogue with Moore and filtered through Moore's writing. *Biography* also illustrates polyvocality and multiple "authorship." The text suggests the ways in which Moore manipulates Baquaqua's voice and transposes oral speech into writing. Even when Baquaqua narrates in the first person, we can "hear" Moore's voice through his, especially in what are supposedly Baquaqua's effusions on the "poor African" and his wanting for Christian knowledge (Law and Lovejoy 92). We can also "hear" Baquaqua speaking in sections where Moore describes Baquaqua's homeland and customs. The text itself suggests that Baquaqua exchanged his personal narrative for the possibility to return to his homeland of Djogou ("Zoogoo" in the narrative) on a mission trip with the Free Baptist Mission Society. In this way, Baquaqua ultimately uses the assignments of baptism and testifying his experiences under slavery as an attempt to "author" his return to Africa.

It is unknown what Baquaqua's fate was after he and Moore completed *Biography*, but what is certain is that they both left behind a text that challenges the idea of the slave narrative representing a solely North American or Anglophone concept. Although of course published in Detroit and written in English, *Biography* further develops the image of slavery in nineteenth-century Latin America as seen through the eyes of the enslaved. The section in which Baquaqua narrates his experiences in Brazil is less than twenty pages in the original pamphlet, but we might illuminate their literary significance when we compare them with Brazilian literature and history. Baquaqua narrates the horrors of the Middle Passage to Brazil in *Biography* (1854) five years before Susana in Maria Firmina dos Reis's *Úrsula* (1859) and decades before Castro Alves's poem "Navio Negreiro" (1880). Furthermore, Baquaqua's descriptions of his brutal and arbitrary punishments contradict popular notions of a "milder version" of slavery existing in Brazil ("The Press and Brazilian Narratives of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Castilho 82). Like Cuba, Brazil helped to fill the void in sugar production after the Haitian Revolution. Like *Autobiografía*, *Biography* argues through Baquaqua's testimony that even for those enslaved outside the sugar mills, life was filled with arbitrary and brutal torment. Christianization has historically been used to "justify" slavery, but Baquaqua's narrative does not show that he was baptized in Brazil. *Biography*'s brief but rich section on Brazil thus further destabilizes the idea of slave narratives as a purely North or Anglo-American phenomenon. The most important contribution of *Baquaqua* are its descriptions of Baquaqua's life in Africa before being illegally captured into slavery in Brazil. The slave trade in Brazil was outlawed in 1831, but Baquaqua was captured and shipped to Brazil only a few years before co-authoring his *Biography* in 1854. *Biography* therefore bears witness to the ways in which Africans were still being sold and

purchased after the “Lei Feijo” declared that all enslaved Africans who disembarked in Brazil were to be declared free by law.”⁶²

Even if distorted by Samuel Moore’s interpretation of Baquaqua’s oral text, it gives a privileged view into the lives and cultures of Africans captured and brought to the Americas. Unlike many other slave narratives, the first seven chapters of *Biography* provide “a Description of that Part of the World; Including the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants.” From the combined perspectives of Moore and Baquaqua, *Biography* is not only a biography of Baquaqua himself, but also of Africa, Brazil, North America, and their complex relationship, chained together by an ongoing Trans-Atlantic slave trade that continued operating despite the laws that ineffectually prohibited it. While perhaps lacking the rhetorical sophistication of narratives like Frederick Douglass’s, *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* illustrates the alignment of evangelical and antislavery discourses, the collaborative authorship that shaped slave narratives in the nineteenth century, and the richness, diversity, and complexity of the cultures that Africans brought to the Americas. The narrative features Moore’s objective to Christianize Baquaqua and therefore erase his original Islamic and African culture and identity, but the text also reveals those same Islamic and African culture and identity with curious anthropological “interest.”

The Brazilian *Biografia*

Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua has been largely overlooked in the US, but it has been regarded as an important document in Brazilian studies since at least the 1980s. *Children of God’s Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil* (1983), by Roger Edgar Conrad, contains passages from *Biography* narrated in the first person from Baquaqua’s perspective.

⁶² See the “Lei de 7 de novembro de 1830”: “Todos os escravos, que entrarem no territorio ou portos do Brazil, vindos de fóra, ficam livres.”

Constructing *Biography*'s importance based on its singularity in Brazilian documentary narrative, Conrad writes that "The following document is one of the few in this book dictated or written by a slave or former slave" (23).

Other examples of "direct" slave testimonies in Conrad's book include "A Young African's Account of Life on a Slave Ship" (1849) in which "Augustino, an African who in 1830, while still a child, had been included in a cargo of slaves transported to Brazil" (37). Augustino's legal testimony describes the conditions of the slave ships as "the same as pigs in a sty," thereby contradicting the ex-slave trader Joseph Cliffe's testimony that the slave ships had been "comparatively comfortable" before slave trafficking was outlawed in 1830. Like Baquaqua's narrative, Agostino's legal testimony represents the experiences of the enslaved who endured the arduous middle passage from Africa to Brazil. It was also originally written in English by a second author.⁶³ Conrad shows that there were slave testimonies that were written by the enslaved in Brazil. In "A Slave Petitions for Protection from His Master" (1876), an author simply named "João" writes to a judge that, despite having been promised freedom by his former captor, he was instead sold to another—a common occurrence in Brazil at the time (Conrad 321). Unlike both *Baquaqua* and Agostino's documents, "A Slave Petitions for Protection from His Master" was not transcribed by a white abolitionist or legal scribe. In this way, it stands out as being like Esperança Garcia's handwritten deposition. What sets Baquaqua's *Biography* apart from these documents—as well as surely many more legal depositions like it, that have already been "discovered" or are waiting in archives to be found—is that *Biography* is much longer, being 66 pages in its original pamphlet form. Accordingly, it is

⁶³ Conrad's source is the "Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Consider the Best Means which Great Britain Can Adopt for the Final Extinction of the African Slave Trade. Session 1849 (London, 1849), pp. 162-163)" (37).

much richer in detail about slavery in Brazil than any of these brief legal documents. While Agostino's testimony deals with the conditions of slave ships in the Middle Passage after 1830, and “Jão’s” has to do with mistreatment of the enslaved by their enslavers, *Biography* represents both these issues in the same document.

Baquaqua's text took a leap into Brazil's consciousness in 1988, when Silvia Hunold Lara published a partial translation of the pamphlet as *Biografia de Mahommah G. Baquaqua*. Selecting an approximately 13-page section narrated from Baquaqua's point of view, the translation gives the reader the impression of *Biography* as an autobiography literally written by Baquaqua. Just as Madden's “Life of the Negro Poet, Written by Himself” should be considered a separate document from Manzano's “original” manuscript (requested by Del Monte and with Suárez y Romero's markings), so too should Sonia Nussenzweig's 1988 translation of *Biografía* be considered a separate document from Moore and Baquaqua's “original” *Biography*. Like *Autobiografía*, *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* undergoes important “textual multiplications” of its own. In the “Apresentação” of the translation, Hunold Lara constructs the importance of the document to Brazilian history based on its singularity as a “direct” testimony of slavery in Brazil. She explains that her late colleague Peter Eisenberg brought *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* to her attention and had begun translating it before his death. The translation of the fragment that she published is by Sonia Nussenzweig. Hunold Lara summarizes the document as dealing with an “ex-escravo, sua vida na África, sua escravização e transporte para o Brasil, de suas experiências como escravo em Pernambuco junto a um padeiro, sua venda para o capitão de um navio que viajava até o Rio Grande do Sul, sua viagem até os Estados Unidos, da fuga para conseguir a liberdade, sua viagem ao Haiti, uma viagem de volta aos Estados Unidos e daí para o Canadá” (269). This summary, as the translation itself, downplays

the role of Africa in the text, which takes up the first seven chapters and approximately one half of the document. With regards to what the text “does” in the context of Brazilian history, Hunold Lara describes *Biography* as “a narrativa de uma vida extraordinária que também traz dados extraordinários sobre as experiências escravas no Brasil e nas Américas” (296). For Hunold Lara, the main importance of Baquaqua’s text is its representation of Brazil from the perspective of an enslaved person. Hunold Lara concludes her introduction by remarking that *Biography* represents “Um documento raro, especialmente se pensarmos na escassez de testemunhos escravos *diretos* sobre a escravidão no Brasil” (296). The lack of direct slave testimonies in Brazil is once again used to stress the importance of the text, despite the abundance of them alongside Baquaqua in Conrad’s book.⁶⁴

Biography has appealed largely to historians due to its documentary value, but we might continue to recognize the text’s value within a Brazil’s literary historiography. While translated into Portuguese for the first time in 1988, it was first published in 1854. It therefore represented slavery in Brazil from an African perspective before *Úrsula* (1859), by Maria Firmina dos Reis, *A escrava Isaura* (1875), by Bernardo Guimarães, and the antislavery poems “Vozes D’África” and “O navio negreiro,” (written in 1868 and published in 1880), by Castro Alves (1847-1871). Until recently, due to the surge in academic interest in *Úrsula*, *A escrava Isaura* was long considered the first and only abolitionist novel in Brazil. However, *Úrsula* and Castro Alves’s explorations of slavery in Brazil go beyond *A escrava Isaura* through their constructions of

⁶⁴ Yet another book of direct slave testimonies, published in the same year as Nussenzweig’s translation is *Depoimentos de Escravos Brasileiros* (1988). Mário José Maestri Filho transcribes two interviews with former slaves that are estimated to have been born between 1870 and 1880. The first, Mariano Pereira dos Santos, gave an interview in 1982 in the Ernesto Gaerner Hospital in Curitiba just months before his death. The second, Maria Benedita da Rocha, or Maria “Chatinha,” was interviewed in her home in 1981. In his analysis of Marinho’s and Maria’s interviews, Maestri Filho comments that the vocabulary they use denote the alienation of the enslaved from colonial society: “Depoimentos como os de Maria Chatinha e Mariano dos Santos, além de ricos em informação e interessantes, indicam que os escravos brasileiros possuíram um código linguístico próprio” (26).

Africans' voices, their loathing of the Middle Passage and slavery in Brazil, and their yearning for home. In this way, their antislavery strategy of "giving a voice" to Africans is different from *A escrava Isaura*'s strategy of describing its protagonist as nearly white to elicit sympathy from an implicit white reading public. Literary critic Terry Eagleton writes that "Some texts are born literary, some achieve literariness, and some have literariness thrust upon them" (Eagleton 7). With literariness thrust upon it, *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* has quickly become an important name in Afro-Brazilian studies, despite his text not being originally written in Portuguese, nor in Brazil. Many of the accomplishments for which authors such as Maria Firmina dos Reis and Castro Alves are celebrated were accomplished first by *Biography of Baquaqua*.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of *Biography / Biografia* is its first-person narration from Baquaqua's perspective. Nussenzweig's translation begins with Baquaqua's first contact with a white man, still set in Africa, before being loaded onto the slave ship. Through Baquaqua's narration, the reader sees whites as "Others" through an African lens of understanding. Baquaqua's first-person narration begins, "At Gra-fe, I saw the first white man, which you may be sure took my attention very much; the windows in the houses also looked strange, as this was the first time in my life that I had ever seen houses having windows" (qtd. In Law and Lovejoy 270).⁶⁵ Baquaqua's narration continues estranging white culture as he is loaded onto the slave ship: "I had never seen a ship before, and my idea of it was, that it was some object of worship of the white man. I imagined that we were all to be slaughtered, and were being led there for that purpose. I felt alarmed for my safety, and despondency had almost taken

⁶⁵ Nussenzweig's translation is "Em Gra-fe vi o primeiro homem branco o que, pode ter certeza, chamou-me muito a atenção. As janelas das casas também pareciam estranhas, pois era a primeira vez em minha vida que via casas com janelas" (qtd. in Hunold Lara 270).

sole possession of me” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 151).⁶⁶ In addition to the personal “I” / “eu,” the original—as well as the translation—uses the collective “we” / “nós” to describe the infernal conditions suffered by not just the narrator, but also his enslaved companions on board.⁶⁷ The first-person plural narration refers to, ultimately, the millions of captured and enslaved Africans forcibly sent to Brazil and the Americas. For those living in the interior, like Baquaqua, “Native of Zoogoo” (Djogou), the Trans-Atlantic voyage began long before reaching the Atlantic. Whereas scenes of corporal punishment repeat throughout Baquaqua’s narration, the threat of physical violence begins on the pre-Trans-Atlantic voyage to reach the ocean by way of river. As they row to the slave ship awaiting them, Baquaqua and the others are branded: “(...) to insure [sic] obedience, a man was placed in front with a whip in his hand ready to strike the first who should dare to disobey orders; another man then went round with a hot iron, and branded us the same as they would the heads of barrels or any other inanimate goods or merchandize” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 150).⁶⁸ Scenes of punishment continue through the slave ship to Baquaqua’s arrival at Pernambuco. The narration again refers to the first-person plural to describe his disembarkation: “We landed a few miles from the city at a farmer’s house, which was used as a kind of slave market. The farmer had a great many slaves, and I had not been there very long before I saw him use the lash pretty freely on a boy, which made a deep impression on my mind,

⁶⁶ In Nussenzweig’s translation, “Nunca havia visto um navio antes e pensei que fosse algum objeto de adoração do homem branco. Imaginei que serfámos todos massacrados e que estávamos sendo conduzidos para lá com essa intenção. Temia por minha segurança e o desalento se apossou quase inteiramente de mim” (qtd. in Hunold Lara 271). In the original, “I had never seen a ship before, and my idea of it was, that it was some object of worship of the white man. I imagined that we were all to be slaughtered, and were being led there for that purpose. I felt alarmed for my safety, and despondency had almost taken sole possession of me” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 151).

⁶⁷ “Fomos arremessados, nus, porão adentro...” (qtd. in Hunold Lara 272). “We were thrust into the hold of the vessel in a state of nudity” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 153).

⁶⁸ “Para se assegurarem de nossa obediência, um homem se postou à nossa frente com um chicote na mão pronto para açoitar o primeiro que ousasse desobedecer, outro homem circulava com um ferro quente e nos marcava como a tampas de barril ou a qualquer outro bem ou mercadoria inanimada” (qtd. in Hunold Lara 271).

as of course I imagined that would be my fate ere long” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 156).⁶⁹ The foreshadowing at the end of this passage introduces the two years of torment that Baquaqua endures in Brazil under slavery, and the many punishments he would endure there. However, the “we” / “nós” at the beginning of the passage suggests that his destiny was not unique to him. In this way, Baquaqua’s narration is constructed to represent not only his own personal experiences but also the collective experiences of enslaved Africans in the Americas.

Nevertheless, *Biografia* portrays many of the particularities of slavery and society in Brazil from Baquaqua’s point of view. For example, the text bears witness to some of the more complex aspects of language, race, and power in Imperial Brazilian society. Baquaqua could communicate with his first captor because learned Portuguese from other enslaved black people with a closer proximity to power: “Some of the slaves on board could talk Portuguese. They had been living on the coast with Portuguese families, and they used to interpret to us. They were not placed in the hold with the rest of us, but come [sic] down occasionally to tell us something or other” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 156).⁷⁰ In other words, Baquaqua learns the language of the oppressor from other members of the oppressed. His teachers’ possession of Portuguese represents their position literally above other enslaved Africans in the hull. *Biografia* therefore illustrates the intimate relationship between language and power, as well as the racial hierarchy dividing not just black and white people in Brazil but black people against each other. As the text later notes, black people were not only slaves but slave-owners in Brazil. When Baquaqua is

⁶⁹ “Desembarcamos a algumas milhas da cidade, na casa de um fazendeiro, que grande quantidade de escravos e não demorou muito para que eu presenciasse empregando livremente seu chicote contra um rapaz. Essa cena causou-me uma impressão profunda pois, é claro, imaginei que em breve este seria meu destino” (qtd. In Hunold Lara 273).

⁷⁰ While there is an error in the original version, this error and others are corrected in Nussenzweig’s translation, showing that, like Madden, they smoothed out the language of the text at the cost of flattening its telling imperfections: “Alguns escravos a bordo sabiam falar português. Haviam vivido no litoral com famílias portuguesas e faziam o papel de intérpretes. Não eram colocados no porão como nós, mas desciam ocasionalmente para nos dizer uma coisa ou outra” (qtd. in Hunold Lara 273).

being sold a second time, a “man of color” attempts to purchase him: “(...) any one [sic] having the means of buying his fellow creature with the paltry dross, can become a slave owner, no matter his color, his creed or country, and that the colored man would as soon enslave his fellow man as the white man, had he the power” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 162).⁷¹ The text’s analysis of power relations in Brazil stands out for disrupting black-and-white notions of race and power in nineteenth-century Imperial Brazil. It is difficult to know if the surprise is Baquaqua’s, Moore’s, or both.

Another aspect of slavery in Brazil that the text represents is that, although once used as the justification for Portuguese conquest and the capture of Africans (like De Azurara shows), Christianization and baptism were no longer seriously practiced in nineteenth-century Brazil. In the home of Baquaqua’s first captor, he attests to having been forced to pray at the threat of being whipped. However, he describes that he and the baker’s other four slaves are never explained the rituals that they were forced to practice: “We were taught to chant some words which we did not know the meaning of. We also had to make the sign of the cross several times. Whilst worshipping, my master held a whip in his hand, and those who showed signs of inattention or drowsiness, were immediately brought to consciousness by a smart application of the whip” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 158)⁷². In addition to Baquaqua’s ineffectual Christianization in Brazil, Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy analyze the importance of that which is not mentioned: “It is noteworthy that Baquaqua makes no reference to being baptized. In the colonial period, Brazilian law had theoretically required the baptism of slaves brought from

⁷¹ “(...) qualquer um que dispõe dos meios para comprar seu semelhante com o vil metal pode se tornar um senhor de escravos, não importa qual seja a sua cor, seu credo ou sua nacionalidade; e que o homem negro escravizaria seu semelhante tão prontamente quanto o homem branco, tivesse ele o poder” (qtd. in Hunold Lara 276).

⁷² “Fomos ensinados a entoar algumas palavras cujo significado não sabíamos. Também tínhamos que fazer o sinal da cruz diversas vezes. Enquanto orava, meu senhor segurava um chicote na mão e aqueles que mostravam sinais de desatenção ou sonolência eram prontamente trazidos à consciência pelo toque ardido do chicote” (qtd. in Hunold Lara 274).

Africa, but after independence this was no longer rigorously enforced, and by the 1840s Christian instruction of slaves was being left to the discretion of owners” (159). Baquaqua had in fact been “Christened” José da Costa by his second captor, the sea captain,⁷³ but Baquaqua’s Christian name is not mentioned in the body text of *Biography*. Baquaqua’s “Christening” was thus likely in name only. The purpose of slavery was not Christianization but profit. One of the most glaring contradictions presented in the narrative is the bustling slave trade, even though it had been legally outlawed in 1831. Although the text makes no mention of the “Lei Feijó,” *Biografia* bears witness to the ineffectualness of enforcing it in Brazil: “Great numbers make quite a business of this buying and selling human flesh, and do nothing else for a living, depending entirely upon this kind of traffic” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 158).⁷⁴ Beyond its descriptions of the thriving slave trade in Brazil, Baquaqua’s narrative itself represents a testimonial account of how profits trumped laws in matters of slavery. In these ways, *Biografia* adds slavery in Brazil to Manzano’s testimonial account of “second slavery.” After the Haitian Revolution, Cuba and Brazil filled the void left in the sugar industry despite England’s attempts to quash the Trans-Atlantic slave trade during the first half of the nineteenth century.⁷⁵

Although both *Autobiografía* and *Biography* are starkly different texts, “slave narrative” is an apt term under which to compare their similarities and define their differences. The most obvious difference—as hinted by their titles—is that while the prior was literally written by a slave’s hand, the latter was not. In her introduction to Sonia Nussenzweig’s translation, Hunold Lara clarifies that the text is written in the “primeira e na terceira pessoa,” and the narrative was

⁷³ See “Affidavits of Captain Clemente José da Costa, and the slaves José da Costa and José da Rocha, New York, 1847” reprinted in the “Appendix” of *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua* (Law and Lovejoy 195-209).

⁷⁴ “Há uma grande quantidade de pessoas que fazem um verdadeiro negócio dessa compra e venda de carne humana e que só fazem isso para se manter, dependendo inteiramente desse tipo de tráfico” (qtd. in Hunold Lara 274).

⁷⁵ For an analysis of the Haitian Revolution on “second slavery” in Cuba and Brazil, see Ada Ferrer’s “Cuban Slavery and Atlantic Antislavery” (2008).

“compilado e editado por Samuel Moore, engajado na luta abolicionista” (269). However, the narrative was not only “compiled and edited by Moore,” as the “Preface and Compiler’s Notes” suggests, but also written by him (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 92). Since *Biografia* (1988) begins and ends with Baquaqua’s narration, from the beginning of his Trans-Atlantic journey through his escape in New York, it gives the impression as if it were written by Baquaqua. This is misleading because Samuel Moore had an enormous influence over Baquaqua’s narrative as the writer of the text.

Other versions of *Biography* also downplay Moore’s influence on the text. Robert Conrad’s *Children of God’s Fire* includes only passages narrated from Baquaqua’s perspective, cutting out Moore’s interjections in Chapter VII with ellipses. In Brazil, a full translation entitled *Biografia de Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua: um Nativo de Zoogoo, no interior da África* was published by Uirapuru in 2016. However, even though this version includes the first six of seven chapters narrated by Moore as well as the seventh chapter narrated (mostly) by Baquaqua, its description on the front cover calls it an “unpublished work”: “Obra inédita: A única autobiografia escrita por um ex-escravo que viveu no Brasil.” Moore’s name is nowhere to be found on the cover, despite his fundamental role in the narrative. The erasure of Moore’s influence over the text in the 2016 translation is like the original text’s modest description of Samuel Moore as a “compiler” or “editor,” even if he in fact wrote it. Both the original and its republications emphasize Baquaqua’s role in the text’s realization, but recognizing Moore as the writer of the narrative does not depreciate *Biography*’s value. On the contrary, represents an honest look at how the text reflects both Moore and Baquaqua’s voices and interests, as do many nineteenth-century slave narratives. According to Nicole Aljoe’s definition of Caribbean and Latin American slave narratives,

One of the most striking features of slave narratives produced in the Caribbean and Latin America is that an overwhelming majority of them were narrated to an editor or transcriber. Consequently, these narratives must be viewed as composite texts in which both the narrator and transcriber/editor work together to create meaning. Although the narratives are mediatory in nature, it is important not to view these narratives as “corrupted and inferior forms,” but rather to read them as Creole texts emblematic of the dialectical relationships of power in the slave system. (Aljoe, “Slave Narratives of the Caribbean and Latin America”)

Although not written in Latin America, *Biography* represents just such a “composite text” realized through the collaboration between a black voice and a white writer. In this way, *Biography* fits under Aljoe’s definition of a “Latin American slave narrative.” Like the *gestor* of a *testimonio*, Samuel Moore exercised exercises his own authorship over *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua*. In this way, the text is also partly a biography of Samuel Moore.

The Biography of Samuel Moore

Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy point out the mystery surrounding who Moore was, but we get a much richer picture of Moore and his motivations for writing *Biography* from the text itself. Law and Lovejoy write that “The book as published was avowedly a collaborative production, involving Baquaqua and an editor, named on the title page as Samuel Moore, whom Allan Austin has identified with Samuel Downing Moore, a Unitarian Minister and abolitionist who emigrated to the U.S.A. from Ireland, and lived in Ypsilanti, in eastern Michigan” (8). Additionally, on the original cover, Moore is described as the “late publisher of the ‘North of England Shipping Gazette,’ author of several popular works, and editor of sundry reform

papers,” suggesting that he was possibly deceased at the time of publication in 1854 (Law and Lovejoy 87). If Moore indeed were Irish, it could be “interesting” to explore the coincidence between Madden and Moore’s national identities and their roles in antislavery causes.⁷⁶ But in any case, *Biography* is not written in the “first and third person,” as both Hunold Lara and Lovejoy argue,⁷⁷ but rather in *the first and first person*, those being Moore and Baquaqua’s. In both Moore and Baquaqua’s first-person narrations, each also contains the other’s voice. In this way, the text is as much a “biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua” as it is one of the missionary abolitionist Samuel Moore—mysterious as he remains. For starters, in the original text (unlike Silvia Hunold Lara and Editora Uirapuru’s translations in Portuguese), we get a sense of Moore as an amateur writer through its numerous spelling and grammatical mistakes in English. These errors are not a product of Baquaqua’s oral narration, but rather Moore’s writing.⁷⁸

Biography takes place principally in the settings of Africa, Brazil, and only later in the United States. However, but the text’s main objective is abolishing slavery in the United States. Chapters I-VI, from pages 9 to 25 in the original pamphlet, describe Africa with information provided by Baquaqua, but narrated from Moore’s first-person point of view. In this section, Moore consistently directs the narrative toward a US audience. For example, when describing the geography of “Zoogoo” (Djogou), Moore writes that “The people of America can have no idea of the size and beauty of some of the trees in Africa (...)" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 108). Again, when Moore describes the process by which people in Djogou grind corn, he writes a simile to compare the product to one recognizable to US readers: “By patient labor they succeed

⁷⁶ See *Ambivalence and the Postcolonial Subject: The Strategic Alliance of Juan Francisco Manzano and Richard Robert Madden*, by Gera C. Burton, which compares Madden’s “postcolonial” status as an Irishman in England to Manzano’s status as a slave in Cuba (2004).

⁷⁷ “The second part, which gives an account of Baquaqua’s own life, in contrast, is mainly written in the first person, although with occasional third-person interpolations” (Law and Lovejoy 10).

⁷⁸ These spelling and grammatical mistakes are represented and signaled in the Princeton University edition: e.c. pages 105, 129, 131, 153, 183, 184, etc.

in making it as fine as the finest American flour” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 111). It is important to note that, even when Moore is writing from his own perspective, Baquaqua’s voice is present in his narration since Moore’s writing is constantly informed by Baquaqua’s oral testimony. We can never measure Moore’s words against Baquaqua’s, but we can infer from the text that it is destined for an US audience. For starters, it was published in Detroit, Michigan. Also, Baquaqua’s narration in chapter VII makes references to the United States in his descriptions of Africa. In one case, he compares African and North American mosquitos, demonstrating both “authors” awareness of their audience.⁷⁹ In another case, Baquaqua compares the grasses of “Cham-mah” to those in the “prairies of South and South-western North America,” even though (as far as we know) he had never visited those regions of the United States. In the same way that Moore’s narration on Africa in chapters I-IV contains Baquaqua’s knowledge, therefore, Baquaqua’s narration in chapter VII contains information probably provided by Moore. Lovejoy suggests that Moore is from Ireland,⁸⁰ but the text demonstrates that Moore’s set of knowledge (and even his spelling) are North American.

Biography constructs an implicit nineteenth-century US audience. Its overlapping discourses are simultaneously antislavery, anti-war, pro-evangelical, and white supremacist. As the preface indicates, the text that follows is directed toward “the friends of the poor African negro and the colored race generally,” who “will be greatly benefitted by reading the work carefully from beginning to end; they will there see throughout its pages, the horrible sufferings and tortures inflicted upon that portion of God’s creatures, merely because ‘their skin is of a

⁷⁹ Baquaqua’s narration says, “(...) they were *indeed* mosquitoes, none of your small flys [sic], gnats and such like, that people in North America call mosquitoes, but real big hungry fellows, with stings and suckers enough to drain every drop of blood out of a man’s body at one draw” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 131).

⁸⁰ Lovejoy’s suggestion that Moore could be Irish invites a possible comparison between him and Richard Robert Madden. Perhaps both men formed alliances with Black men against slavery because they themselves were colonized “Others” under British colonial rule.

darker hue,’ notwithstanding their hearts are as soft and flexible as the man of paler cast” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 92). Although the preface therefore defends black people’s equality (by comparing their humanity to whites’), the text itself suggests that Africans are “poor” not only when they are enslaved by whites, but also because they lack whites’ culture. Moore writes that “The women in Africa are considered very inferior to the men, and are consequently held in the most degrading subjection. The condition of females is very similar to that in all barbarous nations” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 117). We should note that these words were written at a time when it would still be nearly a century until (white) women won the right to vote in the United States through the ratification of the nineteenth amendment in 1920.⁸¹ As Gayatri Spivak notes, women’s treatment outside the West is a common justification for Western colonization.⁸² In this way, the condemnation of both slavery in the West and the cultures of “barbarous nations” coexists simultaneously in *Biography*.

The text continues to represent Moore’s own biography as a minister through his ideology that Christian civilizations must “enlighten” Africa with Western knowledge, and most importantly the Gospel. In other words, the Christianization of Africans—while serving in other texts as a justification for slavery—serves in Moore’s text as a justification for missionary activity in Africa:

“Africa is rich in every respect (except in knowledge.) The knowledge of the white man is needed, but not his vices. The religion of the white man is needed, but more of it, more of the spirit of the true religion, such as the Bible teaches, ‘love to [p. 29] God and love to man. Who will go to Africa? Who will carry the Bible there? And who will teach the

⁸¹ Black women in the South continued to be denied the vote through Jim Crow laws in the Southern U.S.

⁸² See Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?”: “Spivak’s ‘sentence’—‘White men are saving brown women from brown men’—serves to justify colonial interventions if white men are taken as saviors and brown men are scapegoated as oppressors (of brown women)” (“Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak” 2112).

poor benighted African, the arts and sciences? (...) Let the Savior's command be obeyed. "Go ye out into all the world and preach the gospel." Save all those who are perishing for lack of knowledge, for the lack of that knowledge, you have the power to impart. (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 129)

Just what Moore means by the "white man's vices" (war) is clarified in an earlier passage condemning warfare from a Biblical standpoint.⁸³ Through the comparison of these two passages, Moore's overarching motive for the text emerges. Just as the United States must condemn war to justify preaching the Gospel to "the heathen," so too must it abolish war and slavery. In other words, so long as slavery continued in the United States, missionaries like Moore would have a moral disadvantage in preaching the Gospel in Africa.

Moore's perspective justifies missionary projects on the supposition of the West's superiority over Africa, but he also highlights aspects of African culture that he believes are superior to Western culture. One of the aspects of African superiority is the high level of respect with which the young must pay to the old. On observing the ways in which "Great respect is paid to the aged" and "Children are brought up to be obedient and polite"—information presumably provided by Baquaqua—Moore reflects, "Should not these facts put to shame the manners of the children in this country towards the aged? How painful it is to witness the disrespect shown to grown up people by the rising generation of this country, and in many cases the shameful behavior of children towards even their own parents, and that without a single check of censure or rebuke!" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 113). On the one hand, Moore appears to be making a

⁸³ "How strange that nations boasting of enlightenment and the power of the glorious Gospel of Christ to govern them, should so engage, "and to hand and foot to foot" in such scenes of carnage and destruction. How can Christian nations so engaged ever think to succeed in their mission of converting the heathen, when their practices at home are so much at variance with the blessed truths set forth in the sacred volume" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 122).

comment on the superiority of Africa over the West, suggesting that his ideology is more complex than merely believing Africa as backward and in need of “the knowledge of the white man.” Moore’s ideology becomes even more complex given his addition to his previous comments, after begging his pardon for the digression: “And if this contrast in the behavior of the poor African children, with that of those of our own enlightened nation, may be the means of but one step in the march of improvement and reform in this respect, the compiler of these pages will feel amply repaid for the little exertion bestowed upon these few extra lines” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 114). In this way, Moore specifies his point on the superiority of Africa’s treatment of the elderly. Africa’s presumed inferiority is the cause that the superior treatment of the elderly by the young should “put to shame” the manners and customs of the United States, a presumably “enlightened” nation. Moore’s analysis of one way in which African culture is superior to US culture, therefore, is consistent within his greater understanding of Africa as culturally inferior. In any case, Moore’s reflections on Baquaqua’s information are important to observe since they shape the text.

Given passages in which Western / white supremacy is part and parcel of Moore’s antislavery discourse, it is hardly any wonder that versions like Conrad’s and Hunold Lara’s omitted them, but they are nonetheless important because they reveal just what sort of filter Baquaqua’s narration passes through to reach the reader through Moore’s writing. In other words, just as there is no *Biography* without Baquaqua’s oral testimony, the text would not exist if it were not for Moore’s writing. Chapter VII illustrates the impact of Moore’s identity and ideology not only in passages where he narrates, but also in Baquaqua’s narration. Moore’s pitying representation of the “poor African” are repeated in Baquaqua’s narration in his (their) description of the slave ship: “O! friends of humanity, pity the poor African, who has been

trepanned [entrapped] and sold away from friends and home, and consigned to the hold of a slave ship, and consigned to the hold of a slave ship, to await even more horrors and miseries in a distant land, among the religious and benevolent,” (the religious and the benevolent, of course, referring to those like Baquaqua (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 153). Furthermore, we might read the failure of Baquaqua’s first enslaver in Brazil to baptize Baquaqua as critical of Catholicism, considering the Protestant flavor of Moore’s interpretive lens. When Baquaqua’s narration says that his first captor was “a Roman Catholic” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 158), was that Baquaqua or Moore’s contribution? Given Baquaqua’s baffled confusion at his captor’s worship, would he have known what a “Roman Catholic” was, or does this reflect Moore’s interpretation of Baquaqua’s description based on his prior knowledge of Brazil as a Catholic nation? Instances like these show that the first half of *Baquaqua* (and Moore’s point of view in general) is essential to interpreting Baquaqua’s narration. Whereas we might certainly like to believe Moore when he writes that he writes *Biography* in “nearly his [Baquaqua’s] own words,” every word of the text is filtered through Moore’s writing (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 136). In this way, just as *Autobiografía* is partly the product of Del Monte and Suárez y Romero, *Biography* is partly the product of Moore.

Since *Biography* is the combined product of Baquaqua and Moore’s oral and written “authorship,” respectively, the text fits under the slave narrative umbrella. Contrary to its title (and much like *Autobiografía*), *Biography* resists the norms of both biography and autobiography, but illustrates many of the tropes, conventions, and authenticating strategies common in “slave narratives.” Like *Autobiografía*, it contains many scenes of Baquaqua’s punishment and suffering under slavery meant to turn readers’ hearts against the institution. Beyond the Middle Passage, Baquaqua endures brutal treatment under his first captor and even

worse treatment under his second, a sea captain. Some of the distortions between Baquaqua's testimony and Moore's writing are evident in the text. Under Baquaqua's first captor, he is made to carry stones a quarter mile at a time: "hard labor," Baquaqua and Moore describe, "such as none but slaves and horses are put to" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 159). When Baquaqua throws the stones on the ground to relieve himself, his narration describes that "my master would be very angry indeed, and would say the casoori (dog) had thrown down the stone" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 159). The word for dog in Portuguese, however, is "cachorro," a word that Lovejoy describes as "commonly applied as an abusive term to black people and hence considered an extreme insult" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 159).⁸⁴ It is ambiguous as to whether this mistake is Moore or Baquaqua's, although Baquaqua's narration repeatedly shows readers that he understood Portuguese reasonably well.⁸⁵ *Biography* describes that, under his first captor, when he did not sell all his merchandise in the town (Recife),⁸⁶ Baquaqua says that "the lash was my portion" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 159). His abuses only increase under his second captor.

The prefix spells out explicitly that the reason it describes Baquaqua's suffering is to delegitimize the institution of slavery in the eyes of its intended white audience, "the friends of the poor African negro": "This little work may have its desired effect whenever it is read, and no doubt the sufferings of the subject (Mahommah) will bring the tear to many a pitying eye, and the blush to many a dimpled cheek, in shame for the cruelty practiced upon him by men bearing the image of their Maker (...)" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 92, 94). However, scenes of suffering

⁸⁴ Nussenzweig's *Biografia* retains the original mistake with a parenthetical correction – "casoori (cachorro) – as well as a footnote: "Grafado desta forma no original, seguido pela tradução para o inglês '(dog)' "(qtd. in Hunold Lara 274).

⁸⁵ "I soon improved in my knowledge of the Portuguese language whilst here, and was able very shortly to count a hundred" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 159). He later describes that, on his ship voyage to New York, an English passenger describes it in Portuguese: "This same man told me a great deal about New York City, (he could speak Portuguese)" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 171).

⁸⁶ "The 'city' is presumably Recife, capital of Pernambuco. It was normal practice at this time for slaves to be delivered outside the city, in order to evade the attentions of the British navy (...)" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 156).

are just one narrative strategy that approximates it to others commonly labeled as “slave narratives,” starting with the book’s cover. *Biography*’s primary title, *An Interesting Narrative*, borrows from other “Interesting Narratives” such as *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. Also, just as *The Life of Olaudah Equiano* is “Written by Himself” (Gates, *The Classic Slave Narratives* 1) and *The History of Mary Prince* is “Related by Herself” (Gates 227), *Biography* is “Written and Revised from his own Words” as a means of authenticating the experiences described in the narrative (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 87). Another of *Biography*’s authenticating strategies is Moore’s “Preface and Compiler’s Notes,” which had the intended effect of validating black experiences by a white editor to an implied white audience.

Biography engages in many of the narrative tropes common amongst the most widely recognized slave narratives. For example, *Biography* parallels *The Life of Olaudah Equiano*’s narrative arc, from the subject’s early life and capture in Africa through the Middle Passage, slavery in the Americas, life at sea, and eventual freedom. *Biography* and *The Life*, therefore, might be divided into a similar beginning, middle, and end of capture, slavery, and liberation. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* follow similar arcs, although they do not begin in Africa, since Douglass and Harriet Ann Jacobs were both born into slavery in the Southern United States. Nevertheless, their narratives, just like *Baquaqua* and *Equiano*, begin with the subject’s carefree childhood and ignorance of slavery, a brutal awakening to the harsh realities of slavery when they enter adolescence, and a path to freedom through escape. Despite *Baquaqua* and *Equiano* representing what we might call “African slave narratives” and *Douglass* and *Incidents* representing “US slave narratives,” all four share an arc that might be described with the beginning, middle, and end of ignorance,

awakening, and freedom. In their many editions and translations, *Autobiografía* and *Biography* reflect this basic arc as well, therefore meriting their classification as slave narratives.

One final antislavery technique justifying *Biography*'s inclusion in the nineteenth-century slave narrative fold is its comparisons of blacks to whites to validate black people's humanity. Slave narratives' logic consistently goes that slavery is wrong because black people are human, and black people are human because—except for skin color—black people are like whites. This type of representation of black people anticipates a white reading audience who assume that they are not human, or not as human as whites, as *Biography* shows through Moore's narration when he describes Baquaqua's yearning for home.⁸⁷ Passages like these are common in *Biography*, as well as in a similar narrative, published just one year before, entitled *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853). Like *Biography*, *Twelve Years a Slave* is written by a white author (named David Wilson) based on the oral testimony of a former slave (Solomon Northup). In his narration, Northup compulsively validates his humanity in its communion with white people's, such as when he says, "I possessed the same feelings and affections that find a place in the white man's breast" (Wilson and Northup 10). Furthermore, when Northup describes his love for his children, he says, "Their presence was my delight; and I clasped them to my bosom with as warm and tender love as if their clouded skins had been as white as snow" (Wilson and Northup 11). Beyond Wilson's "Editor's Note," Northup's declaration that he loved his dark-skinned children as if they were white suggests that we should understand "Northup" as not just a narrative construction of the man himself, but rather as a product of the compound authorship of Northup

⁸⁷ "Some persons suppose that the African has none of the finer feelings of humanity within his breast, and that the mild of human kindness runs not through his composition; this is an error, an error of the grossest kind; the feelings which animated the whole human race, lives [sic] within the sable creatures of the torrid zone, as well as the inhabitants of the temperate and frigid; the same impulses drive them to action, the same feeling[s] of love move within their bosom, [p. 40] the same maternal and paternal affections are there, the same hopes and fears, griefs and joys, indeed all is there as in the rest of mankind; the only difference is their color (...) (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 146).

and Wilson. The structures of racism behind the language of the text served the purpose of connecting with an implicit white audience, just like in *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua*.

Slave narratives are controversial for scholars like Stepto and Blumenthal, who argue that black perspectives are distorted by white antislavery benefactors. Molloy criticizes Del Monte's influence over Manzano's *Autobiografía*, and Crispin Sartwell argues that slave narratives "were printed by white people for white people, even as they were composed by black people as liberatory instruments" (23).⁸⁸ For these scholars, what Gates and Davis call the "Slave's Narrative" is not accurate. Scholarly attempts to shine a light on white abolitionists' participation in the creation of slave narratives practice the "hermeneutics of suspicion" characteristic of late twentieth century and early twenty-first century post-revisionary scholarship. These scholars and others interrogate white "contamination" in slave narratives and question their canonization in spite of more "authentic" expressions of black voices. I agree with them to an extent and thus extend my argument in this dissertation to include twentieth and twenty-first century Afro-Latin American literary narrative, but it is best when we not only recognize white benefactors' influence but also analyze their genuine literary contributions. The last one that I will consider is the text's representation of Afro-Brazil. *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* is a precursor to the Latin American *testimonio* genre not only in the sense that it involves a *gestor* and *informante* figure but also in its ethnographical interest in Afro-Brazilian culture. These sections are typically excluded from translations and analyses because they are narrated by Moore, but they are one of the most unique aspects of the text. In the first several chapters of *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua*, Moore uses Baquaqua's testimony to describe Djogou and African life in Brazil.

⁸⁸ See "Truth and Concealment in Slave Narratives" from Crispin Sartwell's *Act Like You Know: African-American Autobiography and White Identity* (1998).

The Biography of Afro-Brazil

What makes *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* stand out from other slave narratives is that it constructs a “biography” of the African cultures that were still being forcibly brought to Brazil during the nineteenth century. It would already be unique if it only offered a rare, detailed documentary representation of Brazil as seen through the eyes of an enslaved African, following Baquaqua’s travels from Pernambuco to Rio de Janeiro and Rio Grande do Norte before reaching New York City. However, *Biography* goes beyond even that by also giving us a rich—even if unreliable—documentary picture of the cultures of the peoples captured, sold, and brought to the New World, and that continued being imported illegally in Brazil long past 1831. *Biography*, in other words, gives us a sense of not only the “Manners and Customs” of Djogou, but also how the same manners and customs were brought to and helped shape Brazil. It is this “Biography of Afro-Brazil” that is lost when Moore’s first-person descriptions of West Africa and its people are omitted.

We must of course recognize that these representations are constructions doubly distorted through the lenses of Moore’s writing and Baquaqua’s oral descriptions, but *Biography* is nevertheless a rare contribution to the slave narrative as a genre, along with other texts such as *The Life of Olaudah Equiano* that also describe enslaved Africans’ lives before capture. The first clue as to the distortions of how Africa is represented is in Moore’s words for places. As Law and Lovejoy indicate, “Zoogoo” in fact refers to Djogou, which is “situated inland from the kingdom of Dahomey (in what is today southern Bénin)” (17). Other names of places get lost in translation between Baquaqua’s oral account and Moore’s writing, such as “Berzoo” (referring “more correctly” to “Bergoo” or “Borgu” (Law and Lovejoy 27). The inaccuracies in Moore’s

spelling of places in Africa alerts us to the probable inaccuracies in *Biography*'s representations of Africa and Africans overall. However, they might also alert us to the difficulty of transcribing African knowledge into Occidental languages through writing in general. The text itself indicates this issue in Moore's narration in the first half of *Biography* through its description of African laws and society: "In Africa they have no written or printed forms of government, and yet the people are subject to certain laws, rules and regulations. The government is vested in the king as supreme, next to him are chiefs or petty sovereigns, there are also other officers, whose titles and office cannot be explained very well in English" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 102). In other words, speaking is a form of authority and authorship in Africa. In an African sense, therefore, Baquaqua is very much one of the "authors" of the text through his oral contributions to Moore's writing.

The text itself disturbs the binary separation between the African oral tradition and the Western written one when describing Baquaqua's education, in which he is required to learn to read and write passages from the Koran.⁸⁹ This point, too, illustrates the cultural diversity, complexity, and conflicts present in Africa beyond those concerning the West and slavery. Although Baquaqua is described as a "Mahomedan," there are also descriptions of the impact of pre-Islamic West African beliefs in the region of Djogou, and African Muslims' attitudes towards those beliefs. Beyond the Islamic educational practices of reading and copying the Koran, Moore (informed by Baquaqua's own ideas and prejudices), writes that "The Africans are a superstitious race of people, and believe in witchcraft and other supernatural agencies" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 118). Moore uses such African "superstitions" to justify his overarching

⁸⁹ "The manner of teaching is rather different to other countries, the Africans having neither books nor papers, but a board called Wal-la, on which is written a lesson which the pupil is required to learn to read and write (...)" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 126).

objective goal for conducting Christian missionary work in Africa. Reflecting on the practice of consulting an “astrologer” or “witch” when “they suppose any one person is bewitched,” Moore reflects that “Of course all such notions have their origin in the grossest ignorance, hence the necessity of educating the masses of the people in every part of the world” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 118). However, we also get a sense of Baquaqua’s own prejudices toward pre-Islamic religious practices from a Muslim perspective when Moore writes that “There is a class of men called medicine men, whom the people suppose nothing can hurt; these men have the office assigned them of putting to death these supposed witches. They are called UnBahs and are scattered all about the country; go in [p. 23] a state of nudity; eat swine’s flesh, and are considered by the Mahomedans as a very wicked people” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 118). In this passage, Moore illustrates not only his own negative perceptions of the “UnBahs,” but also Baquaquas because of their “nudity,” diet, and “wickedness.” Therefore, not only Moore’s but also Baquaqua’s judgments guide the narration in sections where Moore is “speaking.”

Moore’s written narration—guided by Baquaqua’s oral narration—bears witness to the clashes of cultures in Africa between pre-Islamic and Islamic Djogou. The sections about Baquaqua’s view of non-Islamic Africans deconstructs the homogenization of Africa in the Occidental gaze. Beyond Muslim Africans, the groups of non-Muslim Africans that Baquaqua observes are important, because they, too, made up the millions captured and sent to Brazil from the sixteenth century through Baquaqua’s time in the nineteenth century. In this way, *An Interesting Narrative* represents a biography of not only Mahommah G. Baquaqua, and not only Samuel Moore, but also of West Africa and its impact on Brazil. It is therefore important to read Moore’s narration in all seven chapters to appreciate the full significance of the brief document to Afro-Brazilian studies. In reading Moore’s narration—parts that are suppressed from Conrad’s

and Hunold Lara's abbreviated versions—the reader gets a sense of how Moore shaped even the sections in which Baquaqua “speaks,” how the text represents a slave narrative rather than an autobiography through its use of narrative and authenticating strategies, and, most importantly, how Baquaqua and millions like him took their knowledge and memory to Brazil and fundamentally shaped its history and culture. Through the knowledge that Baquaqua provides Moore, the Occidental reader accompanies Moore in learning about Africa's cultural legacy and contributions to Brazil—albeit through the secondhand retelling of Moore's writing. Even more than Nussenzweig's translation in Portuguese, therefore, the original *Biography* represents an “Afro-Brazilian slave narrative,” written through a North American lens due to several “interesting” twists of fate.

Baquaqua “Born Again” in Afro-Latin American Studies

Baquaqua's oral testimony represents his authorship over his own “biography.” The text also illustrates him as the “author” of his escape from slavery—like Manzano—and even the (attempted) author of his return to Africa. While Moore illustrates his motivations for writing the pamphlet to be to condemn slavery in the United States to morally justify US missionary presence in Haiti and Africa, he writes specifically in the prefix that it is to raise money for Baquaqua to return home on one of such missions: “If it [this publication] should be the province of Mahommah to go out to Africa as a missionary, according to his heart's desire, it is his intention, if he is permitted to return to this country, to issue this work in a larger form, with the addition of matters that has [sic] either been entirely left out or curtailed for want of space, together with his success amongst his native race, the people of his own clime” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 95). Beyond the prefix, the text itself testifies to Baquaqua's enthusiastic willingness to

renounce Islam and be baptized by the leaders of the Free Baptist Mission society. In the conclusions to *Biography*, Baquaqua's narration attests that he met the Reverend William L. Judd in Port-au-Prince after he had been sent to Haiti from New York. He then attests that Mr. and Mrs. Judd "provided for me a passage on board a vessel bound to New York, to educate me preparatory to going to my own people in Africa, to preach the Gospel of glad tidings of great joy to the ignorant and benighted of my fellow country-men who are now believers in the false prophet Mahomed" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 182-3). Although representing Baquaqua's narration, this part, again, is suppressed from Conrad's and Hunold Lara's versions, which is too bad given the provocative questions it might raise: does this primarily represent Baquaqua or Moore's voice? Did Baquaqua really renounce Islam or did he merely see baptism, the Free Baptist Mission Society, and the oral testimony he gave to Moore to write his *Biography* as an opportunity to go home?⁹⁰

Although Baquaqua "signs off" as saying "I might with propriety commit to paper all that has been recounted in this work," we can only imagine what a version of the story "written by himself" would look like. This is like how we can only imagine what Manzano could have told us in the lost second part of *Autobiografía* (Luis 192). *Biography* fell into obscurity during the times of its publication. However, just as Baquaqua is supposedly "born again" as a Christian in the text, the text itself has been "reborn" in Latin American studies due to its documentary representation of slavery in Brazil from the point of view of the enslaved. Conrad's *Children of God's Fire* (1983) references an even earlier reproduction of passages of *Biography*, entitled

⁹⁰ Through taqiyyah, the Koran permits Muslims to deny their faith publicly in the face of persecution." *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* defines taqiyyah as "[p]recautionary denial of religious belief in the face of potential persecution. Stressed by Shi'i Muslims, who have been subject to periodic persecution by the Sunni majority. The concept is based on Quran 3:28 and 16:106 as well as hadith, tafsir literature, and juridical commentaries" (Esposito). Instead of genuinely converting to Christianity, could Baquaqua have been merely practicing "taqiyyah"?

“Mahommah Q. [sic] Baquaqua: Recollections of a Slave’s Life” in *The African in Latin America* (1975), edited by An M. Pescatello (186). Before Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy’s 2001 republication of *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua*, Lovejoy had published an article on Baquaqua in Portuguese in 2002⁹¹ and co-authored another article in Spanish with María Capitello in 2008.⁹² Most recently, Jennifer Gómez Menjívar published an article in Spanish entitled “Negro, letrado y filósofo: Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua y su *Biografía*” (1854). In addition to Nussenzweig’s 1988 and Editora Urapuru’s 2016 translations, a theater adaptation produced by Cia do Pássaro and entitled *Baquaqua—Documento Dramático Extraordinário* debuted in 2016 in São Paulo (Paoliello), all attesting to its rising face as a documentary representation of slavery in Brazil from an African perspective.

The best of these articles, translations, and adaptations do not squeamishly obscure Moore’s voice in *Biography*, but rather honestly and soberly acknowledge Moore’s important role in the work’s realization. His writing shapes not only the “third-person” narration, but also Baquaqua’s “first-person” one. In understanding Moore and Baquaqua’s distinct written and oral “authorships,” respectively, we therefore also may better understand the ways in which black and white authors—whether writing or speaking—collaborated during the nineteenth century to produce documentary representations of slavery in Latin America. In continuation with Manzano’s *Autobiografía* and Baquaqua’s *Biography*, Maria Firmina dos Reis’s *Úrsula, romance original brasileiro* continues to show that Afrodescendant authors represented slavery in Latin America not just through firsthand experiences but also engagement with the dominant

⁹¹ See Paul E. Lovejoy, “Identidade e a Miragem da Etnicidade: A Joranada de Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua para as Américas” (2002).

⁹² See Paul E. Lovejoy and María Capitello, “Comparación de la vida de dos musulmanes en América: Muhammad Kaba Saghanagh y Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua” (2008).

political and literary discourses of the times. Moreover, it shows black female authors' contributions to antislavery narrative in Latin America during the nineteenth century.

III. An “Original Brazilian Romance”: Maria Firmina dos Reis’s *Úrsula*

First published anonymously under the pseudonym “uma maranhense” in 1859—coincidentally the same year that Luís Gama published his first work, a book of poetry entitled *Trovas burlescas*—*Úrsula*, by Maria Firmina dos Reis (1825-1917), has been called one of the founding texts of Afro-Brazilian literature and a precursor to the concept of *negritude*, the theory of black identity and consciousness in the African diaspora.⁹³ At the same time as more attention has been focused on the author’s role as a founder of Afro-Brazilian literature, her novel has been studied and celebrated by recent critics especially for its “realistic” representations of slavery. Denunciations of slavery come from the novel’s free indirect discourse, as well as directly from the voices of enslaved black characters themselves, who condemn their condition of bondage and reminisce of the freedom they and their ancestors once knew in Africa before they were made slaves in Brazil. In the novel, these characters include the virtuous and tragic Túlio and Susana, and the wayward and pitiable Pai Antero, symbol of the crushing effects of slavery and alcoholism on the human spirit. Ultimately, all three characters succumb to the barbarity of slavery and seignorial society at large: although recently freed by Tancredo, Túlio is murdered by the novel’s antagonist, the diabolical commendador Fernando P***; Susana dies from her punishment, ordered by the same; and Antero—yet another of Fernando’s slaves—is a shell of who he was in Africa, drowning his sorrows in cachaça to escape his miserable condition of slavery in Brazil.

⁹³ See “Maria Firmina dos Reis: escrita íntima na construção do si mesmo” by Maria Helena Pereira Toledo Machado. See also *Faces de uma precursora*, “Prestadoras de negritude,” Eduardo Assis Duarte.

To illuminate the significance these pioneering representations of black people in Brazilian literature, many critics have turned to a novel that was once considered Brazil's first (and only) abolitionist novel but has come to represent *Úrsula*'s flawed foil in Afro-Brazilian studies: *A Escrava Isaura* (1875), by Bernardo Guimarães. Whereas Guimarães's novel poses its antislavery critique on the figure of its white-passing title character, *Úrsula*'s antislavery discourse has been measured as more authentic because it sympathizes with enslaved Africans and Afro-Brazilians. These characters denounce the severity of the slavery that oppresses them "in their own words." The superiority of *Úrsula*'s antislavery discourse over *A Escrava Isaura*'s has been attributed not only to the texts' contrasting representations of slavery and the enslaved, but also due the contrasts in the authors' biographies. While the novel itself says only that it was written by "uma maranhense," Horácio de Almeida, who "discovered" *Úrsula* in the 1960s, published a fac-similar edition of the novel in 1975, thereby reintroducing the novel to the public after a century of neglect. Although the novel was written under a pseudonym, Almeida achieved assigning authorship to one Maria Firmina dos Reis, an obscure educator and author from Guimarães, Maranhão, near the capital of São Luís.⁹⁴ In the same year that Almeida's fac-similar version of *Úrsula* came out, the Maranhense journalist and author Nascimento Moraes Filho published a rigorous study of Maria Firmina dos Reis, including biographic information about the author and other writings by her. In addition to *Úrsula*'s prologue, in which the author describes herself as a woman of humble social status, the biographical information presented by Moraes Filho describes her as "morena" with "cabelo, crespo" and "nariz curto e grosso" (Moraes Filho). Based on this information, critics such as Luiza Lobo, Zahidé Lupinacci Muzart, and

⁹⁴ The exception being Sacramento Blake's *Diccionario Bibliographico Brazileiro*, which served as Almeida's source for assigning *Úrsula*'s authorship to Maria Firmina dos Reis.

Eduardo Assis Duarte have argued that Maria Firmina was better able to represent the enslaved than Bernardo Guimarães, a member of Brazil's economic and cultural (white) elite.

It is thus of utmost importance to the literary historiography of Brazil that Maria Firmina dos Reis be correctly recognized as a black woman, because it proves that black women have made invaluable contributions to Brazilian literature long before the twentieth century. However, in letting the conversation stop there, we might be missing the ways in which it reflects, interprets, and localizes the widespread conventions of antislavery discourse in the nineteenth century. Antislavery discourse circulated widely in Latin American literature and crossed international borders. In his article “The Press and Brazilian Narratives of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: Slavery and the Public Sphere in Rio de Janeiro, ca. 1855,” Celso Castilho shows that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), by Harriet Beecher Stowe, had made an impact on public and literary discourse in Brazil through a translation into Portuguese in 1853. Castilho shows how Stowe’s novel inspired another feminist author and educator, Nísia Floresta, in her 1855 short story, “Páginas de uma vida obscura.” If *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* influenced Floresta’s “Páginas de uma vida obscura” and Bernardo Guimarães’s *A escrava Isaura*, it probably also influenced Maria Firmina dos Reis’s *Úrsula*. A comparison of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Úrsula* would appear to confirm this: both novels condemn slavery under Christian ideals of universal brotherhood, uphold the virtuousness and “noble” character of the enslaved over their oppressors, and denounce the cruel treatment suffered by black people under slavery. There are also coincidences between the novels’ plot and characters that I will develop later. Both *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe, and *Úrsula* uses the novel as a medium in which to circulate similar discourses found in slave narratives such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and “Life of the Negro Poet,” (aka *Autobiografía*).

Especially as the first abolitionist novel in Brazil and as the first novel written by an Afro-Brazilian woman, *Úrsula* is indeed an “original” romance / novel, as the title suggests. However, its similarities to other narratives also illustrate the vast circulation of antislavery discourse in the Americas. Just as Stowe’s novel draws from Douglass’s *Narrative*, *Úrsula* likely draws from Stowe’s novel. Afrodescendant authors like Maria Firmina dos Reis therefore wrote not only from firsthand experience but also engaged with other works of literature to produce their own. Noting this potential influence does not negate its originality but rather illustrates Maria Firmina dos Reis’s engagement with the intellectual process of writing literature. This is especially important to consider since Maria Firmina dos Reis’s biography suggests that she witnessed slavery but never experienced it firsthand. The same critics that view *Úrsula*’s antislavery discourse as a product of her biography demonstrate a certain reluctance to observe that the book is not named after a black character at all (as the covers of many recent editions in Brazil might suggest), but rather a white and slaveholding one. Despite recent enthusiasm for the novel’s antislavery character, *Úrsula* also illustrates a literary tension between conventions of the Romantic novel and its realist elements.

At the same time as Afro-Brazilian studies has celebrated *Úrsula* as a nineteenth-century precursor to modern black identity and consciousness, the field has struggled to reconcile the novel’s antislavery discourse with its main plotline, centered on an ill-fated romance between the title-character, Úrsula, and her beloved, Tancredo. While they are both members of the Brazilian Northeast’s powerful slaveholding class, Tancredo purchases Túlio’s freedom from Úrsula’s mother, Luiza B., and the decadence of Úrsula’s father, Paulo B. leaves her and her mother in financial ruins. And despite their relative privilege over the novel’s black characters, all are victims by its bitter end. Whereas Tancredo desires Úrsula out of love, Fernando, the novel’s

antagonist, desires Úrsula for lust and attempts to seduce her with his high position in society. When Úrsula rejects Fernando's proposal, he becomes enraged and kills Tancredo and Úrsula's former slave (turned friend) Túlio, thus driving Úrsula to go mad and ultimately die of grief. While the Romantic and abolitionist elements of the novel tend to be analyzed in isolation, they complement rather than contradict one another. The novel constructs solidarity between white women and enslaved black people by giving them a common villain in Fernando, who in addition to destroying Úrsula's happiness, is notorious for his extreme insensitivity and cruelty toward the enslaved—hence the death of Susana. By combining antislavery and Romantic elements, *Úrsula* resembles antislavery novels both inside and outside of Latin America that sought to court readers, seduce their minds, and stir their passions against slavery. The significance and “originality” of *Úrsula*, in other words, is not only due to its author’s biography nor its uniqueness to Brazil, but also the ways in which it is perhaps the strongest example of Afro-Brazilians’ participation in shaping antislavery discourse during the nineteenth century.

Maria Firmina dos Reis, by *Úrsula*

Much of what know about Maria Firmina dos Reis comes from the novel itself, even though her name was not printed on the original version. She maintained her anonymity under the pseudonym “uma maranhense” for several plausible reasons. The novel’s bold denunciation of slavery in Maranhão could have had serious repercussions for Dos Reis, especially as a woman of color. She does offer some biographical information in the novel’s preface. The author offers a humble and self-effacing portrait of herself as “uma mulher, e mulher brasileira, de educação acanhada e sem o trato e a conversação dos homens ilustrados, que aconselham, que discutem e que corrigem, com uma instrução miserrima, apenas conhecendo a língua de seus

paes, e pouco lida, o seu cabedal intellectual é quasi nullo” (6). On its surface, this preface is a testament to the social obstacles that women faced in nineteenth century Brazil toward achieving the same level of literary success as men. The novel itself demonstrates Dos Reis’s profound learning despite her limited formal education. *Úrsula*’s allusions to Shakespeare (and, moreover, *Othello*, thereby further suggesting the importance of race in the novel) contradict the preface’s claims that the author was “poorly read.” Moreover, the author writes that knew only the world of “her parents’ language,” but her vocabulary and diction suggest that she was indeed well-read and had borrowed her words (many in disuse) from classics of Western literature.⁹⁵ Therefore, a way of reading the prologue against the grain is that the author in fact announces her intellectual capabilities and reading by denying them, all while cleverly still laying claim to the virtue of modesty, which would have been especially important as an Afro-Brazilian female writer in a white supremacist and patriarchal society. The author’s identity as a reader—in addition to her identity as a “maranhense” and “mulher brasileira”—should guide our reading of *Úrsula* because she herself brings it to our attention through negation.

In addition to the author’s prologue, the fac-similar version of *Úrsula* (published in 1975) contains a prologue written by Horácio de Almeida that narrates his process of assigning the anonymous and all-but-forgotten novel’s authorship to Maria Firmina dos Reis. Almeida’s process depended on both his own research and chance, which he claims is how he found what he believed to be the novel’s only extant copy in the first place: “O acaso, às vezes, ajuda a desanuviar o passado” (IV). He narrates how he found the only extant copy of *Úrsula* by writing that “Faz coisa de seis ou oito anos comprei um lote de livros, entre os quais vinha uma pequena brochura, que me despertou a atenção. A bem dizer, foi por causa dessa brochura que adquiri os

⁹⁵ As Horácio de Almeida’s prologue in the fac-similar version suggests, “Aqui e ali, como uma pedra de propeço, topa o leitor com uma palavra for a de uso, exumada dos clássicos” (VII).

livros em apreço. A folha de rosto assim rezava: *Ursula/Romance Original Brasileiro/Por Uma Maranhense/San'Luis/Na Typographia do Progresso/Rua Sant'Anna, 49—859*" (Almeida IV).

Since the novel was signed anonymously by "Uma Maranhense," he began a search for other authors who may have used that pseudonym, but to no avail—at first. Whereas he had consulted "Tancredo e outros dicionários de pseudônimos," it was instead by perusing the Doutor Augusto Victorino Alves Sacramento Blake's *Diccionario Bibliographico Brazileiro* (1900) for authors from Maranhão that he eventually found Maria Firmina dos Reis, author of *Úrsula*, on page 232 of the sixth volume: "Pensei em Sacramento Blake, mas só podia consultá-lo se tivesse o nome da autora, que era então para mim uma incógnita... Percorrendo a relação dos escritores maranhenses, encontrei Maria Firmina dos Reis, que Sacramento Blake apresenta como autora do romance *Ursula*" (V). In other words, the growing bibliography on Maria Firmina dos Reis and her work may be traced back to a single reference in Sacramento Blake's bibliographic dictionary to *Úrsula*, found by Almeida like a needle in a haystack through determination and sheer luck.

As Almeida himself notes, the biographic information provided by Blake about Maria Firmina dos Reis is very scarce, occupying only about a paragraph.⁹⁶ Expanding on this short biography of Maria Firmina dos Reis, another researcher, Nascimento Morais Filho, included more bibliographical information on the author in *Maria Firmina. Fragmentos de uma vida*, which was published in the same year as Almeida's fac-similar republication of *Úrsula* (1975).

⁹⁶ "D. Maria Firmina dos Reis — Filha de João Pedro Esteves e dona Leonor Felippa dos Reis, nasceu na cidade de S. Luiz do Maranhão a 11 de outubro de 1825. Dedicando-se ao magisterio, regeu a cadeira de primerias letras de S. José de Guimarães desde Agosto de 1847 até março de 1881, quando foi aposentada. Em 1880 fundou uma aula mixta em Maçarico, termo de Guimarães, cujo Ensino era gratuito para quasi todos os alumnos, e por isso foi a professora obrigada a suspendel-a depois de dous annos e meio. Cultivou a poesia, e tanto em verso, como em prosa escreveu algumas obras, de que as mais conhecidas são: — *Cantos á beira-mar: poesias. S. Luiz.... — Ursula: romance. S. Luiz.... — A escrava: romance. S. Luiz...*" (Sacramento Blake 232)

Morais Filho provides a physical description of suggesting that she had black physical features.⁹⁷ The “discovery” of *Úrsula* by Horácio de Almeida and the biography provided by Nascimento Morais Filho have ignited the interest of Afro-Brazilianist scholarship in Maria Firmina dos Reis and her work. In the wake of 1975, more and more scholars have read and analyzed what Almeida’s prologue argues is Brazil’s first novel of female authorship, and what Morais Filho’s biography suggests is the first novel by an Afro-Brazilian woman. Maria Helena Pereira Toledo Machado suggests that her mother, Leonor Felippa, was a black freedwoman:

Recentemente, devido à localização nos arquivos do Maranhão, pela pesquisadora Mindinha de Araújo, de novos documentos relativos a Maria Firmina dos Reis, duas correções a respeito de sua biografia estão sendo propostas. Uma primeira se refere à sua data de nascimento, que, como apontado acima, teria ocorrido em 11 de março de 1822, conforme consta em declaração em Auto de Justificação. Uma segunda diz respeito à localização de um Auto de Batismo de Maria, mulata filha de Leonor Felippa, que aparece como preta forra, ex-escrava de Caetano José Teixeira, o que implica novas abordagens da biografia de nossa autora, pois, nesse caso, ambos os pais seriam negros” (95).⁹⁸

It is for this reason that Cristina Ferreira Pinto-Bailey writes that Maria Firmina Dos Reis’s parents “were Leonor Felippa dos Reis, a freed slave of mixed race, and João Pero Esteves, a Black man about whom very little is known” (“Introduction” ix). Despite disagreements amongst critics over Maria Firmina dos Reis’s parentage, the consensus would appear to be that she was

⁹⁷ “Traços físicos – Nenhum retrato deixou Maria Firmina dos Reis. Mas estão acordes os traços desse retrato-falado dos que a conhecem ao andar pelas casas dos 85 (oitenta e cinco anos: Rosto arredondado, cabelo, Crespo, grisalho, fino, curto, amarrado na altura da nuca; olhos castanho-escuros; nariz curto e grosso; lábios finos; mãos e pés pequenos; meã (1,58, pouco mais ou menos), morena” (Filho).

⁹⁸ See “Maria Firmina dos Reis: escrita íntima na construção do si mesmo, by Maria Helena Pereira Toledo Machado” (2019).

able to accomplish realistic representations of enslaved black people and their experiences in her writing because she was an Afro-Brazilian woman herself. *Úrsula* appears to be the first Brazilian novel to denounce slavery, elevating its status to the first abolitionist novel in Brazil as well. Focusing especially on these aspects of the novel, recent scholarship tends to argue that *Úrsula* is worthy of study, not only for its “firsts,” but also because of the verisimilitude with which it represents slavery. Because it denounces slavery based on its oppression of black people, *Úrsula* is analyzed as soaring above Brazil’s other abolitionist novel, *A escrava Isaura*, which features a protagonist who is enslaved but is white passing. Furthermore, despite Maria Firmina dos Reis limited biography, Brazilian literary critics in the twenty-first century draw a direct link between the author’s work and her social status as a woman of color in Northeastern Brazilian society. In this way, just as Maria Firmina dos Reis authored *Úrsula*, the novel’s depiction of slavery has “authored” Maria Firmina dos Reis and her recent entrance into Brazilian literary history, from persona non grata to a founder of Afro-Brazilian narrative.⁹⁹

Recent anthology entries on Maria Firmina dos Reis attest to the ways in which Maria Firmina dos Reis’s biography has been constructed by readings of black representation in *Úrsula*. For example, in the anthology *Escritoras Brasileiras do Século XIX* (1999), the editor Zahidé Lupinacci Muzart argues that *Úrsula* did not become an influential novel during its time because of the author’s racial and gender identity.¹⁰⁰ She continues that irony of this is that it was her peripheral position in society that gave her the ability to write authentically about slavery. In the more recent anthology *Literatura e Afrodescendência* (2011), Luiza Lobo adds to Muzart’s assessment that the author was able to accomplish such realistic representations of enslaved

⁹⁹ See Michel Foucault’s “What Is an Author?” (1969).

¹⁰⁰ “A questão da Abolição vai ser quase um *leit-motiv* da pena feminina, mas somente com o romance *Úrsula*, teremos uma visão diferente do problema. O livro, por ter sido editado na periferia, longe da Corte, e por ser de uma mulher e negra, lastivelmanete, não teve maior repercussão” (Muzart 266).

black people not despite but rather due to her marginal status in Brazilian society. Since Maria Firmina dos Reis was a “mulata e bastarda”—her assessment coming from *Fragmentos de uma vida* —, Luiza Lobo argues that the author inserts “elementos típicos da sociedade escravagista brasileira e da real situação do escravo africano no Maranhão, com certeza por ter tido convívio pessoal e concreto com escravos” (118). In other words, Lobo argues that because Maria Firmina dos Reis lived at the margins of Imperial Brazilian cultural life as a primary school teacher in a provincial town in Brazil’s remote Northeast, she was therefore able to portray marginalized and enslaved black characters better than authors like Bernardo Guimarães who largely came from Brazil’s white, male, and wealthy economic elite.

Despite its success during its times, Bernardo Guimarães’s *A Escrava Isaura* has served as the picture *par excellence* of white elite authors’ detachment from the harsh realities of slavery. In “Currents in Afro-Latin American Political and Social Thought” from *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction* (2018), Frank A. Guridy and Juliet Hooker cite Maria Firmina dos Reis’s abolitionist novel as proof that “Afro-Latin Americans played fundamental roles in dismantling slavery in Latin America” (191). This is a significant corrective to the previous prevailing belief that *A escrava Isaura* was “Brazil’s only important abolitionist novel” (Haberly 146). In its time, *Isaura* was a success and even gained official recognition from the Emperor Pedro II. It has remained popular over a century later. Carolina Maria de Jesus cites it as one of her foremost inspirations to write,¹⁰¹ and it was adapted into a 100-episode telenovela produced by Rede Globo in 1976 (Braga). While *A escrava Isaura*’s popular success in these

¹⁰¹ “Uma vizinha emprestou-me um romance: *Escrava Isaura*. Compreendi tão bem o romance que chorei com dó da escrava que foi amarrada na corrente. E assim foi duplicando o meu interesse pela literatura” (Carolina Maria de Jesus, *Meu sonho é escrever* 20).

ways has stood the test of time, its critical success has not. In *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*, David T. Haberly writes of Bernardo Guimarães that

His characters are stereotypical representatives of pure Good or pure Evil, and his plots are rarely convincing. These flaws are particularly evident in *A escrava Isaura*, a novel which may have been influenced by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (...)

While Guimarães's text appears to attack slavery, his beautiful and angelic heroine is far from a typical slave; she is educated and highly cultured, and her "skin is like the ivory of a keyboard..." (Haberly, "The Brazilian Novel from 1850-1900" 146)¹⁰²

Indeed, part of the injustice of Isaura's enslavement is that she passes as white, despite that she is in fact the Afrodescendant "filha de uma linda mulata" (Guimarães 8). Perhaps in this way, the novel invites the implied (white) readers to project themselves onto the main character and imagine being powerless against the fearsome possession of the novel's dastardly villain, Leóncio, and subject to his cruel punishments. As a woman whose beauty is repeatedly emphasized throughout the novel, Isaura also fits a "damsel in distress" archetype that may have hail the same implied readers into the story and care about the fate of the hapless Isaura. In any case, the novel's *deus ex machina* conclusion of Isaura's rescue by the generous and handsome millionaire, Álvaro, and Leóncio's subsequent suicide perhaps confirm critical judgment of the novel as at best "utterly unrealistic" and, at worst, offensive to the experience of millions enslaved in Brazil (Haberly, "The Brazilian Novel from 1850-1900" 146).

¹⁰² To the point of Guimarães borrowing from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Sayers argues that "It is a fact (...) that only after the appearance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* does Brazilian literature become thronged with cruel overseers and virtuous slaves. The famous flight of Bernardo Guimarães' Isaura from Minas to Recife was probably suggested by Eliza's flight across the Ohio's ice floes to freedom in the North and ultimately in Canada" (167). As I will show later, a close comparative reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Úrsula* suggests that Maria Firmina dos Reis, too, adapts themes and scenes of Stowe's novel to a Brazilian historical and geographical setting.

Whereas contemporary literary criticism has generally judged *Isaura* as a ridiculous novel due to its representation of a “white” slave, *Úrsula* has been praised for its realism. In *Escritoras Brasileiras do Século XIX*, Muzart argues that *Úrsula* avoids relying on stereotypes such as the “mulata sensual” to portray its black characters and instead imbues them with psychological depth and their own search for identity.¹⁰³ She then contrasts *Úrsula* directly with *A escrava Isaura*: “Esse lado da narrativa é dos mais interessantes porque traz à literatura brasileira uma visão diferente do passado do negro africano, sendo, por isso, na minha opinião, superior ao romance *A escrava Isaura*, de Bernardo Guimarães, do coloração racista, visto que o conceito de beleza do autor só pode estar na mulher branca e rosada” (267). Luiza Lobo echoes Muzart in her analysis of a “*A escrava*,” a short story by Maria Firmina dos Reis, that she argues also more accurately represents slavery in Brazil by representing it as it was experienced by enslaved black people: “destaca-se por sua coragem e originalidade entre outras obras que circulavam na época romântica, que defendiam o abolicionismo em tese, no plano das ideias, mas não logravam vivenciar o problema na própria carne. Entre estas, contam-se o inverossímil *A escrava Isaura* (1875), de Bernardo de Guimarães” (118). The editor of the anthology *Literatura e afrodescendência*, Eduardo de Assis Duarte wrote an article in the Spring 2017 edition of the Afro-Hispanic Review, entitled “Precursoras da Negritude,” in which he distinguishes Maria Firmina dos Reis’s novel above her contemporaries’ because, unlike theirs, it condemns slavery as an affront to Christian morality, not just because one slave is represented as

¹⁰³ She quotes Charles Martin, the author of the introduction of a recent edition of the novel: “A luta psicológica dos personagens pela propria identidade supera as simples descrições de navios negreiros. A visão de Maria Firmina é bem mais ampla e refinada que em geral. Neste romance, ela escapa ao estereótipo da ‘mulata sensual’ (como a Rita Baiana, de Alusío Azevedo) como o principal ponto de interesse nos enredos sobre a raça negra” (Muzart 267).

especially undeserving of her condition (126). Although Duarte does not cite Bernardo Guimarães's novel directly here, *Isaura* aptly fits his description.¹⁰⁴

In sum, the current critical consensus is that *Úrsula*'s depictions of enslaved black people correspond to the reality of slavery in Brazil, especially in comparison with *A escrava Isaura*. Lobo argues that “uma das maiores originalidades da obra de Maria Firmina é revelar o escravo à luz realista” (119), and Muzart seconds this point, declaring that “pela primeira vez o escravo negro tem voz” (266). However, current criticism on *Úrsula* risks overstating its case. The potential danger in imagining *Úrsula* as *Isaura*'s opposite obscures the ways in which both novels dare to argue against slavery at the height of its profitability in Brazil. Both use tropes and techniques of nineteenth-century antislavery narratives and the Romantic novel to criticize the barbarity and heartlessness of the slave system. *Úrsula* represents a definitive step toward realism by criticizing slavery for its oppression of black characters, but internationally Maria Firmina dos Reis's novel belongs to a larger network of antislavery novels that combine both Romantic and realist elements. This does not take away from Maria Firmina dos Reis's legacy as an Afro-Brazilian author but adds to its importance in the context of not only Brazil but an international network of antislavery discourse and literary narrative.

Realism and “Romance”

A mainstay feature of the nineteenth century Latin American novel is inserting sympathetic representations of black people, as well as direct criticisms of slavery, into the greater framework of a fatal love plot.¹⁰⁵ This includes Maria Firmina dos Reis's novel. In

¹⁰⁴ “Ressalta-se de início que não se trata de condenar a escravidão unicamente porque um escravo específico possui um caráter elevado, como se pode lerem narrativas abolicionistas da época” (Duarte 126).

¹⁰⁵ See *Foundational Fictions* (1991), by Doris Sommer.

addition to the tragic plight of the enslaved, *Úrsula* centers on two other hapless victims of fate, the title character and her beloved, Tancredo. By analyzing the novel's antislavery discourse within the context of Romanticism, I aim to go beyond the hypothesis that Maria Firmina dos Reis was able to create a realistic portrait of slavery in Brazil because she was an Afrodescendant woman herself. While *Úrsula* does indeed produce an antislavery discourse based in favorable representations of black people and negative representations of slavery, so do many other Latin American novels published both before and after it. In Cuba, realist and antislavery elements were being written into tragic romances such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841), Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco* (published in 1880), and Cirilo Villaverde's final version of *Cecilia Valdés* (1882). These novels were published abroad (Spain and the United States, respectively), and Avellaneda was not part of the Del Monte literary circle. They were therefore probably not directly influenced by Manzano, but they both reflect the antislavery elements exemplified by *Autobiografía* and promoted by Domingo del Monte's antislavery and Cuban nationalist literary project. Like these Cuban novels, *Úrsula* inserts antislavery discourse within a *romance* that, very much in the spirit of its times, represents love, death, and slavery as tragic elements of a cruel and unjust society.

At about the same time as he read, marked, and copied Juan Francisco Manzano's autobiographical manuscript (1839), Anselmo Suárez y Romero wrote his antislavery masterpiece novel, *Francisco*. Like Manzano's manuscript, *Francisco* represents Suárez y Romero's response to a request made by Domingo del Monte to fulfill his wishes to construct a Cuban style of literature based on realistic and critical portraits of slavery rather than repeat the dominant conventions of European Romanticism (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 1). *Francisco* reflects the influences of both Manzano and Del Monte through its representations of Ricardo's

ruthlessness toward his slave, Francisco. Like Manzano, the fictional Francisco receives terrible punishments from his captor to the effect of criticizing slavery. However, the context of these punishments is different. Manzano tends to be punished arbitrarily and “p^r la mas leve maldad propia de muchacho” (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 304). On the other hand, Francisco is punished for falling in love with and impregnating another one of Ricardo’s slaves, Dorotea. Not despite but because Dorotea loves Francisco in return, she rejects him to spare Francisco from further punishment. In despair from not only Dorotea’s rejection but also from his solitude as an African displaced and enslaved in Cuba, Francisco takes his life to end his sorrows and defy the chains that bind him. The marks of Juan Francisco Manzano’s influence are evident in Francisco’s scars, but *Francisco* is different from *Autobiografía* in its depiction of an African rather than “pardo” protagonist, as well as its tragic and Romantic love plot.

Like *Francisco*, Avellaneda’s *Sab* narrates the fatal passion of its title character. However, Sab is a house slave who loves his white mistress (who is also his cousin), Carlota. She only finds out about his love for her at the end of the novel when she reads a letter by him, years after his death. Carlota is engaged to Enrique Otway, an Englishman whom she loves, but who only enters the engagement for Carlota’s financial promise. Enrique’s falseness and cold, calculating self-interest is juxtaposed against Sab’s genuine love for Carlota and his self-sacrificing altruism for her. The novel therefore boldly represents Sab, a house slave, as morally superior and more worthy than Enrique, a white man, whose marriage with Carlota becomes her source of woes. Tragically and symbolically, Sab dies the very day of Enrique and Carlota’s wedding day, passing on into the hearts and minds of the novel’s readers as an allegory for the injustice of slavery, that prevents what could have been Carlota’s chance to know true love.

William Luis argues that Gómez de Avellaneda was not a member of Del Monte’s literary circle,

and it is uncertain whether she had read Manzano's manuscript (or his published poems) before leaving Cuba for Spain in 1836. Nevertheless, *Sab* might be read as an extension of Del Monte's project of turning away from the Romantic style popular in Spain and Europe to develop a Cuban style of narrative based on a counter-discourse to slavery. We might therefore read irony in the fact that Gómez de Avellaneda published her novel, not in Cuba, but in Spain.¹⁰⁶

Another Cuban novel (although also published abroad) that directly confronts and challenges the practice of enslaving black people is the definitive 1882 version of *Cecilia Valdés*. Even though, like *A Escrava Isaura*, it is also named after a "mulata" protagonist, there is much more to the novel than its title. On its surface, the novel narrates an incestuous and fatal love triangle. The novel's patriarchal antagonist, Cándido Gamboa, has a child out of wedlock with a black slave. Not knowing that she is his half-sister, Leonardo Gamboa falls in love with Cecilia but betrays her by marrying his parent's choice for their only son, the illustrious Isabel Ilincheta. To avenge her heartbreak, Cecilia sends her suitor Pimienta to kill Isabel at the wedding, but he kills Leonardo instead and escapes. A masterpiece of Romantic literature, the novel draws the reader in through its engrossing plot. However, as William Luis argues in *Literary Bondage*, *Cecilia Valdés* is also a realistic novel. It takes a stronger antislavery position than *A escrava Isaura* by directly confronting the enslavement of black people in its definitive 1882 version both in its concrete descriptions of the sugar plantations as well as in its allegorical implications. As William Luis also shows in his article "Cecilia Valdés: el nacimiento de una novela antiesclavista," *Cecilia Valdés* went through three versions until it became the widely known

¹⁰⁶ See "How to Read *Sab*," which observes the similarities between *Sab* and Manzano: "There are similarities between *Sab* and Manzano, the later of whom Suárez y Romero also used as a model for his protagonist (...) Like Manzano, *sab* was not a common slaver, but a fortunate house slave, who could speak clearly, read and write, and think rationally. *Sab* was a coach driver, the most coveted and recognized position amongst slaves, as narrated by Suárez y Romero's *Francisco* (...) If we consider *Sab* within the context of the other antislavery works, Gómez de Avellaneda's novel takes a similar antislavery stance. The passive slave should be viewed as a narrative strategy to entice the reader into accepting and even identifying with the slave" (Luis, "How to read *Sab*" 182).

classic it is today. The first two versions written in Cuba did not criticize slavery in any tangible way because of strict Cuban censorship. Published in New York far away from Cuban censors, the definitive 1882 version of *Cecilia Valdés* depicts slavery in a negative light through its descriptions of the Gamboa family's sugar mills:

Las crueidades de la esclavitud son claramente visibles en el segundo volumen de la novela, cuando los Gamboa vuelven al ingenio. *Cecilia Valdés* va más allá que otras novelas antiesclavistas al darnos una vívida descripción de los esclavos cimarrones, tanto los del campo como de los de la ciudad, y las razones que les llevaron a actuar en forma tan arriesgada. De hecho, uno de los episodios más traumáticos es el que dedica a Pedro, el esclavo cimarrón que fue capturado y mordido por perros, llevado al cepo y finalmente a la enfermería, donde se suicida tragándose la lengua. (Luis, “Cecilia Valdés” 192)

Pedro swallowing his tongue can be read as a metaphor for the silence imposed on the enslaved through trauma. Whereas Pedro himself does not speak, the descriptions of slavery on the sugar mills in *Cecilia Valdés* attest to the inhumanity of the institution. In addition to giving us vivid descriptions of the harsh life for black people on the sugar plantations, Luis argues that the novel goes beyond other antislavery novels by allegorizing the end of slavery through Leonardo's death. By murdering Leonardo, Pimienta puts an end to the Gamboa lineage and their legacy of oppression.

Cecilia Valdés is therefore a complex novel because, while it idealizes the beauty of its “mulata” protagonist, it also features realistic descriptions of slavery and its oppression of enslaved black people. In this way, *Úrsula* is more like *Francisco, Sab*, and *Cecilia Valdés* than *A Escrava Isaura*. However, *Úrsula* is different from all these novels since it is the only one named after not an Afrodescendant character but rather a white slaveholding character. Úrsula

and her mother Luisa own two slaves, Túlio and Susana. Susana was originally purchased by Fernando, but she was sent with his sister Luisa when she married Paulo, whom Susana regards as “mau,” like Fernando. However, Susana attests to the compassionate and “extremely kind” treatment that she and Túlio received under Luisa and Úrsula (especially when Paulo died). But in any case, she also says that only death could wipe away her memory of suffering under Fernando.¹⁰⁷ All four characters—Túlio, Susana, Luisa, and Úrsula—are depicted as hapless victims of tragic circumstances. Luisa’s husband and Úrsula’s father, Paulo B., shuns Luisa’s love and spends the family’s money on “loucas paixões” before dying and leaving Luisa (literally) paralyzed and the family penniless.¹⁰⁸ When Luisa dies, Úrsula is left an orphan and in the absolute control of her uncle Fernando, who arranges to marry her niece against her will.

The misfortunes that Luisa and Úrsula face are therefore paralleled by their slaves’ bondage. In the opening chapter of the novel, Túlio goes out of his way to save the handsome yet melancholic Tancredo after he has fallen from his horse. Tancredo praises the Good Samaritan Túlio’s benevolence, but Túlio rejects Tancredo’s praise: “A minha condicção é a de misero escravo! Meu senhor—continuou—não me chameis amigo,” to which Tancredo responds, “Calla-te, oh! Pelo céo, calla-te meu pobre Túlio—interrompeo o joven cavaleiro—dia virá em que os homens reconheçam que são todos irmãos” (18). As Muzart and Lobo argue, *Úrsula* is a stronger abolitionist novel than *A escrava Isaura* because it presents Túlio as Tancredo’s equal and as morally superior to the villainous Fernando. However, the dialogue does not follow the conventions of social realism but rather Romanticism. As their dialogue shows, Túlio speaks the

¹⁰⁷ “O senhor Paulo B. . . morre, e sua esposa, e sua filha procuraram em sua extrema bondade faser-nos esquecer nossas passadas desditas! Túlio, meu filho, eu as amo de todo o coração, e lhes agradeço; mas a dor, que tenho no coração, só a morte poderá apagar!” (94-5).

¹⁰⁸ “Ah! Senhor – continuou a infeliz mulher – este desgraçado consórcio, que atraiu tão vivamente sobre os dois esposos a cólera de um irmão ofendido, fez toda a desgraça da minha vida. Paulo B... não soube compreender a grandeza de meu amor, cumulou-me de desgostos e de aflições domésticas, desrespeitou seus deveres conjugais, e sacrificou a minha fortuna em favor de suas loucas paixões” (Dos Reis 74).

same elevated language as his educated white counterpart, Tancredo. A technique of social realism is to imitate speech in writing, but both *Úrsula*'s black and white characters' grandiloquent manner of speaking is used as a resource to move readers and make them, like Tancredo, see black people and whites as equals.¹⁰⁹

After reviving him, Túlio takes Tancredo back to his mistress's Luisa B.'s house, where he meets her beautiful only daughter Úrsula. Tancredo is nursed back to health and, in exchange for saving him, gives Túlio money to buy his freedom. Ecstatic, Túlio later tells Susana about the good news of his liberty. She responds by telling Túlio about her longing for her own freedom in Africa¹¹⁰ and narrates the horrors of the slave ship and life as a slave in Brazil.¹¹¹ As William Luis's *Literary Bondage* might suggest, we should read any criticism of slavery in Cuban literature of nineteenth century as nothing short of subversive.¹¹² Like antislavery Cuban literature, *Úrsula* then, too, is significant for representing an abolitionist position in a time when Brazil also depended on slave labor for its economic development. Through studying antislavery literature in both Cuba and Brazil, their histories begin to appear as if mirror images of each other, as Doris Sommers argues in *Foundational Fictions*.¹¹³ Maria Firmina dos Reis had likely

¹⁰⁹ Horácio de Almeida comments in the prologue, "Com relação ao coloquial, predomina o tratamento de vós entre todos os personagens, até mesmo os mais humildes, os escravos, que não claudicam nas formas verbais. Porventura, não são também artificiosas as obras literárias dos tempos românticos?" (VIII).

¹¹⁰ "Liberdade . . . eu a gosei na minha mocidade!—continuou Susana com amargura—Tulio, meu filho, ninguém a gosou mais ampla, não houve mulher alguma mais ditosa do que eu" (Dos Reis 91).

¹¹¹ "E logo dous homens apareceram, e amarraram-me com cordas. Era uma prisioneira—era uma escrava! Foi em balde que supliquei em nome de minha filha, que me restituíssem a liberdade: os bárbaros sorriam-se das minhas lagrimas, e olhavam-me sem compaixão. Julguei enlouquecer, julguei morrer, mas não me foi possível. . . . A sorte me reservava ainda longos combates. . . . Metteram-me a mim e a mais trezentos companheiro de infortúnio e de captiveiro no estreito e infecto porão de um navio. Trinta dias de cruéis tormentos, e de falta absoluta de tudo quanto é mais necessário á vida passamos n'essa sepultura até que abordamos ás praias brasileiras" (Dos Reis 93).

¹¹² "Any sympathetic presentation of blacks in nineteenth-century Cuban literature represents a counter-discourse to power and is subversive to a Western form of rule. If the fabric of colonial Cuba was based on sugar and slavery, the antislavery narrative questioned the very strength that motivated the society by resorting to an image that challenged and undermined it" (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 2).

¹¹³ "In some ways, Cuba represents the mirror image of Brazil, the other apparently anomalous and long-lasting slave society. Neither country fits the general Latin American pattern of Independence in the 1810s and 1820s followed by civil wars that ended by midcentury. Cuba was among the last colonies that Spain lost at the end of the century, whereas Brazil, long independent from Europe, was a sovereign monarchy at home. Yet, both countries

never read Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco*, since it was published in Spanish and not until 1880. However, Susana's lament for her lost home and family in Africa echoes Francisco's toward the end of Suárez y Romero's novel: "¡ay Dios!, había acabado por arrebatárselo todo. Sin padre, ni madre, ni hermanos, ni otro pariente alguno; sin amigos; en Cuba, tierra de blancos; esclavo, hijo de África y negro" (Suárez y Romero 176). The coincidences between antislavery literature in Brazil and Cuba are not just "stranger than fiction" but show that authors from both countries used Romanticism, the dominant literary discourse of the time, as a medium for turning readers' hearts and minds against slavery.

Like Francisco's lament, Susana's reinforces Africans' innocence and suffering under slavery. Both "Preta Susana" and the "pálida" Úrsula share a common fate despite their differences in color and social position, the one being a slave and the other being none other than her "benevolent" mistress. Úrsula and Tancredo fall in love, but Fernando threatens to marry her by force. When Tancredo and Úrsula elope, Fernando seeks revenge and kills both Tancredo and Túlio. Therefore, like *A escrava Isaura*, *Úrsula* represents enslaved characters as completely good and those that harm them as completely evil. The main difference is that *Úrsula* does not soften its stance by casting a whitened slave in the role of those martyred. The novel's white characters are represented as sacrifices in addition to its black characters. Although the significance of Túlio and Susana in the novel can hardly be overstated, the current criticism on *Úrsula* misses an opportunity by not analyzing the solidarity the novel constructs between black and white people—and especially women—within the context of Romanticism as a whole. *Úrsula* crafts a broader critique, not only of slavery, but also of patriarchy and all efforts to dominate others through force. Luisa B. is a victim of her husband, and practically everyone is a

were slaveocracies until the end of the century, when Cuba rid itself of Spain and Brazil became a republic" (Sommer, *Foundational Fictions* 124).

victim of Fernando. Although he confesses his sins to a priest in the epilogue, Fernando fears that God will not forgive him for his crimes upon his death. Whereas Tancredo's amiable attitude toward Túlio serves to highlight the gentleman's virtue, their deaths (and Úrsula and Susana's as well) seal their role as sacrificial lambs that heighten the novel's overall dramatic effect.

Victimhood is a condition of purity and worthiness in the novel, and justice comes in the form of Fernando's damnation in the afterlife despite his cries of repentance. The novel therefore condemns seigniorial society on the whole through its symbol of Fernando, under whom the novels black and white characters' fates are bound in unjust tragedy.

Binding black and white people's tragic fate is not unique to *Úrsula* but is rather a common technique in the nineteenth-century antislavery novel whose purpose was to move readers to embrace black people as being fellow human beings, or, in the language of *Úrsula*, as their “semelhantes” and “próximos.” Also like many nineteenth-century antislavery novels, including *Francisco, Sab*, and *Cecilia Valdés*, *Úrusla* packages its antislavery message of brotherhood between blacks and whites within a dramatic and tragic love plot. A *Escrava Isaura* communicates its criticism of slavery through a love plot, too, but one with a happy ending. And unlike *A escrava Isaura*, *Úrsula* vividly illustrates and criticizes the enslavement of black people and thus, like *Francisco, Sab*, and *Cecilia Valdés*, illustrates a tension between realism and Romanticism. Pointing out the popular Romantic elements of *Úrsula* do not detract from the merits of its realistic depictions of slavery but rather recognizes the contributions of Afro-Brazilian women like Maria Firmina dos Reis to the Latin American novel and antislavery discourse at large. The novel's passages imploring the reader to recognize black people as equal in a time when slavery was still an important economic engine in Brazil is vastly significant. We may therefore recognize *Úrsula* as a superior novel to *Escrava Isaura* because it not only

criticizes slavery but also recognizes black people's humanity by representing them favorably (and by representing them at all), but scholars should go further by analyzing how *Úrsula* conveys its abolitionist message through accepted literary conventions of the time.

By paralleling the slaves Túlio and Susana's tragedies of bondage alongside the tragedies of Tancredo and the title character, *Úrsula* invites the reader to see slavery as a tragedy like its main character's ill-fated love story.¹¹⁴ The novel thus stands out not only in its realistic representations of slavery, but also how it presents them through the lens of Romanticism. While there are parallels between *Úrsula* and other Latin American novels of its time, there is evidence to suggest that *Úrsula* bears directly influenced from Harriet Beecher Stowe's US antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Like Pai Tomás, Like Mãe Susana? Of Martyrs and Monsters

Just as William Luis argues that it is difficult to know whether Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda had read Manzano's *Autobiografía*—in its 1835 Spanish version or 1840 English version—before publishing *Sab* in 1841, it is difficult to know what literary sources influenced *Úrsula*. However, we do know that Francisco Ladislau Álvares d'Andrade translated *Uncle Tom's Cabin* into Portuguese as *A cabana do pai Tomaz ou a vida dos negros na America* in 1853.¹¹⁵ As Hélio de Seixas Guimarães shows, although the translation was written in Portugal, Andrade suggests that he intended his work to be destined for a Brazilian audience. The translator justifies his translation of the English word “estate” to “engenho” to communicate the

¹¹⁴ Freedom from slavery is a metaphor for love in the novel: “Oh, amava-a como o cativo ama a liberdade” (Dos Reis 132).

¹¹⁵ See Celso Castilho's, “The Press and Brazilian Narratives of *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Slavery and the Public Sphere in Rio de Janeiro, ca. 1855*” (2019).

concept to a Brazilian readership (De Seixas Guimarães 424).¹¹⁶ Celso Castilho adds that “newspapers had earlier carried reports of port authorities seizing shipments of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in Rio, Salvador, and Fortalzea (“The Press and Brazilian Narratives of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” 78). If copies of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were making it to Fortaleza, the Northeastern state of Ceará, did Stowe’s novel arrive in the neighboring state of Maranhão, home of “uma maranhense,” Maria Firmina dos Reis? In his prologue to the fac-similar version of *Úrsula*, Horácio de Almeida gives a portrait of São Luis, *Úrsula*’s place of publication and the capital of Maranhão, that suggests that it was somewhat of a literary and cultural capital as well (I).¹¹⁷ For this reason, it is even more surprising to him that *Úrsula* should have slipped through the cracks of memory in Brazil and Maranhão’s literary history. Given that São Luis de Maranhão represented a sort of “Brazilian Athens” during the mid-nineteenth century—and at the height of “second slavery,” thereby giving us an idea of where São Luis’s wealth was coming from at this time—could translations of Stowe’s antislavery text have arrived there, let alone in provincial Guimarães, where Maria Firmina dos Reis lived?

In my readings of *Fragmentos de uma vida*, which includes personal writings by Maria Firmina dos Reis, I have not found any direct references to Stowe, nor even to Nísia Floresta, a contemporary of Maria Firmina dos Reis and a fellow author and educator in Brazil, who wrote an “Uncle Tom story” entitled “Páginas de uma vida obscura,” and which Celso Castilho argues impacted literary and public discourse in Rio de Janeiro. However, *Úrsula* itself demonstrates

¹¹⁶ “Como este meu trabalho é principalmente destinado para o Brasil, onde a admirável obra de Mrs. Stowe pode e deve ser mais apreciada que em parte alguma, adoptei os termos próprios daquele país, como, por exemplo, este *d’engenho*, que talvez algum leitor da Europa não sabia que quer dizer; em língua brasileira, fábrica onde se manipula o açúcar, e onde vive ordinariamente o senhor dela com os seus numerosos escravos” (De Seixas Guimarães 424).

¹¹⁷ “De espantar é que isso tenha acontecido no Maranhão, terra que foi no passado um viveiro de homens ilustres, muitos dos quais com repercussão além das fronteiras do Brasil. Eram tantos os que se acotovelavam na literatura maranhense, entre jornalistas, poetas, escritores, ensaísta [sic], historiadores, que São Luis, a gloriosa capital do Maranhão, granjeou fama de Atenas brasileira” (De Almeida I).

approaches to antislavery writing that closely approximate *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, too. In other words, just as Haberly suggests that *A Escrava Isaura* “may have been influenced by Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,”¹¹⁸ *Úrsula* may have been influenced by Stowe’s international success as well (46). The possible influence of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* on *Úrsula* even further suggests that Maria Firmina dos Reis’s representations of slavery and the enslaved were based on not only the author’s observations and experiences as a free woman of color in nineteenth-century Brazil, but also on her contributions to a far-reaching network of antislavery discourse that crossed the boundaries of nation and literary genre.

Reading *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Úrsula* side-by-side, one gets a sense for the ways in which they resonate, especially in their construction of monstrous “masters” and enslaved martyrs. In *Úrsula*, this character dynamic is illustrated by Susana and Fernando P***. “A Preta Susana,” in the chapter named after her, gives us a sense of her captor’s animalistic character from her perspective. Adding to the pain of being abducted from her “pátria” in Africa is the fact that she was purchased by none other than Fernando: “O commendador P... foi o senhor que me escolheo. Coração de tigre é o seo!” (Dos Reis 94). Fernando’s characterization as violent is intensified in the following chapter, “A Matta,” in which he confronts the innocent and pure Úrsula and professes his love to her after hunting and killing a bird (and thereby foreshadowing Tancredo and her own death toward the end of the novel).¹¹⁹ Enraged by Úrsula’s rejection of his

¹¹⁸ Analyzing the resonance between *Úrsula* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* would change the way we talk about Romanticism and antislavery writing in Brazil, and would add Maria Firmina dos Reis as an important corrective to Hélio de Seixas Guimarães’s analysis of the impact of Stowe’s novel in Brazil: “Explícitas em Machado, as referências à obra de Stowe estão implícitas em Alencar, como ocorre na peça *Mãe*. No entanto, as referências ao *Pai Tomás* aparecerão de modo ainda mais explícito em outros autores-chave do romantismo do Guimarães, em *A escrava Isaura* – certamente o mais conhecido melodrama da escravidão produzido no Brasil-, e Joaquim Manuel Macedo, em *As vítimas-algozes*, título de um conjunto de três novelas publicadas em 1869” (426).

¹¹⁹ When Úrsula sees the bird in the forest, she tends to the wounded animal, staining her dress with blood: “Espavorida, e meia morta de terror, hia ella alevantar-se, quando uma avezinha, uma infeliz perdiz, como que implorando-lhe socorro, veio, ferida e agonisante, cahir-lhe aos pés. Movida de compaixão, desvaneceo-se-lhe por encanto o pavor, que o som do tiro lhe incutira na alma, e tomado a pobrezinha em suas mãos, por excesso de

libidinous advances in the forest, he swears revenge and sends a letter to Úrsula's mother (Luiza) assuring her that Úrsula will be his. The letter hastens Luiza's death, and she is buried in the Santa Cruz cemetery. Sometime later, Úrsula visits Luiza's grave alone one evening when two men on horseback surprise her, causing her to faint and building suspense. However, the two men are Tancredo and Túlio, who had come to protect her. The two men's dialogue suggests that they knew where Úrsula was due to information that Susana had given them.¹²⁰ The next chapter informs that it was Susana who had warned Tancredo and Túlio that Úrsula had gone to the cemetery to pray over her mother's grave.

This detail plays a significant role in the construction of Susana's martyrdom and the similarity between her character and Uncle Tom's, as well as the situations that prove their character. After learning that Luiza has died, Fernando and "padre F" go to consult Susana. When Fernando demands that Susana tell him Úrsula's location, Susana replies—telling the partial truth —, "Sahio á tarde, meo senhor, e disse-me que hia orar ao cemiterio" (235). When interrogated if she had gone accompanied, Úrsula again insists that she had gone alone, hiding the detail that Tancredo and Túlio had visited her before Fernando, and that she had warned them where to find Úrsula before being found by Fernando. Accusing Susana (correctly) of lying, Fernando moves as if to attack her ("como um tigre"), but the priest stops him and suggests that he go look for Úrsula in the cemetery. When, of course, he does not find her, since Tancredo and Túlio had found her first, Fernando demands his overseer that he drag Susana to the very cemetery, to which the overseer replies by calling him "um monstro" and threatening to go if

bondade levou-a seo peito. Um rasto de sangue lhe nodou os vestidos alvíssimos de neve" (187). When Fernando kills Tancredo and Úrsula at their wedding, the novel gives us a repetition of this scene with Tancredo in the bird's place: "Um mar de sangue tingiu-lhe as mãos e os puros seios" (Dos Reis 99).

¹²⁰ Túlio says to Tancredo, "(...) senhor, os vossos cuidados revocal-a-hão á vida. Lembrae-vos do que nos disse mãe Susana" (Dos Reis 216).

only to tell her to run away (153). Just then, however, Susana herself appears, accompanied by the priest, who reads Psalms 138 aloud as Susana walks unafraid to confront Fernando. When urged to run, Susana insists on her innocence and faces Fernando as his “victima resignada” (Dos Reis 134). When Susana again insists that Úrsula had gone to the cemetery alone, Fernando flies into another rage, sending her to be whipped to confess her crime. After this dramatic scene in the cemetery, Fernando kills Tancredo and Túlio, and when Fernando returns home, he learns that Susana, too, had died from her punishment. The priest accuses him of “martyring” Susana, saying that she had “no part in Úrsula’s disappearance.”¹²¹ However, the reader knows that she in fact did warn Tancredo and Túlio of Úrsula’s location and Fernando’s threat, showing that Susana had attempted to save Úrsula from Fernando’s lust and wrath by sacrificing herself.

Susana’s role as a martyr and even the surrounding situational and Biblical elements mirror the dramatic and famous climax of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. This in addition to the international popularity of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* suggest that Maria Firmina dos Reis was probably aware of Stowe’s novel. Just as Celso Castilho argues that “Páginas de uma vida obscura” by Nísia Floresta represents an “Uncle Tom story” in Brazil, *Úrsula* does, too. While Maria Firmina dos Reis does not (to my knowledge) explicitly mention *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in any of her other writings, I believe that the texts themselves offer compelling evidence for this hypothesis. Just as Tom is beaten to death by Legree’s overseers, so too is Susana by Fernando’s overseers. Tom is “martyred” for withholding information from a brutal and cynical captor to protect those he might harm. Just as Fernando is characterized as a “bárbaro,” “tigre,” and “monstro,” Tom’s second captor, Simon Legree, is characterized in similar terms as a “beast” and a “lion.”¹²² Both

¹²¹ “Martyrisastes a pobre velha, inocente, e que não teve parte na desaparição de Ursula” (Dos Reis 273).

¹²² “Legree shook with anger; his greenish eyes glared fiercely, and his very whiskers seemed to curl with passion; but, like some ferocious beast, that plays with its victim before he devours it, he kept back his strong impulse to proceed to immediate violence, and broke out into bitter raillery” (Stowe 659).

enslavers represent the very worst of slavery and inspire fear and loathing from their slaves. Furthermore, Legree, like Fernando, is driven by libidinous purposes. Along with Tom, he purchases Emmeline to replace Cassy as his live-in mistress. When these two both escape toward the end of the novel, Legree turns his anger toward Tom. Like Susana, Tom knows where they are but refuses to say; and like Fernando, Legree flies into a rage, ordering Tom to confess in the chapter entitled “The Martyr.” Also, like Susana, Tom is ultimately “martyred” by Legree’s overseers, who are following their captor’s orders. Biblical scripture plays a role in both the scenes of confrontation between Susana and Fernando and Tom and Legree to assign the moral high ground to the enslaved.¹²³

In this way, both novels convey a similar point about race in slave societies. Enslaved black people, not despite but due to the condition of slavery, resemble Jesus Christ while white slaveowners resemble his oppressors. Whereas Tom warns Legree that “my troubles’ll be over soon; but if you don’t repent, yours will *never* end!” Fernando’s guilt in *Úrsula* consumes him even despite repenting, illustrating how *Úrsula* might be read as a Brazilian response to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Other similarities between *Úrsula* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* suggest the possible inspiration the prior draws from the latter. Exact names of towns are blotted out: on the one hand, *Úrsula* obscures the towns that Fernando (Commendador F. de P****) and Tancredo de *** hail from (168, 172), *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* redacts the names of places in a similar way, such as in the “town of P———, in Kentucky” (Stowe 1). These general similarities between the novels only add to the more striking resemblance of Susana and Tom’s deaths, underscored by the diction used to contrast their martyrdom against their captors’ tyranny. In his article, Celso Castilho calls Nísia Florestas’s “Páginas” an “Uncle Tom story” because of the ways in which it

¹²³ Whereas *Úrsula* quotes Psalms, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* quotes the book of Mark: “He sat his basket down by the row, and, looking up, said, “Into thy hands I commend my spirit!” (Stowe 759).

borrows elements from Stowe’s novel to write a counter-narrative to slavery in Brazil through fiction. As he points out, “Páginas” assigns many of Tom’s characteristics to “Domingos,” an African enslaved in Brazil, who “exemplified the attributes of Christian virtuosity and resignation found in Stowe’s internationally famous novel” (77). To that, I would add that *Úrsula* assigns Tom and Domingos’s same qualities to Susana, an enslaved African woman. Castilho’s argument benefits from Floresta’s pamphlet *Opúsculo humanitário*, which “parsed key aspects of Uncle Tom’s Cabin” (78). While I have not found similar evidence that Maria Firmina dos Reis read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in *Fragmentos de uma vida*, the similarities are there between Stowe’s novel and *Úrsula*, written 6 years after the publication of *A cabana do pai Tomás*. And if *Úrsula* did borrow elements from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, what would that suggest about scholarship on Maria Firmina dos Reis, and about antislavery narrative in the nineteenth century at large?

Intercultural and Trans-Genre Dialogues

Like all nineteenth-century antislavery narratives, *Úrsula* contains not only the “voice” of its author or personal experiences, but also the “voices” of the narrative strategies and literary conventions that inform and shape it. These strategies and conventions emerge from a dialogue between both slave narratives and novels like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. While we do not know for sure if Maria Firmina dos Reis read Stowe’s novel, we can make an educated guess through comparison and the fact that, as Celso Castilho shows, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* made a significant impact on both literary and public discourse in Brazil. We also know that, as she was writing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Stowe wrote a letter to Frederick Douglass asking if he could help inform

her of plantation life as to create the most realistic possible picture of it (Olney 149).¹²⁴ Stowe, then, was no doubt familiar with Douglass's work in addition to Douglass the man, and it is probably no coincidence that aspects of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*—such as the narrative trope of going from a “good master” to going to a “bad master”—appear in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as well as in *Autobiografía*. As I show in the first section, William Lloyd Garrison, who requested and advised *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, was aware of “Juan Plácido” (Manzano) and “The Slave Poet of Cuba.” Richard Robert Madden faithfully translated Suárez y Romero’s copy of Juan Francisco Manzano’s when he writes of Manzano’s “martyrdom” under the Marquesa de Prado Ameno, or “martirio” in Manzano’s original manuscript (305). Whether or not these works directly influenced each other, they are nonetheless reflected in one another. In both there are not only similar experiences amongst the enslaved across the Americas but also similar narrative strategies in representing them.

What emerges from the antislavery discourse of the novel is a dialogue not only with personal experience but also with other antislavery literature, including the slave narrative. This dialogue is not fixed within North America or the “Anglophone world,” but rather is international, Trans-Atlantic, and multilingual in character. It is not a one-way dictation from England and North America to Latin America, but rather is truly a dialogue through the ways in which *Autobiografía* was translated into English and published in 1840. Through *Úrsula*, Maria Firmina dos Reis contributes to this dialogue by adapting realist and especially Romantic antislavery discourses to reflect Brazil in the 1850s. Just as Celso Castilho argues that Floresta’s

¹²⁴ “Harriet Beecher Stowe recognized a kindred novelistic spirit when she read one (just as David Wilson/Solomon Northup did). In 1851, when she was writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe wrote to Frederick Douglass saying that she was seeking information about life on a cotton plantation for her novel (...) ‘I wish to be able to make a picture that shall be graphic & true to nature in its details — Such a person as *Henry Bibb*, if in this country, might give me the kind of information I desire’” (Olney 149).

Domingos represents a protest symbol against the illegal but thriving *de facto* African slave in Brazil after 1850, so, too, might Susana. And to Luiza Lobo and Lahidé and Muzart's credit, *Fragmentos de uma vida* reflects Maria Firmina dos Reis's personal ties to the enslaved, but the author's "friend" was enslaved by none other than her own aunt.¹²⁵ What might this mean about the author's position in slaveholding society, and how might it affect how we read *Úrsula*? Does the novel represent the author's solidarity with the enslaved as a woman of color (a term we might assign to her from a contemporary standpoint, since she does not describe herself as such in her "intimate writings" in *Fragmentos de uma vida*), or her compassion benevolent sympathy viewed from a privileged distance?

While there is much debate over Maria Firmina dos Reis' biography, they might ultimately distract us from analyzing how *Úrsula* interacts with and contributes to antislavery literature in Brazil and in the Americas at large. Whereas *Úrsula* may dialogue with the author's own personal experiences as a woman of color—which has been emphasized in literary analysis of her work—the novel also dialogues with the literary conventions of antislavery literature of its times. And while antislavery *novelas* like *Francisco* and *Sab* probably did not directly influence *Úrsula*, one could say that "Romance" was indeed in the air as the most popular European literary style of its day during the mid-nineteenth century. The novel, or in Portuguese "romance" therefore provided Maria Firmina dos Reis with a form for her antislavery critique. Furthermore, that same antislavery critique may have been informed through not only the author's personal experience, but also her reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This does not suggest a one-way, top-down influence of the United States onto Latin American literature, but more

¹²⁵ Releiam, agora, no "Álbum", um de seus registros fúnebres – 'Saudade' – que arremata com uma quadrinha. Sabem quem era essa Guilhermina – sua amiga? Uma escrava! Não sua escrava, mas da velha Henriqueta, sua tia maternal" (Moraes Filho).

subtly illustrates a dialogue between the antislavery novel and the slave narrative, between North and South America, and between black and white authors: *Úrsula* rewrites elements of Stowe's novel, which rewrites elements of Douglass's *Narrative*, which rewrites elements of "Life of the Negro Poet." Between Manzano's *Autobiografía* and Dos Reis's *Úrsula*, slavery in nineteenth-century Afro-Latin American narrative comes full circle.

Plenty has been written and said on the difference between the "North American" slave narrative and Latin American antislavery literature. Susan Willis argues that what "differentiates Manzano's narration from the North American slave narratives" is "the disregard for literary convention, the result of the narrator's separation from an audience" (206). However, Manzano had an audience in the man who requested it, Domingo del Monte. Del Monte's request represents the influence he exercised over Manzano's writing, thereby making even Manzano's original manuscript a mediated text. The manuscript was further mediated through Suárez y Romero's corrections and copy and Madden's translation. These processes of mediation do not differentiate *Autobiografía* from, say, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, but rather illustrate how they are similar. Just as Del Monte requested that Manzano write a an autobiographical "historia," as Manzano's letters to him suggest, Garrison requested that Douglass write. Furthermore, it is plausible that Garrison used "Life of the Negro Poet, Written by Himself" (1840) as a model for *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself* (1845). The implications of Manzano's influence on Douglass would be enormous. Given Douglass's impact on not only other "slave narratives" like Harriet Ann Jacobs's, but we might also hear Manzano's writing echo out through Afro-American literature and abolitionist novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. And given *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s wide popularity in Latin America due to not only Andrada's translation into Portuguese, but also in Spanish as *La cabaña*

del tío Tom, by the Canary author Andrés Avelino de Orihuela, we might hear Manzano's writing echo out through Latin American literature as well. While *Autobiografía, The Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua*, and *Úrsula* have all been studied for representing slavery in Latin America from a black perspective, one final point that unifies them is that they all construct black people for white implicit readers. While Manzano wrote specifically for Del Monte, and Baquaqua spoke specifically for Moore, they all construct black subjects—whether in reference to themselves or to characters like Susana—according to the principles of unjust victimhood, self-sacrifice, and Christian morality. In these ways, nineteenth century Afro-Latin American narrative might simultaneously silence the enslaved—their cultures, languages, and spiritual beliefs and practices—at the same time as they write for them. However, William Luis argues that we must not forget what representing slavery from both a “black” perspective and in “white” terms would have imagined in the nineteenth century in Cuba (and, as I might add, Brazil as well): “A slave or a black described as having white characteristics may suggest, for a contemporary reader, assimilation. But within a different context, the same description was, in fact, aggressive and daring and challenged the slavery system” (*Literary Bondage* 65). In other words, even the tragic slave who implores readers’ sympathies was rebellious within the context of the nineteenth century, when representing black people within the boundaries of white acceptability was the dominant strategy in antislavery discourse.

Of course, *cimarrones* are present in nineteenth century Afro-Latin American narrative. Manzano writes of ways that he actively defied their oppression by defending his mother against a white attacker, both he and Baquaqua escaped slavery by running away. Manzano is not the only black author who wrote down his own experiences about being enslaved to condemn the slavery system during the nineteenth century. The abolitionist poet-lawyer Luís Gama briefly

describes at the beginning of his autobiographical letter “Carta a Lúcio de Mendonça” (1880) that he was sold into slavery as a child by his father. Ligia Fonseca Ferreira distinguishes Gama’s “Carta” from personal histories such as Frederick Douglass’s and Booker T. Washington’s because the epistolary narrative did not reach the same level of national and international repercussion on black literature (318), but even she herself mentions that the letter has influenced Ana Maria Gonçalves’s epic novel *Um defeito de cor* (2006) (306). More contemporary generations of Afro-Latin American writers are thus rooted in the struggle against slavery. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, black authors—especially black women—have championed not only the figure of the rebel *cimarrón* but also the female *cimarrona* who combats the conditions of anti-black racism past and present, as I explore in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

LITERARY CIMARRONES AND CIMARRONAS: TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AFRO-CARIBBEAN NARRATIVE

Lo que encontramos luego, en el manglar ignorado por otros arqueólogos, confirmaba lo que muchos ancianos decían y se repetía de generación en generación. Por esos montes y en esa costa corrían juntos bajo la hermosa sombra de la guanábana cimarrona y las mariposas blancas, los cimarrones indígenas y los cimarrones africanos. Porque todos, repetían, hemos resistido. -Yvonne Denis Rosario¹²⁶

Slavery has remained the dominant theme in Afro-Latin American narrative beyond the nineteenth century. This chapter focuses on slavery in twentieth century Afro-Cuban testimonial novels or *testimonios* and twenty-first century Afro-Puerto Rican novels by black female authors. There are many similarities between nineteenth and twentieth / twenty-first century Afro-Caribbean literary narrative. In both there are oral narratives, black women's perspectives, and themes of dehumanization, social exclusion, and violence associated with slavery. These aspects of antislavery narratives are expanded in the twentieth and twenty-first century. A common thread among them is the figure of the *cimarrón / cimarrona*. This term has been reclaimed in the present to refer to a hero figure who bravely defied their enslavement. In rejecting the ongoing conditions of anti-black racism in the Spanish Caribbean, Afro-Caribbean authors in the present continue their ancestors' legacy of antislavery resistance through literature.

Some authors during the twentieth century represent *cimarrones* not only in a figurative sense but a literal one. Ongoing conditions of exclusion during the twentieth century continued

¹²⁶ "Guanábana cimarrona," 186.

preventing many formerly enslaved Afro-Latin Americans from writing their stories, but some nevertheless succeeded in telling them. Like Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua and many others, they did not write their stories but nevertheless exercised authorship over the texts in their written form. This type of narratives during the nineteenth century falls under the slave narrative umbrella, but in twentieth century Cuba it is known as the *testimonio* or testimonial novel. It spread throughout Hispanic America to document injustice of many different types, not just slavery, but has its origins in *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966), by Miguel Barnet (1940-) and Esteban Montejo (1860-1973). A later *testimonio* in Cuba, *Reyita, sencillamente*, narrates the life of a black woman during the periods of the Republic and Revolution in Cuba, but her narration begins with her memories of her grandmother Tatica and mother Isabel, who were formerly enslaved and continued to live under similar conditions after emancipation. Slavery is therefore still a principal concern in Afro-Cuban narrative during the twentieth century.

There are also similarities between nineteenth century Afro-Latin American narrative and twenty-first century Afro-Puerto Rican novels by black female authors. Black women's antislavery writing in Latin America is not an innovation of the most recent centuries. Esperança Garcia's "Carta" and even more sophisticated works like Maria Firmina dos Reis's *Úrsula* denounce slavery from black women's perspectives in Brazil. Mayra Santos-Febres's *Fe en disfraz* (2009) and Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro's *las Negras* (2016) continue in this tradition of denouncing slavery from black women's perspectives in Latin America. They also share similar themes, such as black women's nostalgia for freedom in Africa, the brutality of slavery for black women, and the savageness of white enslavers, especially white men. However, there are also major differences between nineteenth century Afro-Latin American narrative and twenty-first century Afro-Puerto Rican fiction. *Fe en disfraz* and *las Negras* address rape as part of life for

black women who were enslaved in Latin America. These novels therefore contribute to antislavery discourse in a way that even better reflects the truth about slavery in Latin America for black women. They also represent black women as not only victims of their enslavement but also as *cimarronas*. The *cimarrona* thus replaces the enslaved martyr as the dominant figure in antislavery narrative by Afro-Latin American women. Twenty-first century Afro-Puerto Rican fiction addresses black women's continued struggle against racism and sexism in the present. *Fe en disfraz, las Negras*, and other works of narrative fiction by Afro-Boricua authors thereby connect present-day misogynoir in Latin America to its roots in slavery.

There are similar differences between nineteenth century Afro-Latin American narrative and twentieth century Afro-Cuban *testimonios*. Black authors during the nineteenth century were also rebels for daring to criticize slavery, some even escaping slavery themselves. However, the rebel slave is an explicitly central figure in *Biografía de un cimarrón* (as its title suggests). There is also a greater emphasis on Afrodescendant culture in Cuba in *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Reyita, sencillamente*. This is significant because, whereas Christian morality is a central theme in nineteenth century Afro-Latin American narrative, twentieth century Afro-Cuban *testimonios* explore the theme of Afro-Cuban religions such as Lucumí and Congo. Matthey Pettway argues in his book *Cuban Literature in the Age of Black Insurrection: Manzano, Plácido, and Afro-Latino Religion* (2019) Afro-Cuban religions are present in nineteenth century Afro-Cuban literature implicitly, but *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Reyita, sencillamente* follow in the ethnographic tradition of Fernando Ortiz (Miguel Barnet was his pupil and Daisy Rubiera is a founder of the Fernando Ortiz African Cultural Center in Santiago de Cuba). Like twenty-first century Afro-Puerto Rican fiction, Afro-Cuban *testimonios* expand antislavery discourse to address racism and its intersection with patriarchy not only before but also after abolition.

To quote Alexis de Tocqueville in Madden's address to the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention, the memory of slavery in twentieth and twenty-first century Afro-Caribbean narrative has the effect of not only undoing the myth of Latin American slavery's supposedly "mild character" (qtd. in Madden 216) It also corrects the dominant political narratives of racial harmony in the Caribbean and Latin America in the present. Many Latin American nations and Puerto Rico have embraced the myth that widespread racial mixture produced racially harmonious societies. Toward the beginning of the Revolutionary period, Cuba took concrete policy measures to address racism in Cuban society. William Luis suggests that Fidel Castro's 1961 "Palabras a los intelectuales" speech inspired Miguel Barnet to write Esteban Montejo's oral narrative ("Introduction: Memory and Politics" xii). However, Alejandro de la Fuente in his book *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (2001) argues that the official narrative of the Cuban Revolution became that Fidel Castro had already eradicated racism from Cuba. Luis suggests that *Biografía de un cimarrón* conceals Montejo's true opinions of ongoing racism during the Revolutionary period, and *Reyita, sencillamente* discusses racism as an ongoing issue both before and after the Revolution. Twentieth and twenty-first century Afro-Caribbean narrative is therefore a form of protest against not only the slavery system, as Luis argues in *Literary Bondage* (3), but also society's ongoing denial of slavery and the impact that it has had on the present.

Cuba and Puerto Rico are not the only Caribbean islands where enslaved Africans disembarked, but they are at the center of this chapter because Afro-Cuban and Afro-Puerto Rican authors have been especially prolific in writing about slavery. According to *Slave Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, 777,541 enslaved Africans disembarked in Cuba, and 26,882 in Puerto Rico (Eltis and Richardson). These total over 1 million combined.

This is fewer than the over 1 million (1,120,216) who disembarked in the French Caribbean (mainly Haiti) and more than 2 million (2,318,252) who disembarked in the British Caribbean. Nevertheless, Cuba and Puerto Rico's enslaved population combined represents the majority of the 1,292,912 enslaved Africans who disembarked in Spanish America. It would therefore stand to reason that slavery has had such an outsized impact on Cuba and Puerto Rico in particular, and that it would be a dominant theme in the literature of the Afro-Hispanic Caribbean.

Part 1. Rooted in Struggle: Twentieth Century Afro-Cuban *Testimonio*

As a form of protest against the slavery system, the antislavery narrative did not end with the emancipation of slaves in 1886 but continues well into the twentieth century. -William Luis¹²⁷

Biografía de un cimarrón has been read within several literary traditions, including the *narrativa de testimonio* or testimonial novel (González Echevarría ““Biografía de un cimarrón,”” *Myth and Archive*; Skłodowska; Lindstrom),¹²⁸ the Cuban antislavery narrative (Luis, *Literary Bondage*), and the slave narrative (Olney; Willis; Feal; Aljoe, *Creole Testimonies*). *Reyita*, *sencillamente* defines itself as a *testimonio* in its subtitle, *testimonio de una cubana negra nonagenaria*, but it has also been read within a tradition of black Cuban women’s writing. Like Nancy Morejón’s poem “Mujer negra,” *Reyita* “re-imagines the history of the island of Cuba from the slave trade to the triumph of the Revolution using the perspective of an Afro-Cuban woman” (Kornweibel 67). Part 1 of Chapter 2 contributes to previous studies by examining *Biografía* and *Reyita* within a broader tradition of Afro-Latin American literary narrative. This category is useful because it reveals the overlap among these several interrelated narrative genres. Like nineteenth century Afro-Latin American narrative, *Biografía de un cimarrón* and

¹²⁷ *Literary Bondage*, 3.

¹²⁸ Barnet himself calls it the *novela-testimonio*. See “La novela testimonio: socio-literatura.” (*La canción de Rachel*).

Reyita, sencillamente depict slavery from the perspectives of those who survived and witnessed it, but they also address the institution's aftermath beyond emancipation. Like black writing in other national contexts, twentieth century Afro-Cuban narrative is rooted in the struggle against slavery.

Afro-Cuban narrative and Cuban literature at large both rose up from Cuban antislavery narrative, defined by William Luis as “a group of works written mainly during the 1830s, an incipient and prolific moment in Cuban literature” that “were requested by Domingo del Monte” and “provide a sympathetic view of blacks and slaves during a period in which slavery was at its peak and Cuba was the most important sugar-producing country in the world” (*Literary Bondage* 1). The first antislavery work produced within the *círculo delmontino* is Juan Francisco Manzano’s autobiography. The original manuscript circulated clandestinely within the *círculo delmontino* to avoid persecution from the colonial Spanish authorities. In 1839, Anselmo Suárez y Romero wrote his most famous novel, *Francisco, el ingenio o Las delicias del campo*. *Francisco* is the first novel in Spanish about slavery in the Americas, but its representation of slavery from the perspective of someone who was enslaved—not to mention its title—is indebted to Manzano’s autobiography.¹²⁹ Antonio Zambrana’s *El negro Francisco*, which was written later in 1875, also bears Manzano’s indirect influence since it “is indebted to Suárez y Romero’s work” (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 39). Besides their titles, what *Francisco* and *El negro Francisco* have in common with Manzano’s autobiography is the figure of the docile and tragic house slave at its center.¹³⁰ This figure elicited readers’ sympathies and symbolized the incipient nation itself, which was still under Spanish colonial rule. In other words, the slave archetype of nineteenth-

¹²⁹ “Manzano’s text influenced Suárez y Romero’s novel and certainly the creation of his protagonist, Francisco, named after the slave he knew so well” (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 39).

¹³⁰ This archetype is also reflected in *Sab* even though Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda was not officially a member of the Del Monte tertulia.

century Cuban literature was not a rebel or leader of revolts but rather a bearer of injustices. This is true as well for the most famous novel to emerge from Del Monte's literary circle, Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés*. An early version of the novel was published in Cuba because it lacked the sympathetic portrayal of black people and negative portrayal of slavery that defined antislavery narrative. However, the definitive version of the novel was published in 1882 in New York and contains damning descriptions of the brutal conditions in the sugar mills.¹³¹ *Cecilia Valdés* does not follow the “Francisco” archetype of the house slave, but the novel nonetheless constructs a counter-discourse to slavery by portraying the suffering of the enslaved.

Early studies on Afro-Hispanic literature tend to read Manzano's work as an early expression of black consciousness in literature. Miriam de Costa-Willis's seminal edited volume *Blacks in Hispanic Literature* (1977) notes that “Montejo's *Biografía de un cimarrón* and Manzano's *Autobiografía* “are considered more significant as historical documents which describe nineteenth century Cuban slave life than as literary works” but also astutely observes that history are corelated and share a porous boundary. In short, “History produces Literature, but conversely, Literature creates History” (De Costa-Willis) The volume features an essay entitled “The Concept of Black Awareness as a Thematic Approach in Latin American Literature,” by Antonio Olliz Boyd, that explores expressions of black consciousness in Latin American literature beyond Nicolás Guillén.¹³² The author argues that Manzano's poem “Mis treinta años,” in which the poetic voice laments his suffering under slavery, challenges “the erroneous impression that slavery in Latin America and slavery in the United States were

¹³¹ See William Luis's “*Cecilia Valdés: el nacimiento de una novela antiesclavista*” (192).

¹³² The author notes that “whenever there is black awareness as a thematic approach in the literature of Latin America, Nicolás Guillén seems to be the sole object of literary criticism” (Olliz Boyd).

different,” reproduced within Hortensia Ruiz del Vizo’s introduction to her anthology *Black Poetry of the Americas*:

Slavery in colonial Spanish America was not as harsh as the same institution in English America.... Several influences, however, mitigated the harshness of the institution. One of these was the influence of the Catholic Church.... In the United States, the history of the black population, as we know, has been different.... Nowhere as in the United States does the black live a more painful existence The black spiritual may be seen as the offspring of this suffering.... The actual existence of the spiritual shows the difference between the Spain and the United States bondage. (Ruiz del Vizo 9, 15-16)

The fact that the myth of “benign” slavery appears in a modern anthology demonstrates the persistence of its grasp on the Latin American imagination. Despite being written in 1835, Manzano’s autobiography continues to captivate in part because it continues to challenge not only the pro-slavery hegemony of the past but also that of the present.

Black Writers in Latin America (1979) by Richard Jackson continues the search for expressions of the “true black experience” and “authentic black literature” by turning directly toward Afro-Latin American authors (ix). His first book *The Black Image* (1976) “dealt primarily with nonblack Latin American writers,” but *Black Writers in Latin America* analyzes “the development of black self-awareness or the black as author from the controlled expression of the black writer of slavery times to the more assertive and aggressive black literature of our day” (x-xi). Jackson, like *Blacks in Hispanic Literature*, views Nicolás Guillén as a “turning point” in representing “black consciousness,” after which black writers in Latin America take a more overt approach in criticizing racism and proudly representing Afrodescendant identity than earlier nineteenth-century black writers like Juan Francisco Manzano. Jackson praises Guillén and

contemporary black authors such as Manuel Zapata Olivella for developing a black aesthetic in Latin American literature, but he argues that precursors to black literature in Latin America like “the slave poet in Cuba,” Juan Francisco Manzano “shows no inclination toward race conscious social protest literature” and “his content, stylistic features, and patterns of literary expression are clearly Western” (6). In his analysis of Juan Francisco Manzano’s *Autobiografía*, Jackson applies Saundra Towns’ distinction between “engaged” and “disengaged” African American autobiographies. In the first category, authors “make a personal commitment to black liberation” and in the second black writers “find it far better to forget the past, and to subsume one’s blackness under one’s Americanness” (33). Jackson substitutes “Americanness” for “Cubanness” to illustrate what he calls “Manzano’s integrationist concept of the future he desired in his *patria*... Manzano, then, not only wanted to be free but also to be left to quietly blend into the Cuban landscape, for he felt as Cuban as anyone else” (34). For Jackson, Manzano counts as a “black writer in Latin America,” but his writing was “white.”

In response to Richard Jackson’s *Black Writers in Latin America*, William Luis’s *Literary Bondage* argues that, beyond contemporary US notions of what constitutes radical black discourse and what does not, all favorable representations of black people in nineteenth-century Cuba represents an affront to the ideology of black inferiority that served to justify the slave system at the heart of Cuba’s sugar trade and economic prosperity. *Literary Bondage* responds directly to Jackson’s reading of *Autobiografía*:

It is dangerous for critics to claim that many of the early writers did not go far enough, omitting from consideration the position the early writers represented within the society in which they lived. These contemporary critics do not see or understand that their reading of a text communicates, in many cases, more about their own personal and

contemporary ideology than the novels that they pretend to analyze... It is tempting to assume that the lack of a revolutionary perspective can be attributed to a ‘white’ point of view, which the works implicitly embody, not only because the authors are white but because the works are also part of a Western tradition. This statement can be revealing only if we do not take into account the problems of language and writing... It stands to reason that anti-slavery, as a concept or as a literary, political, or economic movement in Cuba, could only exist as a white movement. The white dominant perspective, whether British or Spanish, which helped to formulate the antislavery narrative could only be expressed by using the mechanism available to white or Western culture. Language and writing, as a bourgeois means of expression, can only be in the form of a dominant white aesthetic. A slave or a black described as having white characteristics may suggest, for a contemporary reader, assimilation. But within a different context, the same description was, in fact, aggressive and daring and challenged the slavery system... The descriptions put the slaves on a higher moral and ethical level than the whites’ (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 64-65).

In other words, Manzano’s self-representation as a Christ-like figure and as a martyr (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 321) was not assimilationist but radical—so radical that it would not be published in the original Spanish in Cuba until the twentieth century. Manzano’s diction defied the perception of black people within elite Cuban society and presented Manzano to the *círculo delmontino* as a master of literary strategy. However, to categorize *Autobiografía* as literature is not the same as calling it fictional. Rather, just as Hayden White argues that historical narratives “are as much *invented as found*” (1537), Manzano uses his literary skill to write the “historia” (history and story) of his life that Del Monte had requested.

The most recent scholarship on Manzano continues to interrogate the influence of other voices in his literary production, but it also places him at the center of his work. In her essay “Literary Liberties: The Authority of Afrodescendant Authors,” Doris Sommer argues that Manzano “doubled himself as the predictable object of liberal pity and also the surprisingly authoritative subject of his own narrative” (327).¹³³ One way in which Manzano does this, Sommer argues, is through “self-authorizing refusal.” When Manzano is just about to describe an episode in which he is beaten for having attacked a slave driver to protect his mother, he instead opts to “pass over the rest of this painful scene in silence” because “not giving up those desired details is a way of owning his own life.” In his book *Cuban Literature in the Age of Black Insurrection: Manzano, Plácido, and Afro-Latino Religion* (2020), Matthew Pettway also explores the “mechanisms of narrative control” within Manzano’s work (41).¹³⁴ While Pettway concurs with Luis and other critics that “rightly regard Manzano’s autobiographical relation as the birth of Cuban Narrative,” he also breaks with readings of Manzano as “an assimilationist that appropriated literary discourse and discarded an African frame of reference as a necessary concession to white aesthetics” (40).¹³⁵ For Pettway, Manzano and Plácido are no mere imitators but rather “architects of discourse” who “portrayed African-inspired spirituality beneath the surface of Hispano-Catholic aesthetics, which, in effect, transformed early Cuban literature into an instrument of black liberation” (6). Sommer’s chapter and Pettway’s book both draw attention toward the ways in which Manzano’s *Autobiografía* not only utilizes literary strategy to curry favor with the Del Monte literary circle but rather speaks past it. Pettway’s book stands at the

¹³³ See *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction* (2018).

¹³⁴ For examples of Manzano’s narrative control, Pettway argues that he exercises “the creation of explicit silences,” “thematic repetition,” and “nonlinear temporality alongside an insistence on the self-conscious gaze” (41).

¹³⁵ Pettway argues that, in “From Serf to Self,” “Molloy misreads Manzano’s reliance on mnemonic techniques as the absence of written language, thus rendering illegible the repository of knowledge embedded in African Cuban oral tradition” (40).

frontier of Manzano scholarship by developing the ways in which his autobiography dialogues specifically with African Cuban oral tradition. Contrary to Jackson's main argument, Pettway shows that Manzano's writing indeed does reflect African aesthetics encrypted within Afro-Hispanic ones. Pettway does not refute but rather reinforces Luis's contribution "that Manzano's account was a testimonial blueprint for the fiction produced by white literati" (40). In all its many versions, Juan Francisco Manzano's autobiography still represents the antislavery roots of Afro-Cuban narrative. *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Reyita, sencillamente* carry Manzano's spirit by writing for black people silenced by racial prejudice in Cuba.

Esteban Montejo and Reyita describe the horrors of slavery—Montejo from his personal memories and Reyita from stories passed down from her grandmother, Tatica. *Biografía de un cimarrón* is usually read as the first of its kind within the Hispanic American *testimonio* genre, but *Biografía* and *Reyita, sencillamente* follow in a long-standing tradition of antislavery writing in Cuba whose first major contributor was himself formerly enslaved. It is therefore necessary to trace Montejo and Reyita's literary lineage to Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía*. All three texts depict slavery in Cuba during the nineteenth century, when Cuba was the largest producer of sugar in the world. While the first challenges pro-slavery hegemony in the nineteenth century, the latter two challenge the erasure of black history and identity from dominant political narratives in the twentieth century. Montejo's and Reyita's *testimonios* therefore not only engage with the past but also challenge the ways in which black history has continued to be erased from Cuba's collective consciousness in the present. One way that slavery and its brutality have been distorted across Latin America is through the cultural narrative of mestizaje. Several nations throughout Latin America promoted racial mixture to whiten the population in a process known as *blanqueamiento*. While mestizaje allowed for a certain level of acceptance of black people

and culture within the national imaginary, it also perpetuated the subjugation of blackness to whiteness that had been in place since the colonial era. The Castro regime declared an end to racism in Cuba shortly after the Cuban Revolution, but *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Reyita, sencillamente* attest to the continued importance of race, remembering, and resistance through writing. Together, *Biografía* and *Reyita* strengthen Afro-Cuban narrative as a literary tradition. They express what Doris Sommer calls “the authority of Afrodescendant authors” over the experiences of slavery and its continued legacy of racial oppression throughout the twentieth century—both before and after the Cuban Revolution.

The classification of *Biografía de un cimarrón* within a tradition of Afro-Latin American narrative implies black authorship. *Biografía*, of course, was written by the most famous author to emerge from Cuba’s Revolutionary period, Miguel Barnet, who is not Afrodescendant. The text is based on 3 years of interviews with the Esteban Montejo, a formerly enslaved black man and veteran of the Cuban War of Independence. Leading scholars have long attributed the text’s authorship primarily to Barnet and his ethnographic training, literary skill, and political motivations (González Echevarría “Biografía de un cimarrón”; Skłodowska; Luis, “The Politics of Memory,” *Literary Bondage*, “Introduction”). Nevertheless, this chapter upholds the legitimacy of Montejo’s authorship of *Biografía de un cimarrón* in dialogue with Barnet’s. The question of the text’s authorship eludes a simple response and invites us to reflect on Michel Foucault’s question of “What Is an Author?” (1969). Foucault examines the author as not a person but a concept that functions to classify texts. The title of *Biografía de un cimarrón* implies Barnet’s authorship,¹³⁶ but William Luis and William Rowlandson highlight some of the

¹³⁶ *Biografía de un cimarrón* was first translated in English as *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*: “... unlike the original text, it is entitled ‘autobiography’ and not ‘biography’. This brings into sharp relief this particular authorial complexity of the testimonial narrative, and demonstrates that neither term is ultimately accurate” (Rowlandson 5).

ways in which Montejo “is not a passive participant but is actively engaged in the writing of his biography” (Luis, “Introduction: Memory and Politics” xxvi).¹³⁷ Part I of Chapter 2 therefore reexamines Montejo’s role in shaping the “philosophy” of *Biografía de un cimarrón* in addition to providing its raw material or “facts” as the text’s informant.

This chapter also argues that the literariness of *Biografía de un cimarrón* does not undermine its historicity. In his book *Metahistory* (1979), Hayden White deconstructs the rigid binary that divides literature and history as separate categories of written narrative.¹³⁸ Following this line of thought, the term informant, which is usually used to describe Montejo’s role in the text, does not adequately capture Montejo’s role as not only a provider of raw information but also a creator of memory, which is an inherently artful act. The recognition of Montejo as an author of *Biografía de un cimarrón* is fundamental to its significance. If history has excluded black people and perspectives because it is a form of writing in the Western tradition, then *Biografía de un cimarrón* intervenes within history by converting Montejo’s oral narration into a written one. In his introduction to the text, Barnet himself cautiously avoids classifying *Biografía* as either history or fiction,¹³⁹ but the text itself has the effect of inviting the reader to reflect on history and literature as overlapping rather than discrete disciplines. In sum, it might seem out of place to include *Biografía de un cimarrón* as the first example of twentieth century Afro-Cuban narrative because it was written by a white man, but it would also be remiss to overlook Montejo’s fundamental literary contributions to the text. Just as there would be no *Biografía de*

¹³⁷ Both editions feature Montejo as an author alongside Barnet. This dissertation does as well.

¹³⁸ White calls historical narratives “verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences” (1537).

¹³⁹ “Acudimos a libros de consulta, a biografías de los municipios de Cienfuegos y de Remedios, y revisamos toda la época con el propósito de no caer en imprecisiones históricas al hacer nuestras preguntas. Aunque por supuesto nuestro trabajo no es histórico. La historia aparece porque es la vida de un hombre que pasa por ella” (61).

“Sabemos que poner a hablar a un informante es, en cierta medida, hacer literatura. Pero no intentamos nosotros crear un documento literario, una novela” (Barnet, “Introducción” 61).

un cimarrón without Montejo, Cuba as we know it, with its rich cultural, historical, and literary heritage, would not exist without black people's multifaceted contributions.

I. Esteban Montejo, Author of *Biografía de un cimarrón*

Just as Jorge Luis Borges's classic short story "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" (1939) has captivated generations of readers to reflect on the complexities of authorship, so, too, has *Biografía de un cimarrón*. The text has transformed over the years since its original publication by the Instituto de Etnología y Folklore in 1966. Miguel Barnet is printed as the text's sole author in this original version. In the original introduction, Barnet explains process by which the text came about: he "discovered" Esteban Montejo in a newspaper featuring centenarians. His interest piqued by the fact that Montejo had run away from slavery, Barnet arrived at Montejo's home for veterans, gained his trust with various gifts, and organized his first-person oral narration into a written text. A noteworthy aspect of the introduction is that Barnet places himself at the center of the text's creation. Montejo is the protagonist of *Biografía de un cimarrón*, but Barnet is the protagonist of the introduction, which has the effect of situating Barnet as the author.

The assignment of the text's authorship has shifted in subsequent versions and in literary criticism. *Biografía de un cimarrón* was first translated by Jocasta Innes ("confusedly, yet significantly," according to Roberto González Echevarría) as *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* ("Biografía de un cimarrón" 249). In this version, Esteban Montejo is printed as the author and Miguel Barnet as the "editor." In addition to the title, Barnet's introduction is also different. In it, he places greater emphasis on Esteban's participation in the text's realization: "Esteban soon became the real author of this book. He was constantly looking at my notebook,

and he almost forced me to write down everything he said. His vision of the creation of the universe particularly appealed to me because of its poetic surrealist slant” (Barnet, *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* 8). In the same introduction, Barnet also claims that “This book helps to fill certain gaps in Cuba’s history. None of the orthodox, schematically-minded historians would ever have bothered with the experiences of a man like Esteban. But Esteban appeared on the scene as if to show that one voice from the heart of action is worth a vociferous chorus from the sidelines” (9). Barnet thus connects Montejo’s “real” authorship with the text’s historical authenticity. Barnet’s introduction thus reflects what Stepto calls the “authenticating function” of white writers’ role in slave narratives (3).

There was a boom in academic production on *Biografía de un cimarrón* during the 1990s (González Echevarría, “*Biografía de un cimarrón*”; Luis, “The Politics of Memory,” *Literary Bondage*; Skłodowska; Lindstrom). Scholars during this time have tended to examine Barnet’s role in creating the text. Still, while scholars during this time have tended to refer to “Miguel Barnet’s *Biografía de un cimarrón*,” they have also explored the tensions within the text between Barnet and Montejo’s voices. Roberto González Echevarría asks a series of questions that have continued to define the conversation surrounding the text to the present day: “who speaks here, the old runaway slave or the young Cuban anthropologist? Is the book a biography, as the original title proclaims, an autobiography, as the English title reads, or a documentary novel, as it is generally classified?” (“*Biografía de un cimarrón*” 249). González Echevarría approaches these questions by reading *Biografía de un cimarrón* within the context of the *narrativa de testimonio* or testimonial novel. The genre emerged following Fidel Castro’s mandate that literature should perform a social function in service of the Revolution. Barnet himself had responded to this call to action when he sought Montejo and eventually wrote *Biografía de un*

cimarrón based on his words. The *narrativa de testimonio* was later officialized with the creation of a literary prize for the category by the Cuban publishing house Casa de las Américas in 1970.

Texts that were written in this category belong to one of two groups: the “epic testimony” that narrates armed Revolutionary struggle and “the account of a marginal witness... dealing with everyday life and folk traditions” (González Echevarría, “Biografía de un cimarrón” 256).

Despite these variations, one factor that unites texts under the *narrativa de testimonio* is its resemblance to journalistic accounts. Unlike literature, journalism “aims at immediacy,” “is faithful to facts, not to rhetorical modes,” and “tends to diffuse the questions of authorship”: “Since facts determine content, the author becomes a neutral conductor, not the generator of a text. Journalism fosters the illusion that incidents write themselves into history” (González Echevarría, “Biografía de un cimarrón” 255). *Biografía de un cimarrón* itself “grew out of a newspaper article,” as Barnet indicates in his original introduction. And yet, González Echevarría argues, Barnet’s text has stood the test of time better than other texts within the genre. Despite “Barnet’s explicit desire to bypass literature” (“Biografía de un cimarrón” 258), *Biografía de un cimarrón* is “the most enduring work” of the documentary novel tradition because of its sense of timeless quality—or, in other words, its literariness.

González Echevarría attributes the text’s literariness not only to Barnet but to Montejo: “The book purports to be factual, the result of a series of interviews with an informant, strung as a first-person narrative for the sake of continuity and convenience. Yet, there is a peculiar literary propriety to Esteban Montejo’s figure and to *Biografía de un cimarrón* in general” (258). This literary propriety begins with Montejo’s name. González Echevarría observes that “Esteban bears the name of two important literary protagonists: Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus and Carpentier’s Esteban in *El siglo de las luces*” and, moreover, shares “their epic-like wanderings, their

authorial propensities, and their more or less obvious association with Christ” (258). But Montejo resonates with more than just a Western literary tradition. “Monte” resonates not only with the Biblical symbol of the mountain but also with the Afro-Cuban symbol of the wild. Lydia Cabrera, who was also a student of the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, writes in her book *El monte* (1975) that “The same ancestral divinities that inhabited the African jungles—powerful spirits who today, as the time of the slave trade, are most feared and worshiped, and on those hostility or benevolence depend every success or failure—dwell in the mountains of Cuba... For Cuban blacks the Wild is equivalent to the concept of the universal mother, source of life” (qtd. in González Echevarría, “Biografía de un cimarrón” 259). Montejo’s escape to the *monte* would appear to have been written within his destiny long before it was written in his biography. His resonance with both Western and African lore attests to the universal character of his story. Moreover, González Echevarría writes that “what is truly significant about Montejo, at least as the character in the book, is his resemblance as an author” (“Biografía de un cimarrón” 261). The ethnographer Barnet found a kindred spirit in Montejo, who acts as not only a witness to his own life but also as “a sort of social anthropologist in his own right” (González Echevarría, “Biografía de un cimarrón” 261). Montejo is not only an insider informant of Afro-Cuban culture but also an outsider to the Lucumí and Congo cultures that he observes, illustrating diversity within *afro-cubanidad*.

González Echevarría’s analysis that Montejo “turns out to be the real author of the book” is an important one (“Biografía de un cimarrón 261). It not only places Montejo alongside of Manzano in a succession of Afro-Cuban authors but also recognizes Montejo’s fundamental role in “writing” *Biografía de un cimarrón*. His contributions to his “biography” are obfuscated by the language of the *narrativa de testimonio*. Montejo plays the role of informant in the sense that

he relates information to Barnet, who organizes that information as the text's *gestor*. But Montejo is also Barnet's double as an anthropologist himself. Montejo relates not only personal experiences but information that he had collected from others as well (a point that he makes by his repetition of the phrase "yo vide"). González Echevarría reiterates this point in *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative* (1990):

Montejo is as much the ethnographer as Barnet. Yet in a curious way Montejo's detached perspective, his memory being a sort of archive of different narrative possibilities—he can speak of and about the Congo or the Lucumí—reflects Neo-African culture in the Caribbean. Montejo moved among several ethnic groups who had different languages and religions, languages and religions that are still alive in Cuba today... (González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive* 170)

González Echevarría thus indicates the intellectual work that Montejo performs. The existence of his narration within a written format depends on Barnet, but "it is the illiterate former slave who is in possession of a masterful wisdom, while Barnet is reduced to 'taking down' what the other dictates" ("Biografía de un cimarrón" 262). Like Barnet himself, readers might be initially interested in slavery as narrated by a man who lived and escaped it. However, Montejo's narration does more than just authenticate his account of black life in Cuba from slavery through the Revolution. It also implies the art of turning memory into language, language into myth, and myth into the pages of collective memory. Why then would Montejo not be recognized as an author?

Like González Echevarría, William Luis also examines authorship in "*The Autobiography of a Run Away Slave*" but digs into Barnet's influence over the text.¹⁴⁰ Barnet is

¹⁴⁰ Luis's article "The Politics of Memory and Miguel Barnet's *The Autobiography of a Run Away Slave*" tellingly attributes authorship of the "Autobiography" not to Montejo but to Barnet.

no “neutral conductor,” as González Echevarría refers to the writers of journalism (“*Biografía de un cimarrón*” 225) but rather a “creator of memory” who “not only edited the interviews with Montejo, but also provided questions to guide and shape the ex-slave’s recollections and, therefore, the text, often motivated by his own interests” (“The Politics of Memory” 480). For example, despite the non-linear structure of their interviews, the book follows a chronological order in Montejo’s narration about his life through its three chapters on slavery, emancipation, and the War of Independence, reflecting the folklorist and ethnographer Barnet’s values of fashioning an organized, “readable” text. *Biografía de un cimarrón* also expresses not just what Montejo wished to say about himself, but also what Barnet wished to say about Montejo, from his participation in important historical events to the everyday culture of black people on the island. In the introduction to *Biografía de un cimarrón*, Barnet writes that Montejo’s principal concerns were mostly personal (“pensión, mujeres, salud”) (*Biografía de un cimarrón* 7). As their interviews progressed, however, Montejo adjusted his form of self-representation to match Barnet’s ethnographic and historical priorities (“la esclavitud, la vida en los barracones y la vida en el monte de cimarrón,” 8). Barnet’s manipulation of *Biografía de un cimarrón* is thus ever-present within the text, from the solicitation of a narrative to the processes of writing and editing. In these ways, Barnet is not only Montejo’s “motivator, transcriber, and editor” but also a “creator of memory” (Luis, “The Politics of Memory” 480).

One of Barnet’s primary interests was “to fill a void in literature and history” with regards to slavery in Cuba (Luis, “The Politics of Memory” 481). Montejo was an active contributor within this process. He fills this void with not only his personal experiences but also the style in which he presents them. In each of the book’s three sections (Slavery, Abolition, and The War of Independence), Montejo returns to working in the same sugar mills that he had under

slavery. These repetitions “are a part of the resurgence of history, but also of African oral tradition and of Montejo’s own recollections” (Luis, “The Politics of Memory” 477). In addition to “oral performance,” Montejo contributes “ideas of his own”:

Montejo was aware of Barnet’s interests in African religion and myths. Perhaps Montejo knew that he was the only living runaway slave in Cuba and thus his activities were going to be recorder. Montejo was conscious of his own grandeur and literary destiny. Like Manzano, who used his narration to underscore his privileged status as a slave, Montejo, under different circumstances, recognizes his own importance and sets the stage for controlling the narration. Montejo kept track of Barnet’s notebook and insisted that he write many things down. As in the chansons de geste, Montejo is a hero of sorts who explains to Barnet what the ethnologist, due to his own social and historic circumstances, wants to hear. In spite of Barnet’s diligence in verifying historical events, Montejo seized the opportunity to glorify himself and others. Montejo recreates his own life by choosing subjects which would be of interest to his listener” (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 207)

In this way, Montejo is a literary figure in a similar sense as Manzano. Although he does not write his personal narrative in a literal sense, he nevertheless develops literary strategies to engage with his primary “reader.” For Manzano this was Domingo del Monte, but for Manzano this was Barnet.

Just as Manzano’s *Autobiografía* reflects Del Monte’s interests, *Biografía de un cimarrón* reflects not only Montjeo’s but also Barnet’s. Luis explains that

Barnet was associated with the second-generation group of poets known as El Puente, named after a private publishing house of the same name which operated between 1960-1965. In 1964, El Puente published his second book of poetry, *Isla de Güijes*. But the El

Puente group fell out of grace and was accused of stressing the aesthetic over the political. Regardless of their commitments to the Revolutionary government, many group members were considered antisocials and homosexuals and were sent to rehabilitation camps known as Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción. Those under detention, and others, were excluded from cultural and literary activities. (Luis, “The Politics of Memory” 485)

In continuation, Luis proposes that Barnet “seized on the opportunity to resume a public literary life” by interviewing and writing about Montejo’s experiences in pre-Revolutionary Cuba (Luis, “The Politics of Memory” 485). Barnet presents Montejo’s narration and his political affiliation as expressions of the Revolutionary spirit:

La honestidad de su actuación en la vida se expresa en distintos momentos del relato, en la Guerra de Independencia sobre todo. El espíritu revolucionario se ilustra no sólo en el propio relato sino en su actitud actual. Esteban Montejo, a los 105 años de edad, constituye un buen ejemplo de conducta y calidad revolucionarias. Su tradición de revolucionario, cimarrón primero, luego libertador, miembro del Partido Socialista Popular más tarde, se vivifica en nuestros días en su identificación con la Revolución cubana. (Barnet, “Introducción” 62)

Viewed through the lens of Luis’s analysis, Barnet’s introduction suggests that he shaped Montejo’s narration and the man himself into an emblem of the Cuban Revolution for the purpose of advancing his own literary career. In other words, to satisfy personal ends, Barnet silences Montejo’s voice at the same time as he brings it into the space of writing.

Elzbieta Skłodowska’s *Testimonio hispano-americano: historia, teoría, poética* (1992) investigates even further into Barnet’s influence over *Biografía de un cimarrón*. In her book she

reads the *testimonio* not as a “voice for the voiceless” but rather as a narrative construction that conceals the process that produces it through the mediation of a second author. Her analysis thus favors the postcolonial theoretical framework in which, as Gayatri Spivak writes, “the subaltern cannot speak.” She also builds on Luis’s argument that *Biografía de un cimarrón* is just as much a reflection of Barnet’s biography as it is of Montejo’s:

A la hipótesis de Luis podríamos agregar una conjetura más: en su esfuerzo reintegrador Barnet parece haber seguido las directivas expuestas por Fidel Castro en su discurso “Palabras a los intelectuales,” comúnmente conocido por haber establecido las reglas de la ortodoxia creadora con la fórmula ‘Dentro de la Revolución todo, fuera de la Revolución, nada.’ Entre los numerosos recursos retóricos empleados en este discurso está también una reminiscencia personal de Fidel sobre un encuentro que tuvo una vez con una anciana negra, exesclava. Luego, mientras que se dirigía a los intelectuales, se preguntaba el dirigente cubano: “¿Quién puede escribir mejor que ella lo que vivió el esclavo y quién puede escribir mejor que ustedes el presente?” (citado por González de Cascorro 85). Sin relación al proyecto barnetiano de “darle voz” al excimarrón.”
(Sklodowska 33)

In other words, Sklodowska builds on Luis’s argument that *Biografía de un cimarrón* represents Barnet’s project of reintegration into Cuban Revolutionary elite society. William Luis confirms that Barnet was in fact present during Castro’s “Palabras a los intelectuales” speech in 1961 (“Introduction, xii-xiii).¹⁴¹ In praise of Sklodowska’s research, González Echevarría writes in his

¹⁴¹ “*Biography of a Runaway Slave* responded to an initiative Fidel Castro Proposed in June of 1961, during the third meeting of intellectuals that sealed the fate of the once popular literary supplement *Lunes de Revolución* (1959-61) and set the parameters for the development of literature a culture in the Revolution: ‘Dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, nada’ (Within the revolution, everything; against the revolution, nothing). At the close of ‘Palabras a los intelectuales’ (‘Words to the Intellectuals’) Castro refers to a 106-year-old ex-slave woman who had recently learned to read and write. Her remarkable feat suggested to Castro she write her life story, a story, he was aware, would be written from her unique perspective and voice. This was the year of Cuba’s Literacy Campaign,

book review of *Testimonio hispano-americano* that “Elzbieta Skłodowska es hoy por hoy uno de los críticos más autorizados de la literatura hispano-americana. Su magnífico libro sobre el testimonio debe ser ya la última palabra sobre este tema” (“Elzbieta Skłodowska” 516).

However, published in 1992, *Testimonio hispano-americano* has been far from the last word on *Biografía de un cimarrón*.

Manchester University Press’s 2010 edition of *Biografía de un cimarrón* reflects the byline Miguel Barnet and Esteban Montejo to recognize the contributions of both the *gestor* and *informante* to the text. The edition’s editor, William Rowlandson, recognizes Montejo as a part of the creative process and argues that “Esteban is not simply a provider of historical fodder, he is poetic and artistic” (36). Rowlandson is careful to also recognize Barnet’s role in shaping the text vis-à-vis his objective “to learn about both Afro-Cuban religious practices and life in the barracoons and not to write a poetic novel” He also points to how Barnet himself recognized that history “is not simply data but is the collective memory of the people and thus bears with it myths and legends as much as suffering and sorrow, and it is in this poetic realm that history comes alive” (36). Montejo therefore represents not just an exploited subject within the context of a mediated text but, according to ’BioDun Ogundayo, a “memory-filled griot of his community” whose discourse includes “the circumlocution typical in African languages: folkloric reference to his African heritage and the haphazard, conversational tone of his discourse” (qtd. in Rowlandson 37).¹⁴² In other words, the “poetry of Esteban’s creative act” lies

which involved teachers traveling through the country in an effort to provide a basic education to all its citizens. Castro identified a need for new voices to recount experiences unknown to many members of Cuba’s educated population. This woman’s life was of particular interest, especially since the revolution was also engaged in rewriting its own history. Barnet, who attended the meeting, was aware of Castro’s words, and he looked for and found someone who resembled the rebel leader’s ex-slave and recounts his own experiences” (Luis, “Introduction” xii-xiii).

¹⁴² See Ogundayo’s “Polyphony in Miguel Barnet’s *Biografía de un cimarrón*” (193-194).

in his “acute empiricism on certain matters, mistrusting hearsay, yet regularly describes events that other people told him with the same assertiveness as his description of events that he witnessed himself (the repeated declarations of ‘yo vide’)…” yet simultaneously making “no distinction between mundane and spiritual matters, describing in the same breath daily events of slavery and war alongside descriptions of witches (127), headless horsemen (128) ‘diablillos’ that hatch from eggs (131), and instructions on how to summon the devil (132)” (Rowlandson 37-38). Montejo is thus the “autor de *Biografía de un cimarrón*” in the same way that Jorge Luis Borges’s Pierre Menard is the author of the Quijote. To this point, Rowlandson writes that “In true Borgesian terms, the text is real in its artifice and artificial in its realism. When, for example, the question emerges about whose voice is really speaking, one must ask whether a single voice is any more single or more authentic than a plural voice, language itself is a plural affair” (50).

In sum, Rowlandson’s analysis highlights Montejo’s contributions to *Biografía de un cimarrón* as not only informational but also literary within his role as an author of the text alongside Miguel Barnet. Scholarship on *Biografía de un cimarrón* has thus distanced itself from the postcolonial suspicion of the 1990s and come back around to González Echevarría’s hypotheses that Montejo “turns out to be the real author of the book” (“*Biografía de un cimarrón*” 261). Luis’s introduction to the 50th anniversary edition of *Biography of a Runaway Slave* further demonstrates this shift toward greater recognition of Montejo’s literary contributions to the text. Luis is careful to argue that Barnet’s influence not only erased but also activated Montejo’s recollections as an agent and creator of memory. Although of course composed ultimately of Montejo’s oral testimony which is always filtered through Barnet’s writing, Luis argues that “Montejo demonstrates that he is not a passive participant but is actively engaged in the writing of his biography. He is aware of Barnet’s ethnographic concerns,

but he also wants Barnet to record thoughts and experiences that are less important to Barnet but crucial from Montejo's perspective" ("Introduction: Memory and Politics" xxvi). Thus, although passed through Barnet's filter, *Biografía de un cimarrón* also places black authorship at the center of the writing experience. Luis's "The Politics of Memory" explores not only the ways in which Barnet manipulates the text but also the ways in which Montejo shares control over it: "Montejo himself is aware of the cycles of history. He is conscious that after the radical transformations in Cuban society, as represented by the abolition of slavery and the War of Independence, the present continues to resemble the past" (476). Despite Barnet's ordering of the text into three discreet chapters centered on slavery, emancipation, and the War of Independence, Luis argues that "the repetitions present in the narration, which include the thematic coincidences during slavery, abolition, and the War of Independence, are not caused necessarily by historical cycles, but by Montejo's ability to recollect certain events which are of personal interest to him" (Luis, "The Politics of Memory" 478). It is thus not only Barnet's authority over the text but also Montejo's own authorship that shape *Biografía de un cimarrón*.

Barnet and Montejo's authorship connects *Biografía de un cimarrón* to slave narratives and to other Afro-Latin American narrative texts. Rosemary Geisdorfer Feal's article "Spanish American Ethnobiography and the Slave Narrative Tradition: *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*" notes the "generic titular relation to testimonial works in the North American slave narrative tradition, which use similar formulas... Barnet and Burgos, consciously or not, establish an intertextual dialogue with the slave narrative" (155). The examples that she mentions include "US slave narratives" such as *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave, Written by Himself*, but we might also include "Latin American slave narratives" such as Manzano's "Life of the Negro Poet, Written by Himself and Translated from the Spanish

by R. R. M” (qtd in Mullen 79) and the similarly entitled *Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua*. Aljoe’s book *Creole Testimonies: Slave Narratives from the British West Indies* (2012) echoes Feal’s main argument when she remarks that “Although Barnet may have invented the term *testimonio* with the publication of Montejo’s narrative, in fact this format existed long before the 1960s” in the form of the slave narrative and “the first *testimonio*, *Biography of a Runaway Slave*, was a slave narrative” itself (17). *Biografía de un cimarrón* resembles a slave narrative in its title, format, and even content. However, it also draws parallels between the periods of slavery and abolition in Cuba. Montejo’s narration therefore not only challenges the myth that slavery was of a supposedly more “benevolent” or “mild character” in Cuba but also shows the ongoing repression of formerly enslaved black men in post-emancipation Cuban society.

Montejo’s Memory in “La esclavitud”: A Refusal to Sugarcoat History

In the introduction to *Biografía de un cimarrón*, Barnet writes that what ultimately made him decide to interview Montejo was that he had been a *cimarrón*.¹⁴³ Barnet explains that his primary concerns were with specific problems concerning the social environment in the barracoons, or slave quarters, and the celibate lifestyle of runaway slaves. As both a former inhabitant of the *barracones* and a former *cimarrón*, Montejo’s testimony was invaluable to Barnet’s project to reconstruct these aspects of life under slavery.¹⁴⁴ Manzano’s *Autobiografía* also reconstructs aspects of life under slavery from the perspective of an enslaved person, but

¹⁴³ “El hombre, aunque no se refería directamente a tópicos religiosos, reflejaba en sus palabras una inclinación a las supersticiones y a las creencias populares. Su vida era interesante. Contaba aspectos de la esclavitud y de la Guerra de Independencia. Pero lo que más nos impresionó fue su declaración de haber sido esclavo fugitivo, cimarrón, en los montes de la provincia de Las Villas” (Barnet, “Introducción” 59).

¹⁴⁴ “Nos preocupaban problemas específicos como el ambiente social de los barracoones y la vida célibe de cimarrón. En Cuba son escasos los documentos que reconstruyan estos aspectos de la vida en la esclavitud” (Barnet, “Introducción” 60).

William Luis observes that *Autobiografía* is limited to Manzano's experiences as a house slave ("Introduction: Memory and Politics" xv). And while it does narrate the arbitrary and violent punishments that Manzano received in that role, it nevertheless precludes descriptions of a life like Montejo's in the barracoons and on the sugar plantations: "Manzano made great strides to join Cuba's learned society, and for this reason he was unable to record the experiences of the field slave. The experiences of a runaway slave like Montejo remained relatively unknown until the initial stages of the Cuban Revolution, when poet and ethnographer Miguel Barnet saw the opportunity to fill a void in Cuban and Latin American history and culture" (Luis, "Introduction: Memory and Politics" xvi). For the same reasons that *Biografía de un cimarrón* represents an invaluable contribution to Cuban and Latin American history and culture, it also represents an invaluable contribution to Afro-Cuban and Afro-Latin American literary narrative.

Biografía is divided into three main sections. The first section is entitled "La esclavitud" and contains two subsections entitled "La vida en los barracones" and "La vida en el monte." Despite Montejo's experiences in the barracoons and as a runaway slave being Barnet's primary motive for writing *Biografía de un cimarrón*, "La esclavitud" is the shortest section of the book (27 pages), and "La vida en el monte" is the shortest subsection (just 10 pages).¹⁴⁵ "La abolición de la esclavitud" is the longest section of the book at 64 pages, and "La Guerra de Independencia" is slightly longer than "La esclavitud" at 29 pages. One explanation for "La esclavitud" being the shortest section in the book is that it occurred so long ago in Montejo's memory. Barnet explains in the introduction to *Biografía de un cimarrón* that, indeed, Montejo's time as a *cimarrón* stands in his memory as a remote and confusing time in his life.¹⁴⁶ The title

¹⁴⁵ Page counts come from the Manchester University Press edition of *Biografía de un cimarrón*, edited by William Rowlandson.

¹⁴⁶ "La vida en el monte queda en el recuerdo como una época muy remota y confusa" (Barnet, "Introducción" 61).

Biografía de un cimarrón therefore might seem ironic since the shortest portion of the testimonial novel is dedicated to Montejo's time under slavery. However, even though “La vida en el monte” occupies only a few several pages, the *Biografía de un cimarrón* develops Montejo's *cimarronaje* as a central aspect of Montejo's character. Montejo attests that he is a *cimarrón* from birth (“Yo era cimarrón de nacimiento”) in the last sentence of the introduction to “La esclavitud” (Barnet and Montejo 66). The beginning of the testimonial novel thus sets the groundwork for everything that follows. Slavery is not only the focus of part one but also echoes throughout parts two and three. In this way, Montejo's perspective fills gaps in the slave narrative genre's representation of slavery in Cuba in multiple ways. Not only does it access the physical spaces of the barracoons and the woods but also the decades immediately following slavery's supposed abolition.

A comparison between *Autobiografía* and *Biografía de un cimarrón* illustrate the latter's contributions to antislavery discourse beyond the nineteenth century. Barnet and Montejo explore topics outside of Manzano's periphery starting with the opening pages of “La esclavitud.”¹⁴⁷ The first sugar mill at which Montejo recalls having worked is Flor de Sagua, and the first responsibility that he mentions in the text is driving mules carrying *bagazo*, or “the sugarcane residue after crushing” (Hill 183).¹⁴⁸ In addition to this work, which he describes as hard because of the strain it put on drivers' backs, he describes the detailed process of making sugar. As is characteristic throughout the text, Montejo compares the past and present by describing the equipment as “primitive” compared with the fast machines and lights in the

¹⁴⁷ These initial pages of *Biografía de un cimarrón* are entitled “Early Memories” in the fiftieth anniversary English translation, but have no title in the original Spanish-language edition.

¹⁴⁸ Although Flor de Sagua is the first mill at which Montejo recalls having worked, he also admits that he cannot remember precisely: “Yo no sé si ese fue el lugar donde trabajé por primera vez... Al menos eso me dice la memoria” (Barnet and Montejo 65). Barnet's inclusion of Montejo's difficulty in remembering details reminds us that *Biografía de un cimarrón* is not a work of history, as Barnet himself says in his introduction, but rather a work of literature whose truth lies in the enduring power of its storytelling.

present. He then describes in detail the process and several products of making sugar cane, such as *muscovado*, *raspadura*, and *cachaza*. Montejo attributes his knowledge of the sugar-making process because, although he was sent to work cutting sugar cane later, he was forced to work inside the mills at about ten years old. He concludes that his experience was not unique since young boys were made to work like oxen.¹⁴⁹ Because Montejo had worked in both the sugar mills and in the cane fields, his testimony captures slavery from multiple spatial angles outside of the domestic sphere. Montejo's project therefore not only contributes to Barnet's project of filling gaps in ethnographic knowledge of slavery in Cuba but also complements Manzano's account of slavery within the slave narrative genre. *Biografía de un cimarrón*'s attention toward sugar production stands out as especially salient because of the product's role in reviving and maintaining slavery in Cuba during the nineteenth century. By discussing his involvement in the island's lucrative sugar production, Montejo speaks for not only himself but also millions of Afro-Cubans held in captivity during the nineteenth century.

Beyond the space inside the sugar mills, Montejo gives his testimony of life under slavery in the barracoons and in *el monte*.¹⁵⁰ Both the barracoons and the woods receive their own subsections within "La esclavitud." The text illustrates Barnet's influence over its organization through the introduction's opening comments. What most concerned Barnet as an ethnographer were specific problems such as the social environment of the barracoons and the celibate life of the runaway slave.¹⁵¹ In "La vida en los barracones," Barnet's ethnographic

¹⁴⁹ "Yo me sé esa parte del azúcar mejor que mucha gente que nada más que conoció la caña afuera, en el campo. Y para decir verdad prefiero la parte de adentro, por lo cómoda. En Flor de Sagua trabajé en la gaveta del cachimbo. Pero eso vino después que yo había tenido experimentación en el bagazo. Ahí la cuestión era de pico y pala. A mi entender, hasta era mejor el corte de caña. Yo tendría entonces unos diez años y por eso no me habían mandado al campo. Pero diez años en aquella época era como decir treinta ahora, porque los niños trabajaban como bueyes" (Barnet and Montejo 66).

¹⁵⁰ El monte is translated as "the woods" in the fiftieth anniversary edition (Hill 30).

¹⁵¹ "Nos preocupaban problemas específicos como el ambiente social de los barracones y la vida célebre de cimarrón" (Barnet and Montejo 60).

concerns therefore shine through Montejo’s descriptions of the severe difficulty of work in the cane fields and sugar mills: the dirty and dangerous conditions of the living quarters,¹⁵² the diseases that often broke out as a result of living in such conditions,¹⁵³ and the ineffectiveness of Catholic indoctrination. These aspects of *Biografía*’s antislavery discourse challenge the notion of a “benign” form of slavery in Cuba. Manuel P. Maza Miquel’s *Esclavos, patriotas y poetas a la sombra de la cruz: cinco ensayos sobre catolicismo e historia cubana* indicates that this “benign slavery thesis” was prevailing not only in Cuba but throughout colonial Spanish America: “se hablaba de una esclavitud española benigna en contraste con la esclavitud maligna de los colonialistas de la Europa del norte. Según esta tesis, el plantador criollo-español era un paterfamilias y el esclavo, un siervo redimido por la religión y el trabajo” (Maza Miquel 80). Montejo debunks the racist myth that black people were “redeemed by religion and work” not only by describing the brutal conditions of slavery but also by commenting on the distance that priests maintained between themselves and the squalid barracoons where enslave field workers were forced to live. While Montejo demonstrates detailed knowledge of the Congo and Lucumí religions, he designates Catholicism as the “other religion,” whose messengers were not the priests but rather enslaved and indoctrinated house servants:

La otra religión era la católica. Esa la introducían los curas, que por nada del mundo entraban a los barracones de la esclavitud. Los curas eran muy aseados. Tenían un aspecto serio que no jugaba con los barracones. Eran tan serios que hasta había negros que los seguían al pie de la letra... Estos negros eran esclavos domésticos y se reunían

¹⁵² “Los amos decían que los barracones eran tacitas de oro. A los esclavos no les gustaba vivir en esas condiciones, porque la *cerradera* les asfixiaba. Los barracones eran grandes aunque había algunos que los tenían más chiquitos... En el del Flor de Sagua vivían como doscientos esclavos de todos los colores... Había barracones de madera y de mampostería, con techos de tejas. Los dos con el piso de tierra y sucios como carajo. Ahí sí que no había ventilación moderna” (Barnet and Montejo 67).

¹⁵³ “De ahí que abundaran las plagas y las niguas que enfermaban a la dotación de infecciones y maleficios” (Barnet and Montejo 67).

con los otros esclavos, los del campo, en los bateyes. Venían siendo como mensajeros de los curas. La verdad es que yo jamás me aprendía esa doctrina porque no entendía nada” (Barnet and Montejo 75).

Through Montejo’s refusal to sugarcoat slavery, one gets a deeper sense of the reality of slavery beyond the false pretext that slavery was for any other purpose except to exploit black labor for profit.¹⁵⁴

While descriptions of the horrors of slavery are thus present in “La esclavitud,” they are not necessarily the text’s focus like they are in nineteenth-century slave narratives. Barnet and Montejo also describe the diversions in which men participated,¹⁵⁵ the characteristics of Chinese workers also living in the barracoons,¹⁵⁶ Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies and rituals,¹⁵⁷ and the Congo and Lucumí origins of such rituals.¹⁵⁸ One that receives detailed attention is *mayombe*, in

¹⁵⁴ *El ingenio: complejo económico social cubano del azúcar* (1974), by the eminent Cuban historian Manuel Moreno Fraginals, makes this point when he calls religious indoctrination the “other” point of friction between the religious indoctrination of the enslaved. The primary reason for the existence of slavery was economic, but it needed a religious “justification”: “La razón de ser de la esclavitud era económica, pero era necesario justificarla desde el punto de vista religioso. En este sentido es importante consignar que los teólogos españoles tenían una larga y brillante tradición antiesclavista que podía resumirse en la famosa frase: ‘ara salvar el ánima no es menester la esclavitud del cuerpo’. Sin embargo, la Iglesia local va construyendo su cuerpo de doctrinas justificadoras de la esclavitud. Y parte del concepto de que la razón principal por la cual se trae el negro salvaje de África es remedirle por el trabajo y enseñarle el amplio camino de la salvación cristiana. Con lo cual el ingenio adquiría un cierto sabor de templo salvador y la trata pasaba a ser una bella sociedad misionera” (Moreno Fraginals 98).

¹⁵⁵ Such diversions included games, dances, and fights, as William Luis summarizes in “Memory and Politics in Writing *Biography of a Runaway Slave*”: “Montejo also depicts the cultural and religious practices of slaves—tells of the games they played. The object of one called the cracker was to see who could break a cracker with his penis. The jug game challenged the men to see whose penis was long enough to reach the ashes at the bottom. Then there was their variation of monte, a card game they played for money that required players to guess which one of two cards on the table was higher than the three cards in their hand. Everyone looked forward to Sunday fiestas and dances like the *yuka*. In the *yuka* the dancing couples seemed to fly. Another dance, the *maní*, was violent and involved only the men, who would form a circle of forty to fifty participants and punch one another. They weighted their wrists with magic charms to power their blows. Such descriptions offer a glimpse into the daily lives of the slaves” (Luis, “Introduction: Memory and Politics” xvii-xviii).

¹⁵⁶ “There were also Chinese, but Montejo says little about them other than to point out that they had a high suicide rate, were quiet, trusted no one, and were born rebels” (Luis, “Introduction” xviii).

¹⁵⁷ “El juego de mayombe estaba amarrado a la religión” (Barnet and Montejo 69-70).

¹⁵⁸ “Yo conocí dos religiones africanas en los barracones: la lucumí y la conga. La conga era la más importante. En Flor de Sagua se conocía mucho porque los brujos se hacían dueños de la gente. Con eso de la adivinación se ganaban la confianza de todos los esclavos. Yo me vine a acercar a los negros viejos después de la abolición” (Barnet and Montejo 74).

which black people and overseers alike asked *santos* for blessings.¹⁵⁹ *Mayombe* could also be used for the enslaved to seek revenge against their enslavers:

Cuando el amo castigaba a algún esclavo, los demás recogían un poquito de tierra y la metían en la cazuela Con esa tierra resolvían lo que querían. Y el amo se enfermaba o pasaba algún daño en la familia. Porque mientras la tierra esa estaba dentro de la cazuela el amo estaba apresado ahí y ni el diablo lo sacaba. Esa era la venganza del congo con el amo. (Barnet and Montejo 70).

Montejo's account suggests that religion was one way that black people empowered themselves despite their enslavement. Black men in the barracoons even formed sexual partnerships, wherein they contributed to and were accepted by their communities.¹⁶⁰ These and other aspects of life in the barracoons reflect Montejo's memory of them as well as Barnet's interest in preserving them in writing. Their focus on black customs and daily life has the effect of recognizing their humanity despite the inhumane conditions imposed on them by slavery. The ethnographic aspects of *Biografía de un cimarrón* reflect not only Barnet's educational background but also Montejo's curiosity in his surroundings. They also reflect previous slave narratives from the nineteenth century. Echoes of Moore and Baquaqua can be heard in *Biografía de un cimarrón*'s interest in the origins and customs of the enslaved. Just as *Biography*

159 “El juego de mayombe estaba amarrado a la religión. Hasta los propios mayorales se metían para buscarse sus beneficios. Ellos creían en los brujos, por eso hoy nadie se puede asombrar de que los blancos crean en estas cosas. En el mayombe se tocaba con tambores. Se ponía una *nganga* o *cazuela* grande en el medio del patio. En esa cazuela estaban los poderes; los santos. El mayombe era un juego utilitario. Los santos tenían que estar presentes. Empezaban a tocar tambores y a cantar. Llevaban cosas para las *ngangas*. Los negros pedían por su salud, y la de sus hermanos y para conseguir la armonía entre ellos” (Barnet and Montejo 69-70). *Mayombe* is also the inspiration of Nicolás Guillén's poem “Sensemayá: canto para matar a una culebra” (*Motivos de son y otros poemas* 70-71)

160 “Total, la vida era solitaria de todas maneras, porque las mujeres escaseaban bastante... Muchos hombres no sufrían, porque estaban acostumbrados a esa vida. Otros hacía el sexo entre ellos y no querían saber nada de las mujeres. Esa era su vida: la sodomía. Lavaban la ropa y si tenían algún marido también le cocinaban. Eran buenos trabajadores y se ocupaban de sembrar conucos. Les daban los frutos a sus maridos para que los vendieran a los guajiros” (Barnet and Montejo 78).

of Mahommah G. Baquaqua is a “biography” of Afro-Brazil, *Biografía de un cimarrón* is a biography of Afro-Cuba. However, unlike nineteenth century slave narratives, Montejo’s narration rejects sentimentalism. *Biografía de un cimarrón* looks at some of the crudest aspects of slavery, but it does so unblinkingly. Montejo describes the separation of enslaved families from a simultaneously personal and stoic perspective: “Por cimarrón no conocí a mis padres. Ni los vide siquiera. Pero eso no es triste porque es la verdad” (Barnet and Montejo 64). Montejo’s characteristically matter-of-fact tone in *Biografía de un cimarrón* represents a stark contrast with the impassioned discourse of Romanticism. His matter-of-fact tone reflects both his own voice and Barnet’s training in ethnography as a social science.

While discussed in detail in *Biografía de un cimarrón*, the many aspects of life in the barracoons are omitted from *Autobiografía*’s account of slavery in Cuba. This is because Juan Francisco Manzano’s narrative takes place primarily within the domestic sphere. As a house servant, Manzano was largely separated from the lives and cultures of other enslaved Afro-Cubans. He himself alludes to his proximity to power in *Autobiografía* by calling himself as a “mulato y entre negros” (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 339). Even if Manzano did have knowledge of life in the barracoons, descriptions of the lives of field slaves (such as the ones included in *Biografía de un cimarrón*) would have been incongruous in nineteenth-century antislavery discourse. As I discuss in the previous chapter, Manzano compares himself to Jesus Christ to illustrate slavery’s injustice within the language of Catholicism.¹⁶¹ Richard Robert Madden’s omitted “Jesucristo” from his translation of *Autobiografía*, showing that Manzano’s writing pushed the boundaries of nineteenth-century antislavery discourse. Given that Manzano’s writing was already ahead of its times, explicitly describing rituals pertaining to Palo Monte as Montejo

¹⁶¹ See Luis, *Autobiografía del esclavo poeta y otros escritos*: “... mis manos se atan como las de Jesucristo” (321).

does in “La vida en los barracones” would have been impossible. Moreover, while Montejo’s criticisms of priests fit within the dominant anticlerical discourse of Revolutionary Cuba, any such criticism from Manzano would have risked offending the religious sensibilities of his target readers within the Del Monte circle. It would have been improper to have described the diversions of men living in the barracoons since they were sometimes sexually graphic.¹⁶² In these ways, *Biografía de un cimarrón* contributes aspects of life under slavery in Cuba that would have been censored from nineteenth-century antislavery discourse.

While “La vida en los barracones” describes life under slavery for the men in the barracoons, “La vida en el monte” depicts Montejo’s life completely removed from society. “La esclavitud” speaks to not only Montejo’s personal subjectivity but also the violence that all black people in Cuba were subjected to during the nineteenth century. However, “La vida en el monte” depicts Montejo’s life in total solitude from his escape to his return shortly after the commemoration of abolition. Barnet’s enthusiasm for interviewing Montejo in the first place suggests that escaping slavery to the woods was a relatively unique occurrence that pertains more closely to Montejo’s independent character than it does to the black experience in Cuba. As William Luis observes, fugitive slaves were not uncommon and in fact formed communities across Latin America: “their communities (*palenques*) gained notoriety throughout the Americas. Zumbi dos Palmares’ Quilombo dos Palmares in Brazil, Benkos Biojó’s Palenque de San Basilio in Colombia, and Ventura Sánchez (Coba)’s Bumba and Manuel Griñán (Gallo)’s Maluala in Cuba are some examples” (“Introduction: Politics and Memory” xiv). Nevertheless, while

¹⁶² See William Luis’s introduction to the fiftieth anniversary edition of *Biography of a Runaway Slave*: “Montejo also depicts the cultural and religious practices of slaves—tells of the games they played. The object of one called the cracker was to see who could break a cracker with his penis. The jug game challenged the men to see whose penis was long enough to reach the ashes at the bottom” (“Introduction: Politics and Memory” xvii-xviii).

escaping in and of itself was not an uncommon experience, surviving alone as Montejo did.

Montejo did not seek refuge in a *palenque* but rather in solitude.

Ironically, despite inspiring the book's title *Biografía de un cimarrón*, "La vida en el monte" is the shortest section. Just over ten pages, it includes Montejo's strategies for avoiding slave catchers, his methods of obtaining food and shelter, and his personal reflections on nature. "La vida en el monte" begins in the fields, where Montejo executes his escape by striking the overseer with a rock.¹⁶³ Escape by these means almost certainly would have been suppressed in the nineteenth-century antislavery narrative. As William Luis observes in *Literary Bondage*, escape by violent means would have been impossible within the limitations of the nineteenth-century antislavery narrative.¹⁶⁴ However, Montejo's escape from slavery is not the first depicted in the Cuban slave narrative. As Luis shows, Manzano also flees slavery in *Autobiografía*: "Regardless of their differing status, Manzano and Montejo suffered equally the ignominies of slavery, and each sought the same solution to his enslavement. Both escaped the brutality of their lives, though in different ways. According to his autobiography, Manzano, who was punished for no apparent reason, fled to the city and sought protection from the captain general, as prescribed by the slavery law" ("Introduction" xv). In other words, while Manzano had sought sanctuary in the lettered city and Montejo in the woods, their flights to freedom are presented as logical and justifiable responses to the oppressive system of slavery. The theme of escape, despite Manzano and Montejo's differences, puts them in sync not only with each other but also with the slave narrative genre. Like *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Incidents in the Life of a Slave*

¹⁶³ "Le silbé [al mayoral] de lejos y él miró y se volvió de espaldas; ahí fue donde cogí una piedra y se la tiré a la cabeza. Yo sé que le dio, porque él gritó para que me agarraran" (Barnet and Montejo 81).

¹⁶⁴ See Luis, *Literary Bondage*: "The antislavery discourse incorporates an unfamiliar situation into Western language and describes it from a bourgeois point of view. It is unequivocal that another position was not possible, at least not before the middle of the nineteenth century and certainly not during the writing of the first antislavery works" (65).

Girl, Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua, and many more, *Autobiografía* and *Biografía de un cimarrón* are not only slave narratives but also narratives that represent a hero's journey from bondage to freedom through self-liberation.

“No se había acabado del todo”: The Specter of Slavery in “La abolición” and “La Guerra de la Independencia”

Biografía de un cimarrón does not stop at describing slavery like most slave narratives. Written in the twentieth century, it challenges the notion that slavery truly ended with its *de jure* abolition in 1886. Entitled “La abolición” and “La Guerra de la Independencia,” respectively, parts two and three continue exposing the ills of slavery through its legacies of social exclusion, forced labor, and impoverishment for black people in Cuba. Hearing cries of celebration, Montejo descends from the *monte* to find out that slavery has been abolished. However, upon returning to society, he finds himself with little option but to go on living in the same *barracones* and working on the same sugar mills as before. Even after later serving in Cuba’s war against Spain for independence, Montejo again returns to working at a sugar mill under conditions like those that he had experienced under slavery. *Biografía de un cimarrón* therefore shows that nineteenth-century Cuban antislavery discourse, formed within Domingo del Monte’s literary circle, continued well into the twentieth century (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 3).¹⁶⁵ Part one, “La esclavitud,” makes *Biografía de un cimarrón* resemble a slave narrative in its form and content, but *Biografía de un cimarrón* does not end with slavery. “La abolición” and “La Guerra de la Independencia” expose the specter of slavery after abolition. Using Montejo’s oral narration, Barnet wrote to raise readers’ consciousness of the continued struggles that enslaved Afro-

¹⁶⁵ See also “The Politics of Memory and Miguel Barnet’s *The Autobiography of a Run Away Slave*” and “The Politics of Memory: Miguel Barnet’s *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* and César Leante’s *Los Guerrilleros negros*” in *Literary Bondage* (199-237).

Cubans continued to face after their legal emancipation. *Biografía de un cimarrón* therefore demonstrates a social commitment beyond the ethnographic task of recording the daily lives of plantation workers. Like its nineteenth-century predecessors in Cuba and across the Americas, *Biografía de un cimarrón* aims to provoke readers' indignation against slavery. However, it also tackles slavery's legacy of continued racial inequality in Cuba by representing slavery's legacy during the post-abolition period in "La abolición" and "La Guerra de la Independencia."

Barnet's primary interests in writing *Biografía de un cimarrón* were Montejo's life in the barracoons and his life in the woods, but the book's longest section is part two, "La abolición." Its length suggests the complex process of the text's realization beneath its surface. Did Barnet push the conversation past Montejo's life in the woods or did Montejo? Was exposing the ways in which slavery continued in practice after abolition form part of Barnet's Revolutionary political motivations for writing Montejo's story, or did Montejo insist that Barnet write more about his life than just slavery? As Barnet himself mentions in the introduction, slavery was a distant memory of Montejo's long-ago youth (Barnet, "Introducción" 61). While Barnet ultimately wrote what is on the page, Montejo nevertheless played an active role in deciding what information to provide Barnet.¹⁶⁶ Even though Barnet does not mention abolition or the War of Independence in his introduction, each is longer than "La esclavitud." This might suggest that Montejo's responses to Barnet's questions expanded Barnet's interests beyond his original intentions for the interviews. Although first captivated by Montejo's experiences as a runaway slave, Barnet ultimately wrote more about his life during abolition and his participation in the War of Independence.

¹⁶⁶ "Montejo demonstrates that he is not a passive participant but is actively engaged in the writing of his biography. He is aware of Barnet's ethnographic concerns, but he also wants Barnet to record thoughts and experiences that are less important to Barnet but crucial from Montejo's perspective. In fact, Montejo demands that Barnet take notice and commit to including the events in his future work" (Luis, "Introduction: Memory and Politics" xxvi).

Whether its contents are primarily the result of Barnet's questions or Montejo's own interests in telling his life's story, "The Abolition of Slavery reflects the Revolutionary agenda of using literature to give a voice to society's most marginalized people. While Montejo's account represents his own personal experiences and observations during this period, through Barnet's writing they also represent the collective experiences of black people who were emancipated from slavery in 1886 yet whose lives were not significantly changed. Cuba's colonial economy still depended on sugar production, which was still being produced largely by a black labor force. Tellingly, the only section in "The Abolition of Slavery" is entitled "La vida en los ingenios." After the celebrations that Montejo hears from the woods, he characteristically suspects that slavery could not have ended so easily, saying that "Yo sabía bien que la esclavitud no se había acabado del todo" (Barnet and Montejo 90). He wanders from town to town, depending on the kindness of others for food and shelter, before eventually deciding to return to cutting sugar cane. Upon starting work again at a mill called Purio, he observes some similarities and differences between life before and after abolition. On the one hand, Montejo's observations might suggest some improvements for the conditions of sugar cane laborers. Montejo says that the overseers do not beat workers like they used to (Barnet and Montejo 91). Also, the barracoon at Purio looks new, has no locks, and even has ventilation. However, even in observing these differences, Montejo reveals continuity between past and present. With limited other options for work, he goes back to living in a barracoon and working on a sugar cane mill under a Spanish overseer. In society, Montejo had little choice but to return to the life he once knew because the only education he had was the one he had received in the sugar mills during slavery.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ "El primer ingenio donde trabajé se llamaba Purio. Llegué un día con los trapos que llevaba y un sombrero que había recogido. Entré y le pregunté al mayoral si había trabajo para mí. El me dijo que sí. Me acuerdo que era español, de bigotes, y se llamaba Pepe. Aquí hubo mayorales hasta hace poco. Con la diferencia de que no golpeaban como en la esclavitud. Aunque era de la misma cepa: hombres agrios y bocones. En esos ingenios

Montejo's observations continue to highlight continuity between life under slavery and life after abolition. William Luis argues that "After emancipation he returned to civilization, to a society that had dismantled the legal but not the cultural shackles of slavery. Mill owners continued to treat blacks as slaves, and many blacks behaved as if they were still in bondage" ("Introduction: Politics and Memory" xviii). Montejo challenges the idea that black people were really free in Cuba: "Ya todos los negros estaban libres. En esa libertad que decían ellos, porque a mí me consta que seguían los horrores. Y había amos, o mejor dicho, dueños que se creían que los negros estaban hechos para la encerradera y el cuero. Entonces los trataban igual. Muchos negros para mí que no se habían dado cuenta de las cosas, porque seguían diciendo: "Mi amo, la bendición" (Barnet and Montejo 91). "La vida en los ingenios," thus begins comparing the periods of slavery and abolition from its opening paragraphs. Throughout the section, Montejo continues to observe the unending work,¹⁶⁸ the methods of cultivation requiring hard manual labor,¹⁶⁹ the lack of social mobility,¹⁷⁰ the lack of educational opportunity,¹⁷¹ the psychological

después de la abolición siguieron existiendo barracones. Eran los mismos que antiguamente. Muchos estaban nuevos, porque eran de mampostería. Otros, con la lluvia y los temporales, se habían caído. En Purio el barracón estaba fuerte y como acabado de estrenar. A mí me dijeron que fuera a vivir allí" (Barnet and Montejo 90).

¹⁶⁸ "El trabajo era agotador. Uno se pasaba las horas en el campo y parecía que el tiempo no se acababa. Seguía y seguía hasta que lo dejaba a uno molido. Los mayorales siempre agitando. El trabajador que se paraba mucho a rato era sacado de allí. Yo trabajaba desde las seis de la mañana" (Barnet and Montejo 91).

¹⁶⁹ "También en esa época existían los filipinos, los chinos, los isleños y cada vez había más criollos. Todos ellos trabajaban en la caña, guataqueaban, chapeaban, aporcaban. Aporcar es arar con un buey y un *narigoner* para remover la tierra igual que en la esclavitud" (Barnet and Montejo 94).

¹⁷⁰ Los curas y los abogados eran sagrados en aquella época. Se respetaban mucho por el título. Hasta un bachiller era algo muy serio. Los negros no eran nada de eso; curas, menos. Yo nunca vi un cura negro. Eso era más bien para los blancos y descendientes de españoles. Hasta para ser sereno había que ser español" (Barnet and Montejo 102)

¹⁷¹ "Los niños... Se criaban salvajemente. A lo único que les enseñaban era a guataquear y a sembrar viandas. De instrucción nada. Cuero sí les daban, y mucho" (Barnet and Montejo 105).

impact of slavery,¹⁷² the ongoing punishments,¹⁷³ and the impunity of overseers' crimes,¹⁷⁴ especially in rural areas.¹⁷⁵ He suggests that black workers were even more vulnerable after abolition than they were before. While Montejo says that they were not whipped with the same frequency as before, the threat of being fired represented another form of control: "El que se quedaba dormido era castigado. Y si el mayoral se ponía furioso, lo echaba para la calle" (Barnet and Montejo 104). In other words, although the means of punishment changed, overseers used violence to maintain the same social order as during slavery. These passages therefore suggest that the Spanish colonial system, still in power for over a decade after abolition, were just as abusive as before. And just as racial injustice continued beyond abolition, *Biografía de un cimarrón* shows that Afro-Cuban narrative has continued to expose and denounce it.

The third and final part of *Biografía de un cimarrón*, "La Guerra de Independencia," continues observing the perpetuation of racial oppression up through the turn of the twentieth century. What had initially motivated Montejo to fight in the War of Independence was a sense of indignation in the face of racial injustice¹⁷⁶ The tragic irony of *Biografía de un cimarrón* is that it concludes with these injustices not only unresolved by emancipation but compounded by War

¹⁷² "En las bodegas vendían chuchos colorados de cuero de buey torcido. Las madres se lo amarraban a la cintura, y si el niño se ponía malcriado, le daban por dondequiera. Eran castigos salvajes heredados de la esclavitud" (Barnet and Montejo 105).

¹⁷³ "Yo me acuerdo de un criminal él que se llamaba Camilo Polavieja. Polavieja era gobernador por los años noventa. Nadie lo quería. El decía que los trabajadores eran bueyes. Tenía el mismo pensamiento de la esclavitud. Una vez le mandó a dar *componte* a los trabajadores que no tuvieran cédula. La cédula era un papelito, como un vale, donde escribían las señas del trabajador. Había que tenerlo arriba siempre. Y el que no lo tuviera recibía unos buenos mochazos en el lomo con vergajo, que era *pisajo* de res seco. Eso era el *componte*" (Barnet and Montejo 107).

¹⁷⁴ El Febles ese sí que era un tirano; *se fajaba* a trompadas con los trabajadores y después los seguía tratando como si nada. Era muy mala paga. Un día un trabajador llegó y le dijo: 'Págume'. Febles lo mandó a meter en los hornos. El hombre se achicarró. Nada más que quedaron los mondongos y fue como se supo del crimen. A Febles ni lo tocaron" (Barnet and Montejo, *Biografía de un cimarrón* 117-118).

¹⁷⁵ "Había ingenios que estaban como en la esclavitud; es que los dueños se creían que eran amos de negros todavía. Eso pasaba mucho en ingenios apartados de los pueblos" (Barnet and Montejo 110).

¹⁷⁶ Hacía falta la Guerra. No era justo que tantos puestos y tantos privilegios fueran a caer en manos de los españoles nada más. No era justo que las mujeres para trabajar tuvieran que ser hijas de los españoles. Nada de eso era justo. No se veía un negro abogado, porque decían que los negros nada más que servían para el monte. No se veía un maestro negro. Todo era para los blancos españoles (153).

of Independence. Despite the heroism of black soldiers of Cuban independence, Montejo once again takes up work at a sugar mill, where he had begun his life under slavery. Many of his comrades “ended up in the street”:

Al terminar la Guerra empezó la discusión de si los negros habían peleado o no. Yo sé que el noventa y cinco por ciento de la raza negra hizo la Guerra. Luego ellos empezaron a decir que el sesenta y cinco. Bueno, nadie les criticó esas palabras. El resultado fue que los negros se quedaron en la calle. Guapos como fieras y en la calle. Eso era incorrecto, pero así fue” (Barnet and Montejo 178).

Barnet writes in his introduction about the subjectivity of Montejo’s perspective.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, Montejo’s viewpoint expresses a greater truth about the continued social, political, and economic oppression that black Cubans continued to face after abolition, even with their invaluable contributions to Cuban independence from Spain.

The structure of *Biografía de un cimarrón* is therefore cyclical throughout its three main parts. In each one, Montejo finds himself in a similar position as he had been under slavery despite abolition and his service to the War of Independence. His situation reflects not only his personal experiences but also the many collective experiences of black veterans of the War of Independence. Official versions of Cuban history present Máximo Gómez as a hero, but Montejo provides a dissenting view. To Montejo, Gómez was a traitor for allowing the United States to intervene in the war ultimately take control of the newly “independent” Cuban nation. Whereas the black soldiers under general Antonio Maceo had fought for Cuba’s independence, Gómez betrayed them by exchanging one colonial power (Spain) for a new one (the United States). US

¹⁷⁷ See Barnet, “Introducción”: “Indudablemente muchos de sus argumentos no son rigurosamente fieles a los hechos” (61).

soldiers brought their own brand of anti-black racism with them.¹⁷⁸ These same soldiers unjustly received most of the credit for rapidly ending the war. In Montejo's view, major battles such as the battle of Mal Tiempo were largely fought by formerly enslaved black soldiers like him. Despite their contributions to independence, "true liberators" like Qunitín Banderas, were not properly recognized as such under the Cuban Republic due to racial prejudice. Montejo claims that there was a bust made of Banderas, but it had been "abandoned on the docks for many years."¹⁷⁹ Despite his supposed illiteracy, Montejo's reading of public spaces thus demonstrates his profound awareness that black people's contributions to Cuba's independence had been erased from the dominant whitewashed version of Cuban history. *Biografía de un cimarrón* ends with Montejo's reading of the Máximo Gómez's statue facing toward the United States and black general Antonio Maceo's statue facing toward the people: "Pasé por un parque y ví que lo habían montado en un caballo de bronce. Seguí para abajo y como a la media legua tenían a Maceo montado en otro caballo igual. La diferencia estaba en que Gómez miraba para el norte y Maceo para el pueblo. Todo el mundo tiene que fijarse en eso. Ahí está todo" (Barnet and Montejo 182). In this way, *Biografía de un cimarrón* calls attention to black people's struggle not only against slavery but also—through the symbol of Maceo—for the authentic liberation of all Cubans from Spanish and US imperialism.

Despite the supposed end of slavery and of the War of Independence, Barnet and Montejo's final sentences suggest that these battles continue into the present and will rage on into the future. Montejo died in 1973, some 10 years after his interviews with Barnet, but his

¹⁷⁸ "Con los negros se metían mucho. Les decían: 'Nigre, nigre'. Entonces se echaban a reír" (Barnet and Montejo 178).

¹⁷⁹ "Yo he visto hombres valientes, pero como él [Quintín Banderas] únicamente [Antonio] Maceo. Pues en la República pasó muchos trabajos. Nunca le dieron una buena oportunidad. El busto que le hicieron estuvo tirado en los muelles muchos años. El busto de un patriota. Por eso la gente está revuelta todavía; por la falta de respeto hacia los verdaderos libertadores. Al que le cuenten lo del busto cree que es mentira. Y sin embargo, yo lo ví. Ahora no sé dónde estará. A lo mejor lo volvieron a poner" (Barnet and Montejo 158).

voice echoes eternally in Afro-Cuban narrative: “no quiero morirme, para echar todas las batallas que vengan. Ahora, yo no me meto en trincheras ni cojo armas de éas de hoy. Con un machete me basta” (Barnet and Montejo 182). *Biografía de un cimarrón* thus goes beyond the discursive limitations of nineteenth-century slave narratives such as Juan Francisco Manzano’s, not only in the sense that it explores aspects of slavery that are absent from Manzano’s *Autobiografía* but also in the sense that the project of abolition remained incomplete after 1886. Just as George Yúdice describes one of the objectives of the *testimonio* genre to “exorcizar y corregir la historia oficial” (qtd. in “Rigoberta Menchú” 749), Montejo’s narration corrects the official history of slavery and its echoes throughout Cuban history. Nevertheless, like Manzano, Montejo was limited in what he could and could not “say” in his *Biografía*. As both Luis and Skłodowska argue, Fidel Castro’s 1961 “Palabras a los intelectuales” speech directly helped to inspire *Biografía de un cimarrón*, but the same Revolutionary discourse also silenced aspects of Esteban Montejo’s oral narration. Given *Biografía de un cimarrón*’s overarching theme of Cuba’s oppression of black people both before and after abolition, what about the periods of the Cuban Republic (1902) and after the Cuban Revolution (1959)?

“Todas las batallas que vengan”: Racism in the Republic and Revolutionary Periods

Chapters on the Cuban Republic and Revolution are absent from the book, but as William Luis observes, there are sporadic references to them because the past is recalled through the lens of the present. A particularly important event during the period of the Cuban Republic was the “War of 1912” in which the Cuban government, backed by the US government, and to suppress the Partido Independiente de Color, committed a massacre of thousands of black people on the island, regardless of whether they were affiliated with the party. Luis argues that “traces of this

1912 war” can be found in *Biografía de un cimarrón*, for example, when Montejo “traveled to the Santa Rosa farm, where he met Martín Morúa Delgado, the same Morúa who crafted the amendment of that name outlawing the Partido Independiente de Color” (“Introduction: Memory and Politics” xxxvi). In another example of how the republic can be found in Montejo’s memory of abolition, Luis notes that “Referring to church raffles during Holy Week, Montejo at one point breaks the chronology of his narration and leaps ahead” (Luis, “Introduction: Memory and Politics” xxxvii): “Nos habían invitado los curas. Uno de ellos, el que dio la misa, quiso atraerse a los veteranos con palabras de Cristo y otras boberías. Llegó a decir en la misma misa que a los comunistas había que exterminarlos y que eran hijos del demonio. Me encabroné, porque por aquellos años yo estaba afiliado al Partido Socialista Popular; por las formas que tenía y por las ideas” (Barnet and Montejo 142). Observing Montejo’s affiliation with the Popular Socialist Party, Luis argues that “the time referenced was likely sometime during Fulgencio Batista’s dictatorship (1952-1959), and Montejo’s sentiments speak to a position in line with the revolutionary cause of the time, though this theme remains undeveloped in the book” (Luis, “Introduction: Memory and Politics” xxxviii). So, if Montejo espoused the political views of the Cuban Revolution, why exclude this period from the book’s timeline?

The reason is because Montejo was perhaps equally skeptical of the Cuban Revolution as he was of “abolition,” “independence,” and the United States-controlled Republic. Luis suggests that “Montejo appears to have been suspicious of any organization, in particular institutions that were run by whites” (“Introduction: Memory and Politics” xxxviii). Moreover, Montejo’s affiliation with the Popular Socialist Party does not mean that he supported Fidel Castro: “Although the Partido Socialista Popular did oppose the Batista dictatorship, it did not support the armed takeover of the government by Castro and his 26th of July Movement” (Luis,

“Introduction: Memory and Politics” xviii). Contrary to Barnet’s portrayal of Montejo as an emblem of the Revolutionary spirit, Montejo’s affiliation with the PSP might suggest that he did not support Castro: ‘In the early years of the revolution, Castro abandoned the rebel movement in favor of the Communist Party, whose members occupied important positions in the government. His act was thus a betrayal of the supporters who had marched triumphantly with him into Havana’ (Luis, “Introduction: Memory and Politics” xxxix). Luis thus argues that Barnet willfully censored Montejo’s comments about life in the Republic and his attitudes toward the 1959 Revolution in order for the book to be published and ultimately to secure his place in Cuban society for himself: “Barnet made a conscious decision to silence Montejo on the periods of the Republic and the Revolution, probably because the independent and outspoken Montejo may have said something controversial about the government that could have interfered with Barnet’s own goal of moving from the margins of revolutionary discourse to its center—and the Montejo project promised to serve him well” (Luis, “Introduction: Memory and Politics” xxix). It is thus likely that Montejo regarded Castro as not a liberator but the next oppressor.

Silencing critiques of the Fidel Castro regime would have been necessary for the book’s publication. Including the Revolution as a period along slavery, abolition, and the War of Independence would have suggested that, under Castro’s regime, conditions for black people still had not significantly changed. Beyond any direct critiques that Montejo might have made, it was therefore necessary for Barnet to exclude the Revolution from being subject to Cuba’s cycles of history. Nevertheless, there is evidence that Montejo dissented of the Castro regime. In the final passage, Montejo talks as if preparing for battle but rejects modern weapons in favor of a machete such as the ones he used during the War of Independence:

This passage is remarkable for its synthesis of different historical moments. Although the narration appears to be situated at the beginning of the republic, the reader knows that Montejo is narrating in the present. He deftly interweaves the present with the past, the time under colonial rule, when Spanish soldiers marched in their crisp, clean uniforms, and the present moment when thoughts of trenches and modern weapons arose as nearby threats to the revolution mounted. Though modern weapons have their advantages, Montejo prefers a machete, a symbol of the past. (Luis, “Introduction: Memory and Politics” xxxiv)

Montejo’s assertion that he does not wish to die so that he can fight all the battles to come is ambiguous. Montejo analyzes direction of Gómez’s statue facing toward the North and Maceo’s statue facing the people, suggesting that one of these battles is US imperialism. However, another battle could refer to the situation of ongoing racism in Cuba. Racism during the Revolutionary period was especially insidious because the Castro regime’s rhetoric claimed that it had already been eliminated through the abolition of social class. The denial of racism in the Castro regime allowed it to continue oppressing black people under the Revolution.

Through not only what it says but also what it omits, *Biografía de un cimarrón* unsettles the dominant narrative that racial relations in Latin America have been historically harmonious. The denial of racism has a long-standing history in Cuba just like other Latin American nations. Racial harmony was promoted by poets and political architects of the Cuban nation. José Martí famously wrote “No hay odio de razas porque no hay razas” in his essay “Nuestra América” (1891) (295), and Nicolás Guillén wrote in his prologue to *Sóngoro Cosongo* that “el espíritu de Cuba es mestizo” (36). However, Alejandro de la Fuente’s book *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (2001) explores the ways in which reality fell

short of these ideals for Afro-Cubans. Anti-black oppression during the twentieth century is deeply rooted in the nationalist ideology of “racial democracy,” which emphasized national unity to unite Cubans of all colors against the common enemy of Spanish colonialism in the nineteenth century, but nationalism had the effect of erasing, denying, downplaying, and distorting historical racial divisions rooted in slavery. De la Fuente observes as many other scholars have that “political elites argued that even during times of slavery race relations had been ‘softer’ and more ‘harmonic’ in Cuba than in other countries” (*A Nation for All* 29). Montejo’s firsthand descriptions of slavery are part of *Biografía de un cimarrón*’s correction to the official history in Cuba that “Slavery itself had been abolished due to the ‘titanic’ efforts, dedication, and generosity of a group of worthy white Cubans who had raised their voices in the Spanish parliament to impose manumission on the colonial government or by those, equally worthy, who had sacrificed their own well-being, fortune, and family to fight for their freedom” (De la Fuente, *A Nation for All* 29). Afro-Cuban literature offers a correction to this historical revisionist narrative by centering the struggle of black Cubans against their enslavement and for their liberation, both in their lives and in the act of denouncing their oppression.

The cyclical structure of *Biografía de un cimarrón* reflects De la Fuente’s argument that, despite limited access to upward mobility, racial inequity continued to be the dominant theme of Cuban history during the period of the Republic. The Cuban Revolution represented the promise of change for black Cubans, but the Castro regime largely failed to deliver on that promise. At its outset, the Castro regime did address racism in its public discourse. The leaders of the Cuban Revolution boldly claimed to have abolished racism: “Slavery,” Guevara was saying at the same time in Santiago, “did not end in Cuba until January 1, 1959” (qtd. in De la Fuente, *A Nation for All* 268). However, just as Martí had declared that there is no racial hatred because there are no

races, these declarations were ultimately a wish rather than a reality for Afro-Cubans. De la Fuente notes that there were several measures and policies during the Revolutionary period aimed at addressing racism and discrimination:

Most blacks and mulattoes benefitted materially from the national redistribution of income and resources implemented by the revolution. Perhaps equally important, for the first time they were, together with other disadvantaged groups, at the center of government attention and given the opportunity to participate substantially in areas that had been closed to them. In this sense, the desegregation of parks, beaches, schools, and recreational facilities was critically important. It allowed Afro-Cubans to assert their recently acquired status in very concrete ways. (De la Fuente, *A Nation for All* 276)

Biografía de un cimarrón itself represents a product of mass campaigns to reflect the Revolution's values of a new integrated society through the arts, culture, and propaganda. However, the regime declared victory over racism too early. Just as during the Republic, talking about race and racism in Revolutionary Cuba became taboo. This ongoing denial of racism by the Castro regime had the continued effect of perpetuating racism in Cuba: "Revolutionaries and, after 1962, Communists could not be racists. Racism was identified with social groups subservient to imperialist interests: the white, pro-yankee, antinational bourgeoisie that had fled the country. Thus, not only was racism anticommunist or counterrevolutionary; it was also antinational and perilous sign of ideological 'backwardness'" (De la Fuente, *A Nation for All* 278). To support the 1962 Second Declaration of Havana's assertion that the Revolution had "eradicated discrimination because of race or sex" in Cuba, the Castro regime silenced critiques of the government in not only the black press but also Afro-Cuban literature (De la Fuente, *A Nation for All* 279).

The question of whether Montejo was censored from critiquing the Castro government will probably always remain one. In response to the accusation that he silenced Montejo on the last 60 years of his life, Barnet has not only confirmed this accusation but literally threatened to kill anyone who writes an epilogue to *Biografía de un cimarrón*.¹⁸⁰ Barnet's declaration that "whoever writes the second part of that book because it destroys the spirit and example that Esteban Montejo gave to the world" suggests that what is at stake is no less than Barnet's control over the legacy of Montejo's "revolutionary spirit," and thus Barnet's own place in Cuban literature. In any case, despite progress and propaganda during the Castro regime, racism continued to be a part of life for black Cubans after the Revolution. The racism by denial of the Cuban Revolutionary government was therefore itself a battle, and the final passage of *Biografía de un cimarrón* does not say that Montejo was prepared to fight some of the battles to come—but all of them. *Biografía de un cimarrón* thus adds greater perspective to the history of black Cubans' resistance against slavery and oppression in Afro-Cuban literature. Just as Juan Francisco Manzano cannot possibly be expected to be the voice of enslaved people's experience in Cuba, neither could Esteban Montejo. The machete, a symbol of enslaved black people's reappropriation of a tool of oppression (forced labor harvesting sugar cane) into a weapon of resistance, is also a symbol of the past and of Montejo's complicated nostalgia for life before the Revolution. Viewed through the lens of gender analysis, it could also be read as a phallic symbol of men's monopoly over the history of slavery in Cuba and Latin America at large.

¹⁸⁰ "If anyone dares to write the life of Esteban Montejo, the second part, I'll kill him, I'll assassinate him, I'll become a terrorist. No one can touch Esteban Montejo. North Europeans don't understand that, but I'll kill him. I'll kill him, I'll have him killed; I don't know how to kill, but I'll have him killed. They can't touch Esteban Montejo. Yes, I'll grab a machete and chop off the head of whoever writes the second part of that book because it destroys the spirit and example that Esteban Montejo gave to the world" (qtd. in Rowlandson 48).

There are black women like Esperança Garcia and Maria Firmina dos Reis who write about slavery in Latin America before the twentieth century. Black women are also present in *Biografía de un cimarrón*. Barnet and Montejo describe them as not only nannies and caretakers but doctors who healed with the power of plants and knowledge.¹⁸¹ However, black women are more often portrayed in *Biografía de un cimarrón* as victims of cruel punishment,¹⁸² objects of sexual pursuit,¹⁸³ and bearers of offspring for their captors.¹⁸⁴ These horrors represent the lived experiences of enslaved black women in Cuba and across the Americas. They are also represented in other prominent pieces of Revolution-era Afro-Cuban literature like Nancy Morejón's poem “Mujer negra” (1975). However, black women are always represented in the book from the perspectives of Barnet and Montejo—never from their own. The result is that Barnet and Montejo represent them as objects that are acted upon rather than as active agents. What is largely missing from *Biografía de un cimarrón* is black women’s resistance to the intersecting conditions of white supremacy, patriarchy, and enslavement. It is therefore important in any analysis of slavery in Latin America to include the voices of Afro-Cuban women. *Reyita, sencillamente*, by Daisy Rubiera and María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno, provides just such an example of black women’s voices in Afro-Cuban literature.

¹⁸¹ Yo me acuerdo que había unas negras crianderas y cebadoras que cuidaban a los criollitos y los alimentaban. Cuando alguno se lastimaba en el campo o se enfermaba, esas negras servían de médicos. Con yerbas y conocimientos lo arreglaban todo” (Barnet and Montejo 76)

¹⁸² “A las mujeres preñadas les daban cuero igual, pero acostadas, boca abajo con un hoyo en la tierra para cuidarles la barriga. ¡Les daban una mano de cuerazos! Ahora, se cuidaban no de estropearle el niño, porque ellos los querían a tutiplén” (Barnet and Montejo 78).

¹⁸³ “El mayoral y el contramayoral entraban al barracón y se metían con las negras... Ahí también se jugaba a la escondida y los negros perseguían a las negras para cogérselas” (Barnet and Montejo 72).

¹⁸⁴ “Eso de los niños de raza era porque eran hijos de negros forzudos y grandes, de granaderos. Los granaderos eran privilegiados. Los amos los buscaban para juntarlos con negras grandes y saludables. Después de juntos en un cuarto aparte del barracón, los obligaban a gustarse y la negra tenía que parir buena cría todos los años. Yo digo que era como tener animales. Pues bueno, si la negra no paría como a ellos se les antojaba, la separaban y la ponían a trabajar en el campo otra vez” (Barnet and Montejo 77).

II. Slavery in Afro-Cuban Women's Narrative: Daisy Rubiera Castillo's *Reyita, sencillamente*

Author and co-founder of the Fernando Ortiz African Culture Center Daisy Rubiera Castillo (1939-) narrates slavery from the perspectives of racial solidarity, shared ancestry, and black women's memory in *Reyita, sencillamente: testimonio de una negra cubana nonagenaria* (1997). Her work thus contributes black women's perspectives to Afro-Cuban *testimonio*. William Luis, in the introduction to his interview with Daisy Rubiera Castillo (2003), argues that "Si en la literatura cubana la voz del negro es escasamente conocida, la exposición de la negra es inexistente" ("La mujer negra en Cuba" 62). Of course, Afrodescendant women are present in Afro-Cuban narrative prior to the close of the twentieth century. Juan Francisco Manzano depicts his mother, María del Pilar Manzano, as a woman of "distension o de estimasion o de razon como quiera que se llame" (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 299). The love that Manzano has for his mother has the effect of heightening the indignation of a mayoral striking her and highlights the injustice of black women's enslavement.¹⁸⁵ *Biografía de un cimarrón* also describes the conditions of slavery for black women in Cuba; but women's experiences are always portrayed through the filter of Barnet and Montejo's perspectives. It is therefore true that, as Luis argues, "La perspectiva de la mujer negra, aunque también marginal, ha permanecido ausente hasta la publicación de *Reyita, sencillamente*" ("La mujer negra en Cuba" 62).

Had Miguel Barnet made a different choice of subject, the history of Afro-Cuban literature could have been vastly different. Since Barnet was interested in investigating African religions, he writes in the introduction to *Biografía de un cimarrón* that his interest had been piqued by a black woman who was a "santera y espiritista" (Barnet, "Introducción" 59). She had

¹⁸⁵ Manzano writes that he transformed from a lamb into a lion after watching the mayoral strike his mother: "... este golpe lo sentí yo en mi corazon dar un grito y convertirme de manso cordero en un leon" (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 311-312).

also been enslaved and appeared in the same newspaper feature wherein Barnet had “discovered” Montejo. Her involvement in Afro-Cuban spiritual and religious practice piqued Barnet’s interest, but he ultimately “forgot” her and instead prepared to visit Montejo at the home for veterans where he lived.¹⁸⁶ In hindsight, the reader might judge Barnet’s choice as a missed opportunity to amplify the black women’s voices in Cuba.

Over three decades later, Daisy Rubiera did just that by writing a *testimonio* from the perspective of her own mother, María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno (1902-1997), or “simply” Reyita. If Barnet had acted to “fill a void in Cuban and Latin American ethnography,” Reyita’s daughter Daisy Rubiera filled a void left by Barnet, but it was not her intention to do so (Luis “Introduction: Memory and Politics” xi). Rubiera said in her interview with Luis that “Independientemente de haber leído *El cimarrón* en dos ocasiones, su lectura no influyó nada en la propuesta que me hice para escribir *Reyita, sencillamente*” (“La mujer negra en Cuba” 64). Rather, Rubiera describes the original idea for the book as having emerged from a dialogue with her mother about black women during the colonial period and Reyita’s own personal memory on the subject: “La idea inicial surge a parir de una conversación que sostuve con mi madre en relación con una investigación que venía realizando sobre la mujer negra en el período colonial cubano. Eso la motive mucho y la estimuló a contarme aspectos de su vida y de su familia desconocidos por mí hasta ese momento” (Luis, “La mujer negra en Cuba” 64). In other words, it was not a desire to write a follow up to *Biografía de un cimarrón* that motivated Rubiera to write *Reyita, sencillamente*, but rather her mother’s own knowledge of black women’s experience in colonial Cuba that had been passed down to her and preserved through her own memory. *Reyita*

¹⁸⁶ “Olvidamos a la anciana y a los pocos días nos dirigimos al Hogar de Veterano, donde estaba albergado Esteban Montejo” (Barnet 59). Since Barnet spent part of his childhood in Atlanta, Georgia, he had probably had contact at some point with slave narratives in the U.S. such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. It is possible that his knowledge of U.S. slave narratives motivated him to write a similar document in Cuba.

therefore represents the collective memory of black women in Cuba from the colonial era through the end of the twentieth century. Abdeslam Azougargh calls *Reyita, sencillamente* “the logical continuation of *Biografía de un cimarrón*” because it deals in greater detail with the historical periods of the Cuban Republic and Revolution (qtd. in Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno).¹⁸⁷ Moreover, Luis observes that Reyita’s life is symbolic of the Cuban nation since Reyita was born in 1902, the same year as the birth of the Cuban Republic (“La mujer negra en Cuba” 62). However, *Reyita* does not simply begin and end with Reyita’s birth and death.¹⁸⁸ Rather, the book returns to the theme of slavery through Reyita’s memory of her grandmother Tatica.

In Chapter 1, Reyita narrates Tatica’s enslavement, which she recalls being told when she was a child. Reyita contrasts the peaceful and harmonious conditions of life in Africa with the horror of Tatica’s kidnapping and the misery and cruelty of life on the slave ship. Although brief, the section entitled “¡Mi abuelita voló!” reflects both the discourse and narrative trajectory of the slave narrative. Like *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua*, “¡Mi abuelita voló!” also represents a sympathetic portrayal of an African who is unjustly captured, transported, and mistreated in Latin America under slavery. Also, like “La esclavitud,” Chapter 1 of *Reyita* illustrates overlap between the *testimonio* and the slave narrative. However, by depicting an enslaved African woman, *Reyita, sencillamente* deals with aspects of slavery that are not developed in either of these narratives. The rape of black women by their captors tends to be excluded from slave narratives that center on black men’s experiences, but black women’s testimonies reveal it to be a central facet of slavery in the Americas. Rape is never just the act

¹⁸⁷ Azougargh’s quotation appears on the back cover of the book: “Creo que *Reyita*... es la continuación lógica de la *Biografía de un cimarrón*.”

¹⁸⁸ Reyita died in 1997, the same year as the book’s publication.

itself but a manifestation of the imbalance of power through violence. Reyita says that her mother, Isabel, is the child of Tatica and her enslaver, a member of the eminent Hechavarría family in Cuba. *Reyita, sencillamente* therefore develops an important aspect of enslaved women's experiences that is present in slave narratives from the United States like *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* but is missing from Manzano's *Autobiografía* and *Biografía de un cimarrón*. Women made up a minority of enslaved Africans who were taken to the Americas (about 35.5%), but their experiences are still central to understanding slavery and its impact in the new world (Eltis and Richardson).¹⁸⁹

Reyita's discussion of slavery in Cuba is also fundamental because of its position at the beginning of the book. By discussing Tatica's enslavement in the first chapter, *Reyita* locates the origins of racism in slavery. After “¡Mi abuelita voló!”, Reyita describes the hardships that Tatica continued to face after abolition. She also describes her pride in being black as well as the racial discrimination that she confronted in her life because of it. Like *Biografía de un cimarrón*, *Reyita, sencillamente* thus observes continuity between the past and the present. However, unlike *Biografía de un cimarrón*, *Reyita* involves not only a black *informante* but also a black *gestor*. Reyita and Daisy Rubiera's relationship as mother and daughter and racial solidarity as black women subvert the traditional hierarchy of *testimonios* and slave narratives. Miguel Barnet founds the *testimonio* model on the slave narrative tradition, in which a white antislavery advocate writes a document that condemns slavery from the perspective of a black subject. The writing and speaking subjects of both slave narratives and *testimonios* like *Biografía de un cimarrón*, *Hasta no verte*, *Jesús mío*, and *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* are usually strangers.

¹⁸⁹ According to *Slave Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, 64.5% of the estimated 10,642,683 slaves embarked were male (Eltis and Richardson).

Daisy Rubiera, on the other hand, writes from both a position of shared ancestry and racial solidarity. In his introduction to his interview with Rubiera, Luis compares “una tensión entre Montejo y Barnet” on the one hand with the “plena confianza” and “compenetración” between Rubiera and Reyita on the other (“La mujer negra en Cuba” 63). By writing about Reyita’s family and her struggles against racial prejudice, Rubiera simultaneously writes about her own vis-à-vis their shared racial, gender, and family identities.

Karen Kornweibel notes the differences between *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Reyita*, *sencillamente* beyond their respective *gestor-informante* relationships. Building on Luis’s analysis of the “trajectory from Manzano, to Barnet, to Rubiera,” Kornweibel argues that *Reyita* shares *Autobiografía* and *Biografía*’s shared belonging, not only to Afro-Cuban and testimonial writing, but also to “the continuum of resistance and agency within the process of narrative constructions of individual and national identities” (68). What distinguishes *Reyita* is that it is “as a strong statement of Afro-Cuban female identity posited as constructive of Cuban national identity” (Kornweibel 69). This is significant because *Autobiografía* and *Biografía de un cimarrón* faced limitations in imagining Cuban nationhood. Manzano, under the conditions of colonial Cuba, “did not ultimately control the production of his own autobiography” (Kornweibel 70); and Montejo, under the conditions of the Castro regime, “is not allowed to engage in a discussion of more modern issues of race and national identity in Cuba” (Kornweibel 72). Moreover, both Manzano’s and Montejo’s texts are shaped by Del Monte and Barnet, respectively. Montejo therefore represents “a voice deferred”¹⁹⁰ in *Biografía* because “Barnet is an author who writes with a limited charity, a charity that understands the importance of

¹⁹⁰ Kornweibel borrows this term from “The Reconstruction of Cuban History and Memory in *Biografía de un Cimarrón*: Negrista Voice Affirmed or Black Voice Deferred,” by Mario André Chandler, who “argues that the biography written by Barnet ultimately ‘denies to the Afro-Cuban subject the complete articulation... of his *afrocubanidad*’” (qtd. in Kornweibel 72).

preserving the voice of an eyewitness to Cuban slavery, but that ultimately favors reinforcing the mythopoesis of the Revolution to providing an opportunity for a complete biography of Esteban Montejo” (Kornweibel 72). Barnet had little choice but to omit from *Biografía de un cimarrón* anything that the Revolutionary government could have perceived as subversive.

Whereas the Race War of 1912 and the Cuban Revolution are omitted from *Biografía de un cimarrón*, *Reyita, sencillamente* includes these key events in Cuban history because “Reyita’s text was intentionally organized around the theme of racial and gender discrimination” (Kornweibel 72). The primary effect of Rubiera’s organization of the text around race and gender is a space to openly discuss the shortcomings of the Revolution. Although she careful to note that Reyita ultimately supported Castro,¹⁹¹ Kornweibel argues “Reyita’s discussion of the Race War of 1912 challenges both the official version of Cuban history and indicates the limitations of the Revolutionary government in dealing with issues of racism”:

The most important aspect of Reyita’s discussion of the Race War of 1912 in terms of the construction of a vision of Cuban identity posited from the position of the Black woman is the way that she criticizes the willful ignorance of Cubans regarding the episode. After explaining that no one at the time wanted to discover the truth, she continues by saying that ‘lo que me llama la atención es que después del triunfo de la Revolución a nadie se le ocurre entrevistar a las personas que vivieron aquellos momentos’ in order to learn the truth (Rubiera 48). Reyita says that the Race War of 1912 coupled with the unwillingness of the Revolutionary government to deal with it, left Cuba ‘más dividida que nunca antes’ (Rubiera 49). Reyita, the presence that unites, perhaps prompted by Rubiera’s focus on racial discrimination, speaks honestly about the racism of the past. (Kornweibel 75)

¹⁹¹ Kornweibel observes in her analysis of the text that Reyita’s words “harken back to the official language of the Revolution, which although she can find fault with it, Reyita supports” (75).

In her conclusions, Kornweibel theorizes that what allowed Rubiera to publish Reyita's critical perspective on the Castro government was "the waning power of the patriarch"—that is, not only her husband, but also Castro himself during the 1990s during the especially difficult "Special Period" in Cuban history after the fall of Cuba's main ally, the USSR (Kornweibel 77).¹⁹² Kornweibel also hypothesizes that Morejón's presentation of the poem "Marina," which is critical of the Cuban state, could also have "opened a space in which Rubiera could publish a book that criticized the Revolution's response to the 1912 Race War, examined racial and gender policies both before and after the Revolution, and centered around the mujer negra as a speaking subject of the nation" (77). In any case, Kornweibel's article makes a strong case that Rubiera, writing from a different approach and under transformed conditions, accomplished that which Barnet was earlier unable. She contributed not only a black woman's perspective but also a nonfictional account of the Republic and Revolution to Afro-Cuban literature.

Just as Barnet shapes Montejo into a national hero and symbol in *Biografía de un cimarrón*, Kornweibel argues that "from a history of slavery and oppression, through the end of the colony and on past the triumph of the Revolution, Reyita's family represents Cuba and its trajectory" (76). In other words, *Reyita, sencillamente* builds on an Afro-Cuban literary tradition that has shared roots in Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía*. For this reason, it is necessary to highlight not only the differences between *Biografía* and *Reyita* (as Kornweibel primarily does) but also their similarities. Their foremost similarity is their shared theme of slavery. Both narratives begin by describing the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Africa and its arrival in Cuba. Slavery in both narratives represents the origin of Cuban history and the root of racial

¹⁹² "Outside the text, perhaps the challenges to the power of the Cuban Patriarch during the *Período Especial* play a part in opening up the space for Daisy Rubiera Castillo to publish *Reyita*, a text that both implicitly and explicitly challenges the official party line on racism in Cuba and which implicitly expands the definition of Cuban identity" (Kornweibel 77).

oppression. In continuation with *Autobiografía* and *Biografía de un cimarrón*, *Reyita* continues to challenge the notion of slavery in Cuba as a supposedly “mild” or “benign” in its character.

There are differences between Manzano’s, Montejo’s, and Reyita’s approaches to slavery. Manzano’s narrative shows that his relatively “privileged” position as a “house slave” did not spare him from slavery’s worst aspects. Montejo’s narrative bears witness to life in the cane fields and barracoons through the filter of Barnet’s ethnographic lens. Reyita narrates slavery in Cuba from the perspective of a black woman through her memories of her grandmother (Rubiera’s great grandmother), Antonia, known affectionately as Tatica. Reyita recalls stories that Tatica told her when she was a girl of her capture in Africa, arduous journey across the Middle Passage, and bondage in Cuba. Like Montejo, Reyita also recounts the continued oppression of formerly enslaved black people during the period of abolition. However, she writes about slavery and its ongoing repercussions for black women in the twentieth century from the perspective of a black woman. Just as Esteban “fills the missing archives of Cuban history” (Rowlandson 3), *Reyita* fills the missing archives of slavery in Afro-Cuban literary narrative through Tatica’s testimony in “¡Mi abuelita voló!”

Tatica’s Testimony in “¡Mi abuelita voló!”

Reyita, sencillamente is not only Reyita’s testimony but also the testimony of her grandmother. Tatica plays an important role in Reyita’s testimony as the source of her memory of her family origins and African ancestry. The title itself is an homage to the belief that, in death, enslaved Africans returned home to Africa. At the same time as Reyita plays the role of the text’s *informante* with regards to her own personal experiences, she also informs Rubiera of Tatica’s oral history of slavery. Tatica is also an author of *Reyita* due to the stories she told

Reyita when she was a child. *Reyita* thus illustrates multiple layers of authorship that multiply Miguel Barnet's concepts of the *gestor* and the *informante*. Barnet had set the principle of the *gestor* as a disinterested ethnographer or writer who interviews a socially marginalized subject and writes a narrative from their perspective. This model is both a continuation of the slave narrative tradition and the basis of *testimonios* such as *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* and *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*. Like Barnet, Elena Poniatowska and Elizabeth Burgos were strangers to the respective subjects of their writing prior to meeting them. Daisy Rubiera works within the tradition of the testimonial novel but writes from the perspective of her own mother. Tatica is not only Reyita's grandmother but Rubiera's great grandmother. *Reyita* thus illustrates the Spanish American *testimonio* as a medium that not only informs a white reading public about the oppression that affects marginalized racial and ethnic groups but also passes down the collective memory of the same groups from generation to generation. In *Reyita*, Rubiera's interviews with her mother act as a metaphor of black women passing down the history of slavery to future generations of black women from their own memory and perspectives. These family networks of storytelling intersect with literary narrative in *Reyita* and illustrate the power of literature to disrupt the dominant political narrative of racial harmony in Latin America.

Reyita develops the role of slavery in Reyita and Daisy's family history from the first couple of pages of the *testimonio*. Reyita begins her narration in the section entitled "Blanco mi pelo, negra mi piel: ¿Quién soy?", in which she briefly describes herself in terms of her character: "Yo soy Reyita, una persona común y corriente. Una persona natural, respetuosa, servicial, honrada, cariñosa y muy independiente" (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 17). Despite these favorable aspects of her personality, Reyita describes herself as a victim of discrimination due to her dark skin color. The book shows that Reyita later experienced racism in

the larger context of Cuban society, but it shows that she first knew racial discrimination from her mother, Isabel: “Para mi mamá fue una desgracia que yo fuera —de sus cuatro hijas— la única negra” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 17). As a result of this childhood trauma of rejection, Reyita explains that she married a white man so that her own children would never experience the same mistreatment that she had received as a child: “No quise que los hijos que tuviera sufrieran lo que sufrí yo. Por eso quise adelantar la raza, por eso me casé con un blanco” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 17). In this way, Reyita defends her motivations for wanting to supposedly “advance the race,” not due to a genuine belief in white supremacy or the superiority of light-skinned children, but rather for her children to not be afflicted by the social conditions of racism like she had been. Reyita’s reflection on her conscious decision to whiten her children only make sense within a racist society. Rather than reinforce the status quo, Reyita’s discussion of race at the beginning of *Reyita* exposes and denounces racism in Cuba. *Reyita* thus reflects the *testimonio* genre in the sense that it is not only the story of its title figure as an individual but is also the story of black Cuban women’s experiences collectively.

The book explicitly links racism to slavery through Reyita’s exploration of the eponymous question of the first section, “¿Quién soy?”, Reyita explains that her first name comes from the fact that she was born on January 6, *Día de los Reyes*, and her second last name was changed to Bueno by her brother Pepe. Her original second last name was Hechavarría, the surname of her grandmother Tatica’s enslaver: “Mis apellidos debían ser Castillo Hechavarría, porque mi mamá tenía el apellido del amo de mi abuelita, quien, además, fue su padre. Pero todos sus hijos teníamos tanto odio por aquella familia —que ni conocimos— que mi hermano Pepe decidió que nos lo cambiáramos y nos pusimos Bueno” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 22). Because it is included in the section introducing Reyita, this passage shows that

slavery had an impact on not only Reyita's history and identity but also Daisy's and all Afro-Cubans'. The following section, “¡Mi abuelita voló!”, suggests that Reyita's knowledge of slavery in her family history comes directly from her grandmother Tatica, who was an enslaved African brought to Cuba during the nineteenth century. “¡Mi abuelita voló!” begins with the suggestion that Reyita may have learned about Tatica's life story as a child from secretly listening to her family's conversations.¹⁹³ The opening passage therefore suggests that Reyita's knowledge of slavery comes from hearsay, but the text later informs us that Tatica herself had told her story to Reyita in her own words. Tatica's story is passed down from Tatica to Reyita, from Reyita to Daisy, and then from Daisy to the reader through the written word. Referring to herself and the other grandchildren, Reyita says that “Tatica contaba que su familia era de una aldea de un lugar llamado Cabinda, que eran de los Quicongos que se dedicaban al cultivo de la mandioca y el café; también tejían con rafia. Los hombres de la aldea se dedicaban a fabricar canoas, tambores y diferentes utensilios de madera” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 19).

Reyita, sencillamente thus describes the economic and cultural activities of the Quicongo people before the arrival of European conquest. In a note at the end of the book, the Quicongos are described as an “Etnia perteneciente a la familia etnolingüística Bantos. Ocupaba el nordeste de Cabinda, entre el río Cuangoy el mar. También se les llamaba *congueses*” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 173). This note illustrates the additional research that Rubiera performed beyond interviewing the informant to write her *testimonio*. Rubiera therefore plays a similar role to *gestores* such as Barnet, but the information that Rubiera provides represents a not only

¹⁹³ The section opens with the following passage: “De mis primeros años no se me han olvidado algunas cosas que fueron motivo de conversación entre mis mayores y que oía —con cuatro o cinco años— desde el patio o desde la cocina; porque en mi época los muchachos no podían estar sentados entre la gente grande mientras ellos conversaban. Aquellas cosas las recuerdo bien, por lo tristes y penosas que fueron” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 18-19).

anthropological but also personal dimension. Cabinda is especially significant in *Reyita* because it represents not just Tatica's homeland but also Reyita and Rubiera's ethnic ties to the Quicongo people.

Albeit through the filters of Reyita's oral narration and Daisy Rubiera's writing, Tatica thus contributes significantly to *Reyita, sencillamente*. She is the original source of her memory of her life and capture in Africa and enslavement in Cuba. Her story is so important that Daisy Rubiera writes about it at the beginning of *Reyita, sencillamente* as a means of representing the origins of their family history and of black history in Cuba. Just as Montejo and Baquaqua should be recognized as authors of their texts because of their oral contributions, Tatica should be recognized as one of the authors of “¡Mi abuelita voló!”. Of course, Tatica's narration is passed through the lenses of Reyita's own oral narration and Rubiera's writing, but Reyita reminds us that Tatica did indeed tell the stories that inform the text and is the voice behind Reyita's in “¡Mi abuelita voló!”. Reyita interrupts her narrative with the phrase “—como ella decía—” to recall Tatica's words (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 20). Rubiera finds this sufficiently important to include in the written narrative, and it has the effect of highlighting Tatica's role in the narrative process. The text also includes wording such as “Tatica contaba” and “Ella decía” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 20). Through the ways in which she recalls Tatica's story in her own words, she reveals that the source of “¡Mi abuelita voló!” is thus none other than the “abuelita” herself. *Reyita, sencillamente* is different from slave narratives in the sense that Tatica's story is told to a writer not directly but indirectly, but the section “¡Mi abuelita voló!” still follows a similar process from oral to written narrative. Daisy, Reyita, and Tatica therefore all contribute to the realization of the text.

“¡Mi abuelita voló!” continues to resemble slave narratives in both its content and process. Like *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua*, *Reyita* provides testimony to the weakness of Trans-Atlantic antislavery laws. It represents the capture of Tatica and her family as a “terrible massacre” that interrupts the peace that had prevailed in Cabinda: “En un atardecer, cuando la familia estaba en su casa después de haber terminado el trabajo en el campo y los niños jugaban, de pronto sintieron explosiones, gritos. Era un grupo de hombres blancos, con armas de fuego, atacaba la aldea, quemaba las casas y cogía a hombres y mujeres” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 20). It is likely that the group of white men in Tatica’s memory refers to illegal traffickers since Spain officially prohibited the slave trade between its overseas colonies and Africa in 1820.¹⁹⁴ *Reyita, sencillamente* therefore is a testimony of enslaved Africans who had been illegally trafficked despite ineffectual laws prohibiting the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Another law that *Reyita* explicitly says was broken is *La ley de vientres libres*. This law was passed in July 1870 and consisted of 21 articles by which slavery “se enmascaraba” (174). Tatica’s first daughter, Socorro, and her second daughter, Isabel (*Reyita*’s mother), both had to work “como una esclava,” even though she was born after the Law of Free Wombs (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 21).¹⁹⁵ Like *Biografía de un cimarrón*, *Reyita* thus illustrates that “la libertad era relativa” when it came to laws that supposedly limited the institution of slavery (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 174).

¹⁹⁴ D. R. Murray argues that “Because the African slave trade to Cuba was illegal after 1820, accurate figures of the number of slaves imported into the island are even more difficult to find than in the preceding period. 47,272 in the decade from 1821 to 1829” (141). However, there have been significant updates to his article “Statistics of the Slave Trade to Cuba, 1790-1867,” published in 1971. *Slave Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* estimates that 136,281 enslaved Africans (over twice D. R. Murray’s estimate) disembarked in Cuba from 1821 to 1830. This estimate jumps to 186,189 in the following decade (1831-1840). The importation of enslaved Africans continued in the tens of thousands well up to 1870 (Eltis and Richardson).

¹⁹⁵ “Tatica “salió embarazada y tuvo una hija a la que pusieron Socorro y que tuvo que trabajar muy duro desde muy pequeña. Después nació mi mamá, que tuvo que laborar como una esclava en los quehaceres de la casa de los amos, aunque eso fue después de la *ley de vientres libres*” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 21).

“¡Mi abuelita voló!” is like some slave narratives with regards to the emotion with which it condemns slavery. The nickname Tatica indicates Reyita’s tenderness toward her grandmother, whose real name was Antonia according to the narration (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 23). The section begins by describing not her capture and suffering but rather how wonderful she was in Reyita’s eyes. She begins with a physical description of Tatica: “Tenía una piel muy linda, no negra negra, sino de ese prieto que hay muy asentadito. Era gorda y de mediana estatura; su cabello era bonito, se peinaba muy gracioso, partido al medio, y se hacía dos trenzas ‘adelante’ y dos atrás; entonces se las recogía a la altura de las orejas; tenía una bella dentadura” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 19). The description of Tatica’s skin as “linda” but not “negra negra” has the effect of whitening her. It is possible that Reyita anticipates the racism of her audience and downplays her grandmother’s blackness as a literary strategy of presenting her as beautiful. It is tempting to judge Reyita for her apparent colorism or even question if Tatica was really from Africa, but the book suggests that Reyita’s own many encounters with racism in her family and Cuban society literally “color” her memory of Tatica. *Reyita* thus shows that, even within a book that denounces anti-black racism, there is “no outside” of racism in Cuba. Reyita also describes Tatica’s personality as “muy chistosa,” and remarks that she lavished kindness onto to all her grandchildren, such as Reyita herself. (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 23). The affectionate way that Reyita remembers Tatica shapes the way in which Reyita recalls the story of her enslavement.

Like other slave narratives, *Reyita* contains interjections that illustrate pathos as one of its primary rhetorical strategies for denouncing slavery. It also reflects Reyita’s authentic hatred for the racial institution that caused such intergenerational trauma in her life and family, starting with Tatica. When she recalls Tatica’s confusion over why the white men were throwing people

overboard, Reyita exclaims, “¡Qué abuso! Aquello solamente de oírlo daba deseos de llorar; y a uno todavía se le llenan los ojos de lágrimas y siente tremenda indignación, porque los tiraban vivos, sin compasión alguna” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 20). Reyita’s emotion resonates with Juan Francisco Manzano’s outrage over his mother’s mistreatment from the mayoral (Luis, *Autobiografía* 311-312). Just as Manzano’s autobiography opens with a loving description of his mother, “¡Mi abuelita voló!” begins with Reyita’s affectionate memory of Tatica. The emotion with which *Reyita* condemns slavery is rooted in family connection and thus illustrates a noteworthy similarity between *Reyita* and slave narratives like Manzano’s. For both Reyita and Rubiera, slavery is not merely an academic or abstract subject but also a personal one. Both women share their indignation over Tatica’s enslavement, and this is expressed through her interpellation of the *gestor* (Rubiera Castillo) into the text. Reyita’s use of the second person is directed not only toward the reader but toward Rubiera: “Si hubieras visto qué linda se veía con sus faldas largas de vuelo, de lunares, de flores o de listas” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 19). By inviting Daisy to imagine not just any enslaved person but also her own great-grandmother, Reyita illustrates a major difference between *Reyita* and other *testimonios*. *Biografía* also deals with family relationships, but Montejo describes the fact that he had never met his parents as not sad because it is the truth (Barnet and Montejo 64). Montejo’s dispassionate tone could be attributed to his personality and narration style, but it could also be attributed Barnet’s background in ethnography. The two cannot be separated in the context of *Biografía de un cimarrón*, and Reyita’s passionate denunciations of slavery cannot be separated from Rubiera’s writing.

The role of the *gestor* in the realization of the *testimonio* is important in both cases. Unlike Barnet, when Rubiera writes about the history of slavery in Cuba, she is also writing

about the story of her own foremothers, who are still alive in her family's memory and in her writing. Reyita's indignation over slavery is so important to Rubiera that she put it at the beginning of her book. The emotion in “¡Mi abuelita voló!” is thus both Reyita's and Rubiera's. It is also Tatica's as the original source of both women's collective memory of slavery.

Slavery and Abolition from Black Cuban Women's Perspectives

“*Slavery is terrible for men, but it is far more terrible for women*” -Harriet Ann Jacobs¹⁹⁶

Like *Biografía de un cimarrón, Reyita, sencillamente* does not end with the abolition of slavery but rather bears witness that slavery continued as a system in which former captors exploited formerly enslaved black people with legal impunity. “¡Mi abuelita voló!” shows that this was an especially sinister issue for black women, from whom sexual exploitation and abuse were routine aspects of slavery. Toward the end of the section, Reyita explains that Tatica had fallen in love with another African on the Hechavarriás' plantation, Basilio, who was also enslaved. Socorro, Tatica's first daughter, was theirs together; but Tatica becomes pregnant with her second daughter, Isabel (Reyita's mother), as the result of rape. Whereas Reyita mentions this briefly in the first section of the book, she elaborates further in “¡Mi abuelita voló!”, including her own comments on the matter: “Mi mamá no era hija de Basilio, sino de uno de los amos de mi abuela. Las esclavas no se podían revirar cuando los amos deseaban aprovecharse de ellas. Eso costaba cuero y cepo. Eso era una inmoralidad de aquellos hombres. Para una cosa las despreciaban, pero para vivir con ellas no les importaba el color” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 21). This passage demonstrates that black women's perspectives are fundamental to understanding slavery in Cuba. Although not a slave narrative per se, *Reyita, sencillamente* is

¹⁹⁶ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 488.

like *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and other slave narratives by black women because they expose the sexual abuse of white enslavers. Instances of rape are not exceptional in narratives of slavery by black women but are a common theme that runs throughout the “genteel” South, Cuba, and anywhere that slavery was practiced in the Americas.

Despite the official abolition of slavery in Spanish law, Reyita echoes Montejo’s testimony that the practices and conditions of slavery lived on in Cuban culture. “¡Mi abuelita voló!” does not end with Tatica’s capture and enslavement but includes details about her life during the post-abolition period. Reyita passes down the story that, although Tatica had left the Hechavarría plantation, she continued to struggle for survival: “Luego de la abolición de la esclavitud, Tatica se fue para un pequeño bohío que Basilio hizo, en un pedacito de tierra que le dieron. Y allí, pasando trabajo, arrancándole a la tierra lo necesario para vivir, nació su tercera hija, a la que le llamaron Nestora. Trabajaron muy duro” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 21-22). This passage shows that, even for black people in Cuba who left the plantations, they still had little option but to endure conditions like the ones that they had under slavery. Similarly, Esteban Montejo returns to the same sugar cane mills where he had worked before in *Biografía de un cimarrón*.¹⁹⁷ However, unlike Montejo and Barnet’s *testimonio*, Reyita’s perspective describes how pregnancy, birth, and child-rearing made life even more complicated for black women in Cuba.

Sexual abuse also continues to be a theme in the lives of the women in Reyita’s family during the period of abolition. Whereas “Mi abuelita voló” focuses on Reyita’s grandmother, “Isabel” centers Reyita’s mother. Isabel’s father and enslaver did not allow her to live her mother

¹⁹⁷ On the historical injustice that the mambises were denied their proper recognition as war heroes, William Luis writes that “It is clear that the white leaders of the Cuban nation betrayed the country and denied blacks their rightful place in history” (“Introduction: Memory and Politics” xxxi).

and Basilio but held her captive at the plantation—a site of torture. There, Isabel was forced to live under the same conditions as she had during slavery:

Al abolirse la esclavitud y Tatica salir junto con Basilio de la finca de los Hechavarría, el papá de mi mamá —uno de los dueños— no dejó que se llevara a Isabel. Ejerció su condición de padre, no para educarla y tenerla como una señorita, sino para que continuara trabajando como criada, que era lo que había venido haciendo desde que levantaba una vara del suelo; a cambio recibía poca ropa y mala comida. (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 29)

In other words, Isabel's father / enslaver uses his paternity rights as a pretext to force Isabel in ongoing captivity even though slavery officially had been abolished. Things only got worse for Isabel on the plantation, where history continued to repeat itself. Like her mother Tatica, Isabel herself was also raped by a man who had married into the Hechavarría family. After giving birth in 1889, she named the baby Eduardito: “Ese no era tampoco un hijo del amor, sino del abuso de Isalgué, esposo de una de las Hechavarría. Para evitar el escándalo, botaron a mi mamá, junto con su hijo, de la casa. No hubo compasión; al contrario, la descarada y la desfachatada era mi pobre madre” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 33). The Hechavarría family's cruel expulsion of Isabel from the plantation further suggests that Isabel's father had never truly recognized her as a daughter. *Reyita, sencillamente* is thus not only a damning portrait of the Hechavarría family but also more broadly exposes the violent reality behind the prestige of wealthy slave-owning families.

Like *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and other slave narratives that center black women's experiences, *Reyita* deals with not just slavery but also the especially sinister impact that it had on black women. Even though she was a victim of rape, the damage that it caused

continued to ripple out through Isabel's life in the form of shame. After giving birth to Eduardito, Isabel did not go to live with Tatica and Basilio for fear of their judgment. She instead went to a farm near La Maya¹⁹⁸ to support herself and her son cutting sugar cane. *Reyita* illustrates what working in the field as a mother was like in practical terms for Isabel: "Allí su vida era un martirio. No tenía quién le cuidara al niño para ir al corte, por lo que lo llevaba con ella, lo acostaba debajo de un plantón hasta que llegaba la hora del descanso, la que aprovechaba para darle alimentos y agua" (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 33).¹⁹⁹ Reyita continues to explain that the respite from her martyrdom came after a few years after cutting cane when she met Francisco Ferrer, a white man. Taking up with Francisco represented a potential resource of support for Isabel when she had no other options. Although he was married, Reyita explains that he did provide her with a house so that she did not have to live in the barracoons while raising her children, but the War of Independence uprooted her life and Isabel was forced to return to the sugar fields. Back where she had started after being expelled from the Hechavarría plantation, she again accepts support from a white man (one of the administrators of the Soledad sugar plantation who had taken a liking for her) and again has a child by him. The text puts it bluntly: "Resultado: salió embarazada de nuevo" (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 35). Like *Biografía de un cimarrón*, *Reyita, sencillamente* thus illustrates the cycle of poverty in which formerly enslaved black people continued to find themselves after abolition. Unlike *Biografía de*

¹⁹⁸ La Maya is an important place in the context of Afro-Cuban history. It is known especially as the village that the Independientes de Color burned in June 1912. According to Maritza Elias, the incident took place because a member of the Independientes de Color threatened to burn down a business in retaliation for discrimination, but the fire accidentally grew out of control. The burning of La Maya was used by President José Miguel Gómez, with support from the United States government, as a justification for the unjustifiable: the so-called "guerrita de los negros," which was a massacre that left approximately 6 thousand black people dead across Cuba (Godfried).

¹⁹⁹ Manzano also describes slavery as "martirio" in his original manuscript (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 305). This is not a coincidence but a reflection throughout Afro-Cuban literature of the cruel nature of slavery from the perspectives of the enslaved.

un cimarrón, *Reyita* does so with particular attention toward the challenges faced by black women. White men provided Isabel with more children but not with consistent help raising them.

Despite the cruel treatment with which Isabel had treated Reyita during her childhood, the chapter about Isabel has the effect of humanizing her. As I suggest earlier, Isabel is presented in the first section of the book as a kind of monster who singles out and abuses Reyita because she was born the darkest of her four sisters, but the reader discovers through Isabel's own story that she herself was the victim of racialized trauma both before and after the abolition of slavery. The decisions that she made to accept the advances of white men after being expelled from the Hechavarriá plantation were made out the necessity for survival. History repeats itself through Reyita's decision to marry a white man to ensure that her children would not endure the same racism that she had. Reyita's narration thus reveals the irony that, whereas Reyita first presents herself as her mother's pariah, they are more alike than different. Like *Biografía de un cimarrón*, Reyita is a reflection on the cycles of history but through the intersectional and intergenerational lens of black women's collective social memory of slavery and its aftermath. *Reyita* covers more historical ground not only in the sense that it includes the period of Cuban Republic, as William Luis observes,²⁰⁰ but also in the sense that it tells the story of Reyita's family across three generations rather than throughout the life of a single individual like Montejo.

Rubiera herself forms an integral part of Reyita's saga as the implicit fourth generation of black women in the story and as the writer of the book. This is significant because *Reyita*'s profound exploration of racism in Cuba in the past reflect its ongoing existence in the present. Rubiera quotes *Reyita* in her interview with Luis when asked about the “problemática racial” in Cuba: “Como algo que no se había resuelto del todo y a lo que había que buscar soluciones

²⁰⁰ “En la obra testimonial *Reyita*, Rubiera entrevista a su madre, Reyita, quien nos cuenta con perspicacia lo que significaba ser negra en la República” (Luis, “La mujer negra en Cuba” 62)

prácticas y objetivas, independientemente de las mejoras que se habían alcanzado. Dicho con sus propias palabras: ‘[...] pienso que los que continúan manteniendo vivos los problemas discriminatorios hacen mucho daño. En ese sentido ¡queda mucho por hacer!’’ (Luis, “La mujer negra en Cuba” 65).²⁰¹ Both women’s assertion that there is a long way to go belies the Castro government’s official stance that the Revolution had already eliminated class, race, and sex discrimination (De la Fuente, *A Nation for All* 279). Through not only *Biografía de un cimarrón* but also *Reyita*, testimonial literature continues to play the role of providing a counter-discourse to the ongoing denial of racism in Cuba. Reyita herself expresses her consciousness of the antiracist function of literature in the section entitled “Queda mucho por hacer,” in which she complains that the few books written about black people (“no es mucho”) do not truly reflect the black experience: “no sé, creo que no se va al fondo, no se entrevista a los viejos, que fuimos los que en definitiva sufrimos toda aquella situación... Yo reconozco el esfuerzo y el empeño que ponen; pero al final, resultan libros que no reflejan bien la realidad” (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 27). In this away, *Reyita* calls attention to its own importance, addressing the very gap in Afro-Cuban literature that it fills. Black women are present in Afro-Cuban literature, but their perspectives are not always represented. *Reyita* echoes *Biografía de un cimarrón* in its depiction of black women as the victims of enslavement, but it matters that in *Reyita* black women tell the story. Speaking and writing about racism is a form of active resistance to it. The act of narrating casts Reyita and Rubiera into not objects but subjects of their narrative. Reyita’s lifespan represents the periods of the Republic and the Revolution, but her memory, informed by Tatica and written by Rubiera, represents black women’s perspectives from slavery to the turn of the twenty-first century.

²⁰¹ See Rubiera and Castillo Bueno, 27.

Besides *Reyita*, there are books about the collective historical experiences of black women in Cuba by black Cuban women. Examples include not only the poetry of Nancy Morejón but also the novels of Marta Rojas (1928-2021). The plot of Rojas's *El harén de Oviedo* (2003) begins in the year 1875 and is set into motion after the death of the title character, “señor de un harén de esclavas,” and primarily follows Enriqueta, the protagonist and “hija de la esclava favorita.” Like *Reyita*, *sencillamente*, *El Harén de Oviedo* is a testament to black female authors’ communal project of recovering the repressed histories of black women during the periods of slavery, abolition, and beyond. Afro-Puerto Rican women writers participate actively in the (re)construction of memory through literary narrative. Novels by Mayra Santos-Febres and Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro further demonstrate the expanding role of Afro-Caribbean women in writing for the silenced.

Part 2. “Re-Membering” Black Women: History and Twenty-First Century Afro-Puerto Rican Fiction

Afro-Caribbean / Latin American literature is composed of not only Afro-Cuban but also Afro-Puerto Rican literary narrative. Black people—and black women in particular—have long been the objects of Puerto Rican literature, from the *negrista* poetry of Luis Palés Matos²⁰² to the short stories of Ana Lydia Vega.²⁰³ While black women have therefore always been present in Puerto Rican literature, there is a new generation of black Puerto Rican authors who are changing the typical representation of black women as sensualized and secondary figures to roles as empowered protagonists of their own narratives. This shift in Puerto Rican literature parallels

²⁰² See “La Negra as Metaphor in Afro-Latin American Poetry” (1985), by June Carter (74, 75-76).

²⁰³ See Emanuel Harris II’s analysis of “El baúl de Miss Florence” in “Talking Back with Ana Lydia Vega: Identity, Gender and the Subversive Portrayal of Mestizaje,” from *Critical Perspectives on Afro-Latin American Literature* (2011).

the shift “from objectified symbol to empowered subject” that Karen Kornweibel has observed in Afro-Cuban women’s literature (67). It is therefore important to notice that the empowerment of black women in Caribbean literature is not an isolated phenomenon but is happening as more black women across Latin America access the means of literary production and write the story of their experiences and perspectives in their own words.

A recurring theme in contemporary Puerto Rican literature by black women is slavery. Female Afro-Puerto Rican authors are interested in not only the depraved conditions of enslavement but also the ways in which black women actively fought for justice and their freedom. As Richard Jackson has argued, slavery and the enslaved have been “disremembered” in official political narratives of various Latin American nations.²⁰⁴ This is especially true for black women, whose role in the resistance against slavery in Latin America historically has been doubly disremembered. Santos-Febres’s novel *Fe en disfraz* (2009) and Arroyo Pizarro’s short story collection *las Negras* (2016) “re-member” enslaved black women in colonial Latin America and challenge the hegemonic narrative of “racial democracy” (Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 264). Santos-Febres and Arroyo Pizarro have usually been read by scholars in a Puerto Rican literary context (Rivera Acevedo 73, Nieves López 48), but their work addresses black women’s collective experiences in captivity across Latin America. In Santos-Febres’s *Fe en disfraz*, there are four chapters that depict slavery in colonial Latin America: in Minas Gerais (23-25), Costa Rica (35-36), Cartagena de Indias (45-49), and Venezuela (57-59). In *las Negras*, the place settings in the first three short stories are ambiguous. “Los amamantados,” which was added in the 2016 fourth edition, is the only short story that takes place explicitly in San Juan.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ See “Remembering the ‘Disremembered’: Modern Black Writers and Slavery in Latin America” (1990), by Richard Jackson.

²⁰⁵ In this dissertation, I analyze the fourth edition, published in 2016. This latest edition contains “Los amamantados,” as well as new preface material that will be crucial to my main arguments.

Santos-Febres and Arroyo Pizarro thus use literary narrative to retell the history of slavery in Latin America from the perspectives of black women.

There are historical studies that revise the early historiography on slavery in Latin America, which previously had falsely compared slavery as less violent in Latin America than in the United States.²⁰⁶ Santos-Febres and Arroyo Pizarro themselves cite three of these studies in their acknowledgments: *Eslavos rebeldes: conspiraciones y sublevaciones de esclavos en Puerto Rico (1795-1873)* (1981), by Guillermo A. Baralt (Santos-Febres 109, Arroyo Pizarro 147); *Puerto Rico negro* (1986), by Jalil Sued Badillo (Santos-Febres 109); and “Mujeres esclavas en la Costa Rica del siglo XVIII: estrategias frente a la esclavitud” (2004), by María de los Ángeles Acuña (Santos-Febres 109). These studies deconstruct the “benign slavery” myth in Latin America using evidence from historical archives. Santos-Febres and Arroyo Pizarro also cite slave narratives: from Cuba Juan Francisco Manzano’s *Autobiografía* and Miguel Barnet and Esteban Montejo’s *Biografía de un cimarrón*, and from the United States Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Santos-Febres 109, Arroyo Pizarro 147). Many scholars have observed that *Fe en disfraz* and *las Negras* fill a gap in the slave narrative genre by centering the experiences of enslaved black women in Latin America (Valladares-Ruiz 611; Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 19; Weldt-Basson 193; Schulenburg 116). However, it has not been sufficiently analyzed how they fill that gap and to what effect within the context of Latin American intellectual thought. There are important differences between Santos-Febres’s and Arroyo Pizarro’s work on the one hand and the slave narratives they cite on the other.

²⁰⁶ Isar Godreau provides an excellent summary of this historiography in *Scripts of Blackness: Race, Cultural Nationalism, and U.S. Colonialism in Puerto Rico* (2015), which I discuss in the following section.

The most noteworthy difference is that *Fe en disfraz* and *las Negras* prominently contain intense meditations on violence committed by white men against enslaved black women.

Violence in these works is not gratuitous but rather essential to their protest of the widespread notion of a “soft brand” of slavery in Latin America (Godreau 69). The unrelenting recurrence of rape and the explicitness with which it is described have the effect of assaulting the foundational historical myths of racial harmony found throughout Latin America. At the center of Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre’s intellectual work is “the intimate and often affectionate relationships between masters and slaves on plantations,” but Afro-Puerto Rican literary narrative locates and problematizes this Freyrian view of the past in multiple Latin American contexts (Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 274). Afro-Puerto Rican narrative’s representation of black women as not only the victims of violence in captivity but also rebel warriors defile “the cultural figure of the Mulata or Morena, a highly sexualized dark-skinned woman embodying—literally—essential qualities of Latin American nationhood” (Andrews, “Inequality: Race, Class, Gender” 75). Contrary to representations of black women as typically docile and sexually receptive in early twentieth century Latin American literature (Carter 74), black women’s perspectives of slavery in both works expose the violence at the root of dominant historical narratives and cultural stereotypes,²⁰⁷ which are themselves the products of a patriarchal and colonial point of view.²⁰⁸ *Fe en disfraz* and *las Negras* thus have the effect of “ripping” the veil,

²⁰⁷ “Sensual Not Beautiful: The Mulata as Erotic Spectacle” (2017), by Jasmine Mitchell, outlines criticism of Gilberto Freyre’s *Casa grande e senzala*: “Laura Moutinho notes in *Razão, Cor e Desejo* that female slaves were imagined as seductresses who initiated sex with white men, rather than their victims (2004). As Donna Goldstein argues in *Laughter Out of Place*, the historical mythmaking of the Brazilian colonial project has interpreted miscegenation through cordiality rather than coercion (2013)” (70). Mitchell also notes Sonia Maria Giacomoni’s criticism of Freyre in *Mulher e escrava* (1988), which argues that “Freyre constructs interracial sexual relations as a love allegory, ignoring colonial and sexual violence” (70).

²⁰⁸ See *The Idea of Latin America* (2005), by Walter Mignolo. Mignolo describes the “perspective of coloniality” as “a consequence of European colonial expansion and the narrative of that expansion from the European perspective” (xi).

as Toni Morrison puts it, that slave narrative authors drew “over ‘proceedings too terrible to relate’” (“The Site of Memory” 91). Their graphic representations of sexual violence expose the deeply disparate power imbalance along racial and gender lines at the root of Latin American history.

Afro-Puerto Rican literary narrative defiles the “optimistic narrative” that “Latin America’s historical experience of racial and cultural mixture had eliminated racism and prejudice and produced societies that offered equal opportunity to all” (De la Fuente and Andrews 6). Racial mixture (*mestizaje* in Spanish and *mestiçagem* in Portuguese) is not the product of racial harmony but racial and gender violence in Santos-Febres’s and Arroyo Pizarro’s works. Such violence is not exceptional but inherent in slavery and its ongoing legacy in Latin America. *Fe en disfraz* is a novel primarily set in the present day, and *las Negras* is a collection of short stories primarily set in the past, but both works feature black women’s testimonies of slavery in colonial Latin America. Whereas such testimonies are largely excluded from known historical archives and slave narratives, Afro-Puerto Rican literary narrative re-members the “dis-remembered” stories of enslaved black women in Latin America.

“Racial Democracy” as Cultural Myths in Puerto Rico

Violence in black women’s testimonies in *Fe en disfraz* and *las Negras* has the effect of exposing the harsh realities of slavery lurking behind the cultural myth of “racial democracy,” or the narrative that racial mixture in Latin America largely has produced (and is the product of) a racially harmonious society. The fact that both *Fe en disfraz* and *las Negras* are contemporary works suggests that this myth has persisted deeply in the Puerto Rican imagination during the present day. “Racial democracy” developed throughout the twentieth century, beginning with the

US incorporation of Puerto Rico as a “Free Associated State” in 1900 (Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 280). If Puerto Rican identity was defined primarily in opposition with their Spanish colonizers during the nineteenth century,²⁰⁹ in the twentieth century it was defined in opposition with the racially segregated United States. On the “mainland,” black codes and Jim Crow laws officially defined racial relations in the US American South until the ratification of the United States Civil Rights Act in 1964. While racial segregation was officially the law of the land during more than half of the twentieth century in the United States, Puerto Ricans defined their identity as a mixture of three races: white, black, and indigenous or Taíno. Most Puerto Ricans during this period supported Free Associated State, but the narrative of racial democracy helped unify them under a single social, political, and cultural identity and define what made them uniquely Puerto Rican. It also distinguished Puerto Rico from the United States. In contrast with the latter’s grievous forms of overt and *de jure* racism like lynching and segregation in the South, Puerto Rico painted itself as a racial paradise.

According to Puerto Rico’s version of the myth of racial democracy, racial discrimination was an anomaly on the island rather than the norm as it was on the “mainland.” Puerto Rico’s supposed freedom from racism was promoted as a badge of pride at an official level on the island, and it was the image that its leaders presented of themselves on the world stage. Luis Muñoz Marín, who was the first popularly elected governor of Puerto Rico in 1948, gave a speech in New York in which he said that “The people of Puerto Rico are perhaps one of the clearest symbols of this absence of prejudice or of false pride or of false hatred of some human

²⁰⁹ Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof note the transition from Latin American intellectuals from defining Latin American identity in relation to Spain and Haiti during the nineteenth century to comparing themselves to the United States in the first half of the twentieth: “Thus, by the end of the 1930s, white and Black intellectuals and national governments in both Latin America and the United States had begun a new conversation that substantially reframed earlier ideas of Latin American racial inclusion and harmony. Narratives that had originally emerged to distinguish the region from Spain and Haiti now worked principally to distinguish Latin America from the domineering and racially repressive United States” (276).

beings as against other human beings” (qtd. in Florido).²¹⁰ However, the dark side of presenting Puerto Rico as a racial utopia was to cover up the ways in which the island had suffered from systemic racism since its colonization by the Spanish from 1493 to 1898. In this way, Puerto Rico and Cuba are similar. Both islands had political leadership whose declarations of freedom from racial prejudice excluded black people’s perspectives. The denial of ongoing racism on both islands had the effect of preserving racism. Puerto Rico’s myth of racial harmony is also like “racial democracy” in Brazil. Paulina L. Alberto’s *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (2011) argues that black intellectuals during the first half of the twentieth century supported the idea of racial democracy to argue on behalf of black inclusion in the Brazilian nation. Alberto also shows that racial democracy was a popular idea beyond Brazil in the chapter “‘Racial Democracy’ and Racial Inclusion: Hemispheric Histories,” which she co-wrote with Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof.²¹¹ Together, they write that racial democracy had an impact on not only Brazilian but also Puerto Rican intellectual thought:

In particular, we find another history of “racial democracy” that unfolded in the 1940s and 1950s in relation to Puerto Rico, a Latin American society that was a US colony and was also the source of the first mass migration of Afrodescendant Latin Americans into spaces governed by US-style race relations. The island therefore plays an important role in the evolution of the concepts used to compare the “Negro question” in the United States and Latin America. Along with African Americans, Afro-Brazilians, and other Afro-Caribbeans, Puerto Ricans of various backgrounds contributed to comparative inter-American conversations about race and democracy that, from their very beginning,

²¹⁰ See “Puerto Rico, Island of Racial Harmony?” from *Code Switch*.

²¹¹ See *Afro-Latin American Studies: An Introduction* (2018).

oscillated between celebrating the existence of racial democracy in the region and denouncing its shameful absence. (Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 266)

Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof thus embrace the “rise and fall of ‘racial democracy’” as a trajectory that describes the twentieth century in not only Brazil but also Puerto Rico and much of Latin America. They cite Puerto Rican author Tomás Blanco, who writes that “by comparison, any prejudice in Puerto Rico was ‘innocent child’s play’” (qtd. in Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 273). They also cite “Afrodescendant thinkers in the region” like Afro-Puerto Rican politician José Celso Barbosa, who “frequently claimed that their national communities were marked by a relative absence of racial prejudice and racial conflict in contrast to the United States” (Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 273). However, the idea of racial democracy has had its share of skeptics in Puerto Rico throughout its “rise and fall.”

Critics of “racial democracy” pointed to the ways in which the island was never free of anti-black racism. Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof write that

Puerto Rico was one of the first parts of the region where social scientists began to conduct research on racial prejudice and civil rights and to puzzle out the incompatibility between Puerto Rican racial self-concepts and US forms of racial classification. Already by the 1940s, this research had begun to reveal dissonance between claims that race prejudice did not exist and observations of extensive prejudice” (Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 280).

They cite University of Puerto Rico professors José Colomban Rosario and Justina Carrión, who “published a compendium of testimonies about racial prejudice collected among their students as well as a collection of writings by Puerto Ricans of color” in their book *El negro: Haití, Estados Unidos, Puerto Rico* (1940). In the book, they “concluded that racial prejudice existed in Puerto

Rico ‘for all persons who did not close their eyes to reality.’ They called the silence of Puerto Rican sociologists cowardly, arguing that scholars were responsible for keeping the race question in a state of ‘damp and unhygienic darkness’” (qtd in Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 280). They also cite “the skepticism of African American and (some) Puerto Rican scholars, presenting evidence of ongoing racism to argue that this national ideal remained largely unfulfilled” (Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 282). Maxine Gordon wrote in 1949—the same year that Luis Muñoz Marín assumed his position as governor of Puerto Rico—that “‘Those who believe prejudice does not exist... have seen Puerto Rico, we feel, with a casual and uncritical eye’” (Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 282). Another critic of “racial democracy” in Puerto Rico was the Afro-Brazilian intellectual Abdias do Nascimento (1914-2011). Once an enthusiastic proponent of racial democracy, he became one of its most vocal dissidents, both within and outside of Brazil. From 1970 to 1976, he was a visiting professor at the Puerto Rican Studies Center at SUNY Buffalo. In 1977, he presented “‘Racial Democracy’: Myth or Reality?” at the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Cultures in Lagos, Nigeria (Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 286). Although racial democracy is most typically associated with Brazil, its pertinence as a greater Latin American issue is illustrated by Nascimento’s involvement in the Puerto Rican Studies Center and the publication of his influential manifesto just one year later.

Isar Godreau investigates the transnational character of the myths of racial democracy in her book *Scripts of Blackness: Race, Cultural Nationalism, and U.S. Colonialism in Puerto Rico* (2015). Just as in other Latin American countries hereto discussed, in Puerto Rico there is a pervasive myth of a “benevolent” version of slavery that persists to this day (Godreau 69). She argues that this myth is the product of a “politics of erasure,” which she defines as “a process of historical narration and representation that entails silence, trivialization, and above all, a

simplification of the history of slavery in dominant registers of Puerto Rico's national culture" (68-69). This process of downplaying the history of slavery "was common in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, when scholars interpreted slavery as a benevolent and unimportant institution in Puerto Rico that facilitated racial integration, race mixture, and *blanqueamiento* at both the biological and cultural levels" (Godreau 69). Godreau cites Puerto Rican scholar Tomás Blanco's book *El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico* (1942), which downplays racial prejudice in Puerto Rico in comparison with the United States: "Blanco argued that the Catholic tradition promoted the recognition of slaves as part of a community of Christian brotherhood, which made the Spaniards receptive to the mixing of races" (69). Blanco's book thus resonates with Gilberto Freyre's praise of racial mixture in Brazil and Frank Tannenbaum's *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (1947), which "argued that the colonies of Catholic powers in the New World (Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil, for example) had more harmonious and milder race relations than the colonies of Protestant powers (such as the English-speaking Caribbean and the United States)" (Godreau 69). The politics of erasure thus dominated intellectual discourse on racial prejudice in Latin America toward the middle of the twentieth century, but more recent scholars in the field of history have begun to chip away at its legacy.

The Politics of "Un-Erasure" in Historical Research

In dialogue with Isar Godreau, other more contemporary historians of slavery in Latin America demonstrate what we might call a politics of "un-erasure" that has become the new dominant intellectual discourse on race in the twenty-first century.²¹² Guillermo A. Baralt's book

²¹² For more information on runaway slave communities, see also *The Afro-Hispanic Review* Volume 36, Number 1 (Spring 2017), on "Black Resistance and Negotiation in Latin America: Runaway Slave Communities," by guest editors John Maddox and Graciela Maglia.

Slave Revolts in Puerto Rico: Conspiracies and Uprisings, 1795-1873 (2006)²¹³ shows that Puerto Rico more than doubled its population of enslaved Africans during the nineteenth century.²¹⁴ Amongst other reasons, this was largely a reaction to the effects of the rebellion in Saint-Domingue.²¹⁵ French Saint-Domingue was once the largest producer of sugar in the world; but once Haiti declared itself the world's first independent black republic in 1804, Puerto Rico joined Cuba and Brazil in filling the vacuum left in the world's supply of sugar. The shortage of sugar and rising prices "accelerated the rate of growth of the sugar plantations in Puerto Rico from the end of the eighteenth century" (Baralt 6). The nineteenth century marked the period known as "second slavery" in Latin America.²¹⁶ Just as this period was especially brutal for enslaved Africans and Afrodescendants elsewhere, Baralt argues that "The repercussions of the Haitian Revolution on the island were not only apparent in the increasing number of sugar cane plantations, but also of those who worked on them. Overall, the Revolution had a devastating impact on the slave population of the Caribbean" (6). Baralt's book thus reveals the truth of slavery behind the myth of racial harmony in Puerto Rico. The worsening conditions of enslaved Africans and Afrodescendants in Puerto Rico following the Haitian Revolution led to conspiracies and uprisings.

²¹³ *Esclavos rebeldes: Conspiraciones y sublevaciones de esclavos en Puerto Rico* (1795-1873) was originally published in 1982, but I refer to the 2006 by Christine Ayorinde because it is the most up-to-date edition and contains a preface by Baralt.

²¹⁴ "From 1790 onwards, the sugar economy of the island underwent a radical transformation. The number of slaves increased more rapidly than in previous years. Between 1789 and 1802 It doubled, from 11,260 to 24,591, as shown in Table I" (Baralt 6).

²¹⁵ "The rise in the number of slaves and the sugar boom was due to several factors that are briefly summarized here. First, the partial removal of the Spanish trade monopoly; second, the creation of the Guipuzcoana Company; third, the liberalization of the slave trade from Africa; fourth, the increased demand for Puerto Rican sugar in the United States of North America during its war of independence; and finally, between 1789 and 1804, the virtual destruction of the sugar industry of the richest sugar colony in the Americas; French Saint Domingue. This paralyzed sugar production, leading to a shortage on the world market and a sudden rise in prices" (Baralt 6).

²¹⁶ This is Ada Ferrer's argument in "Cuban Slavery and Atlantic Antislavery" (2008).

At the same time as enslavers tightened their control of the enslaved population for fear of revolt, news of the slave revolt in Saint Domingue inspired the enslaved to attempt rebellions of their own in Puerto Rico. Baralt argues that “Although we cannot discount the Haitian effect when discussing the Puerto Rican conspiracies, the immediate causes of these were the social and economic conditions of the places in which they occurred” (9). This argument is significant because it demystifies the false notion of slavery as a benign institution on the island. Baralt demonstrates through these uprisings that the notion of historically harmonious racial relations in Puerto Rico is a false one. Enslaved Africans frequently plotted against their enslavers to end their torment and seize their freedom. This picture of race relations in Puerto Rico is quite different than the dominant narrative of racial democracy, which Baralt suggests has remained persistent in academic as well as popular spheres. He argues that “Until recently, only a very few of the slave conspiracies that occurred throughout the nineteenth century were known about. However, this book, which draws mainly on primary sources from several Puerto Rican municipalities, reveals that, counter to the prevailing view, slaves on the island in fact rebelled frequently” (Baralt 1). Attached to the “prevailing view” that the enslaved did not rebel is the assumption that there was no reason to do so in the first place. The preface to the English-language translation makes this assumption explicit:

Up until the book’s publication, the conventional wisdom was that slaves in Puerto Rico were docile, had no reason to rebel, and were generally treated well. Slave masters adhered to Spanish slave codes. Nevertheless, as *Esclavos Rebeldes* demonstrated, researching the municipal records of many towns on the island during the period between 1786 and 1848 revealed a radically different story. (Baralt vii)

Baralt thus argues that “The main reason for the conspiracies was undoubtedly the excessive workload and the ill treatment experienced by the slaves” (1). This overarching argument exposes the true history behind the fiction of racial harmony in Puerto Rico.

Baralt uses historical archives from across Puerto Rico to tell the mostly forgotten stories of enslaved communities and individuals who revolted against the harsh conditions of slavery, but gender is not a major factor in his approach. There are historical studies on black women’s roles in resisting slavery like María de los Ángeles Acuña’s article “Mujeres esclavas en la Costa Rica del siglo XVIII: estrategias frente a la esclavitud” (2004). Acuña’s article looks at eighteenth-century legal testimonies of enslaved black women from the Archivo Nacional de Costa Rica. It acknowledges that slavery was not the primary motor of Costa Rica’s economy, but it was nevertheless a part of daily life in eighteenth-century Costa Rican society. The article’s objective is thus to make black women visible in Costa Rica’s colonial past and examine their strategies for surviving the slavery system. The article is divided into two main parts. The first part explores the origins of Afro-Costa Rican women from West African societies and their forced “adjustment” to occidental life. Acuña argues that African women enjoyed higher social status and greater freedom within their societies of origin. In the Americas, on the other hand, they were doubly subordinated within their roles as women and as slaves within occidental systems of patriarchy and economic exploitation (Acuña 7).²¹⁷ The second part of the article analyzes black women’s strategies of survival within their new assigned roles as producers of wealth and reproducers of children who would be born under slavery, thereby perpetuating the system. However, the archives show that women created networks of solidarity that transcended

²¹⁷ “Las mujeres africanas llegaron a América donde privaba una visión patriarcal occidental que tenía una imagen sobre los roles de género, muy distinta de la africana. Estas mujeres en América sufrían una doble subordinación: como mujeres y como esclavas, fueron explotadas económica y sexualmente y más aún su rol fue cambiado, transformado” (Acuña 7).

African women's diverse ethnic origins. Although African women in Costa Rica represented groups from across West Africa, Acuña argues that in Costa Rica they found commonality through shared experiences as black women (12).²¹⁸ Acuña also demonstrates the ways in which enslaved black women in Costa Rica used the legal system to achieve better conditions for themselves and for their children. The archives reveal cases in which black women denounce their abuse and request a change in captors. In the interest of this dissertation, these cases suggest that relations between enslavers and enslaved—especially enslaved women—were deeply fraught rather than harmonious. Further cases show that enslaved black women often bore their captors' children. Acuña argues that racial mixing under slavery was a strategy that black women used to improve their children's social status. Acuña therefore argues that *mestizaje* was a means of upward mobility in Spanish colonial society. In this light, *mestizaje* is a means of attaining social privilege through whitening rather than evidence of racial harmony in Latin American societies. Acuña's historical research opens a window into the lives of enslaved black women not only in colonial Costa Rica but all Latin America. Nevertheless, legal documents can only tell us so much. Who were the women behind the legal testimonies? What were their thoughts and feelings behind the arguments that they presented in courts of law? Did they resist slavery outside of the legal system like the enslaved men and (very few) women discussed in *Slave Revolts in Puerto Rico*?

The currently available historical research on slavery and resistance in Latin America does not address these questions, the black female literary imagination speaks where the archives

²¹⁸ Acuña interprets Tomasa's legal testimony as representative of the solidarity of Black women in Costa Rica. Her caretaker, María Candelaria, had tricked their captor into believing that Tomasa was a free woman, but when he found out the truth, Tomasa willingly subjected herself to slavery in order to protect María Candelaria from punishment. Acuña argues that "Aquí nos encontramos ante las relaciones que mantienen las mujeres esclavizadas al interior de su grupo, de su comunidad, donde la unión, la solidaridad, el compañerismo, la tradición oral, el recuerdo de la tierra dejada atrás y los lazos familiares sobreviven la残酷 and y la 'muerte social' de la esclavitud. Son mujeres que luchan día a día por su sobrevivencia y la de los suyos" (Acuña 12).

fall silent. There are, of course, many other full-length studies of slave revolts and resistance in Latin America,²¹⁹ but Baralt's and Acuña's studies stand out because they are directly cited in *Fe en disfraz* and *las Negras*. The several stories of black women within these works do not mirror historical accounts but rather revise them to account for black women's interiority through first-person and free indirect narration. They narrate women-led rebellions missing from the pages of history. They dialogue with and revise the slave narratives from which they draw inspiration. It is mentioned in both novels that there are no slave narratives by Afro-Latin American women. Letters like Esperança Garcia's, *testimonios* like Reyita's, and novels like Marta Rojas's demonstrate that enslaved Afro-Latin American women did in fact have a voice in literature before the twenty-first century, but *Fe en disfraz* and *las Negras* are significant because of their unblinking representations of slavery and black women's costly triumphs of resistance. Santos-Febres and Arroyo Pizarro thus use fiction to correct history and slave narratives' exclusion of the diverse and multifaceted stories of enslaved black women in Latin America.

III. Slavery Un-Disguised: Mayra Santos-Febres's *Fe en disfraz*

Mayra Santos-Febres (1956-) is an Afro-Puerto Rican author. She holds a Ph.D. from Cornell University and has won a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2009. Prior to *Fe en disfraz*, which was published in 2009, Santos-Febres's novels include *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (2000), *Cualquier miércoles soy tuya* (2002), and *Nuestra Señora de la Noche* (2006). The protagonists of these previous novels subvert hegemonic structures of race, gender, and sexuality (Valladares-Ruiz 597). They also tend to be Afro-Puerto Rican,²²⁰ but the main character of *Fe en disfraz*, la

²¹⁹ For example, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia* (1835). In chapter 3, I explore how *Um defeito de cor* revises this history by rewriting the history of Luísa Mahin.

²²⁰ The protagonist of *Nuestra Señora de la Noche*, for example, is the historical figure Isabel "La Negra" Luberza.

doctora Fe Verdejo, is an Afro-Venezuelan historian and museographer at the University of Chicago (18). Her research looks at testimonies and artifacts of enslaved black women from across colonial Latin America, including eighteenth-century Brazil (Santos-Febres 23, 38), Costa Rica (35), and Colombia (45), as well as seventeenth-century Venezuela (57). Santos-Febres indicates in an author's note that, to write these metafictional testimonies, she researched Caribbean and US slave narratives (Including Juan Francisco Manzano's and Esteban Montejo's), as well as Guillermo Baralt's and María de los Ángeles Acuña's historical studies on Puerto Rico and Costa Rica, respectively (109). *Fe en disfraz* (originally published in Mexico) therefore exemplifies the cosmopolitan, transnational character of Santos-Febres' oeuvre. The Afro-Puerto Rican author's work explores the intersections of Afrodescendant women's experiences throughout the centuries not just in Puerto Rico but across the Americas.

Although little over 100 pages, *Fe en disfraz* achieves its breadth by interspersing chapters that depict Fe's life in Chicago during the present day with the legal testimonies that form the base of her academic work. These documents are digitally archived online by Fe's assistant, Martín Tirado, who also acts as the novel's narrator. Martín is a Puerto Rican historian whom the novel characterizes as having pale skin (Santos-Febres 22), straight black hair, and a wide nose, possibly indicating a mixed-racial background (15). In the first several chapters, Martín grows increasingly frustrated in his relationship with his long-distance girlfriend, Agnes. At the same time, he begins to experience feelings of simultaneous revulsion and erotic arousal from the documents that he is responsible for cataloguing, which graphically describe the sexual abuse of black women and girls. He also starts an obsession with Fe, his director. The night before the grand opening of Fe's exposition, Fe invites Martín back to her apartment. They have sex, but first Fe puts on the crown jewel of her exhibit: a dress that used to be owned by Xica da

Silva, the legendary black Brazilian woman who inherited her former captor's fortune and rose to a place of distinction in colonial Minas Gerais. The rusted metal harness cuts into Fe's skin when she moves and draws blood. In addition to causing her pain, Fe's self-harming act causes Martín to experience intense feelings of pleasure, resulting in his extasy. The novel thus subverts the white male narrator's sexualization of black women's bodies by placing her agency at the center of her and Martín's sexual experience. Martín's shock derives not only from Fe's voluntary suffering but also from the pleasure that he himself derives from it. Despite Martín's initial feelings of shame, Fe and Martín continue to work as a formidable academic team and present Fe's research around the world. They also continue performing their ritual in private every year on the night of October 31—the same date as Halloween, All Saint's Eve, the Day of the Dead, and the exposition's initial debut.

Due to its subject matter, *Fe en disfraz* has attracted the attention of scholars of race, gender, and sexuality. There are numerous articles that analyze the ways in which Fe and Martín's relationship "flips the script" of the slave narratives' enslaver / enslaved dynamic, paradoxically, at the same time as it pantomimes these roles. Whereas white men assert their dominance over black women's bodies in the testimonies that make up Fe's research, Fe herself asserts dominance in her relationship with Martín. She not only is Martín's superior at work but also directs his actions during their sexual encounters (Santos-Febres 94). Several articles from 2016 to 2019 have examined this aspect of simultaneous continuity and change between past and present in the novel. "El cuerpo sufriente como lugar de memoria" (2016), by Patricia Valladares Ruiz, argues that Fe and Martín's relationship subverts traditional racial and gender power dynamics of power in the contexts of the Caribbean cultures and postcolonial societies at large. Not only Fe's exposition of slave testimonies but her own "cuerpo sufriente" represent sites of

memory for the “(re / de) construction of sexual abuse of slave women” in the present (Valladares Ruiz 584). Alejandra Rivera Acevedo²²¹ and Edgar Nieves López²²² argue that *Fe en disfraz* enter the discussion from an angle of a Puerto Rican “national” canon, which Rivera Acevedo argues is expanded by “integrating distinct voices” from Puerto Rico (73).²²³ John Maddox adds that *Fe en disfraz* unmasks the myth of racial democracy in Latin America through Fe and Martín’s “loco amor” (“Los hijos de la Xica que Manda” 19).²²⁴ He compares Octavio Paz’s critique of Mexico as an “adolescent nation” with Santos-Febres’s representation of an “adulterz interamericana” that not only is conscious of slavery’s mark on Latin American society but also licks its wounds (Maddox, “Los hijos de la Xica que Manda” 19). These articles capture how Fe “rewrites” the slave narratives in the present by asserting her sexual agency, but they do not deeply compare the slave testimonies that compose Fe’s research in the novel and the actual slave testimonies on which Mayra Santos-Febres loosely based them.

There are two articles that go further in depth in analyzing the slave narratives within *Fe en disfraz*. Helene C. Weldt-Basson²²⁵ argues that the novel gives voice to historically silenced enslaved women in Latin America, and it does so through the incorporation of a series of testimonies of formerly enslaved black women that denounce the abuses that they had suffered

²²¹ See Rivera Acevedo’s “La memoria como acto de transformación en *Fen en disfraz*” (2018).

²²² See López Nieves’s “Autodefinición y subversión en *Fe en disfraz* de Mayra Santos-Febres y las Negras de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro” (2018)

²²³ “La relación de estos dos personajes, — Martín y Fe — posee atisbos sadomasoquistas que, a su vez, recrea una relación con una estructura de poder de amo y esclavo muy similar a las relaciones dadas durante la esclavitud, solo que en este caso ocurre a la inversa y por consenso: Fe, mujer negra, es el amo y Martín, el blanco, es el esclavo” (Nieves López 50).

²²⁴ See Maddox’s “Los hijos de la Xica que Manda: *El laberinto de la soledad* de Octavio Paz y *Fe en disfraz* de Mayra Santos-Febres” (2017): “Mientras Octavio Paz usa la Chingada, la pirámide y el pachuco como símbolos de una nación mexicana adolescente que sufre una crisis de identidad, Santos-Febres presenta una adulterz interamericana que, a través de esta alegoría del loco amor, abre el pasado y el futuro de la historia con un lenguaje que lame las heridas dejadas por la esclavitud. Si las Américas van a superar su adolescencia política y su propia alienación, tienen que aprender a escuchar a las mujeres silenciadas, tanto las de hoy como las del pasado” (19).

²²⁵ See Weldt-Basson’s “Memoria cultural versus olvido histórico: las voces de las esclavas en *Fe en disfraz* de Mayra Santos-Febres y *Cielo de tambores* de Ana Gloria Moya” (2017).

under their former captors (193). Chris Schulenburg²²⁶ also address the slave testimonies within the novel. He argues that there is a “dearth of voices” in the historical archives of slavery in Latin America; and in the place of real written testimonies, the experiences of enslaved women are “resurrected” through Fe and Martín’s ritual (Schulenburg 116). In his own words, “Located outside of text itself, accessible only through the ritualized channels of pleasure and pain, these hitherto forgotten voices are finally afforded the discursive space to explore an agency truly all their own” (Schulenburg 127). However, the voices of the enslaved are also afforded discursive space in *Fe en disfraz* not only through Fe and Martín’s ritual but through the fictionalized slave testimonies themselves. Fe herself makes this point when describing her research to Martín, who relates to the reader that she had broken “el molde de expectativas, presentando la otra cara de la esclavitud, la que muestran los relatos de sus esclavas que, sin dejar de ser las víctimas azotadas por los amos, se convierten en algo más” (*Fe en disfraz* 70). For Schulenburg, this “something more” is “located outside the text itself” and is “accessible only through the ritualized channels of pleasure and pain,” or, in other words, Fe’s ritualistic reenactment of a past in masochistic taboo sexual acts (127). Fe and Martín’s ritual indeed symbolizes the simultaneous pain and empowerment of remembering the past; but the novel also constructs black women’s agency not only through Fe but also through the subjects of her research.

My contribution to the discussion on *Fe en disfraz*—developed in the following section—is a close reading of the subjects of Fe’s research in comparison with “real” slave narratives, history, and cultural myth. The testimonies in the novel are much more graphically violent than the Mayra Santos-Febres’s eighteenth and nineteenth century source materials, but just because they are “fictional” does not mean that they are “fictitious.” On the contrary, the slave

²²⁶ See Schulenburg’s “It Hurts So Good: Resurrecting Female Slave Narratives in *Fe en disfraz*” (2019).

testimonies in *Fe en disfraz* represent truths about enslaved black women's experiences that could not be expressed within legal and literary discourses from this time for their explicitly sexual and violent content. In other words, they "say" what could not be said within hegemonic written discourses of their times. The testimonies attest not only to the abuses that enslaved black women endured under slavery but also the ways in which they used legal system and sex to their benefit. This reading ultimately has the power to change the way that we read the novel's representation of the present as well as the past. Fe's reenactment of history with Martín is not just a metaphor for the pain of remembrance but also a way of connecting to the legacy of power that black women have always carried, even while under the oppressive yoke of slavery.

Metafictional Slave Testimony: "Esclavas manumisas en Latinoamérica"

The plot of *Fe en disfraz* develops in a cyclical rather than linear fashion, suggesting that the past and present are inextricably intertwined. Martín's narration of his relationship with Fe during the present day is interrupted by flashbacks to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Chapters III, V, VIII, and XII are slave testimonies from the collection that Fe serendipitously discovers toward the beginning of the novel.²²⁷ Martín himself comments on these testimonies' significance vis-à-vis the "classic" slave narratives:

En inglés, existen miles de declaraciones de esclavos que dan su *testimonio* en contra de la esclavitud. Mujeres educadas que formaban parte de sociedades abolicionistas les enseñaban a leer y a escribir, recogían sus palabras y, luego, financiaban la publicación de esos testimonios para que el público conociera los terrores de la trata. Oludah [sic] Equiano, Harriet Jacobs, Mary Prince, Frederich [sic] Douglass, esclavos con nombres y

²²⁷ As I will explore in the next chapter, this is like Ana Maria Gonçalves's fictionalized discovery of Luísa Mahin's autobiographical manuscript in *Um defeito de cor*.

apellidos, contaron el infierno de sus vidas bajo el yugo de la esclavitud. En español, por el contrario, fuera de las memorias del cubano Juan Manzano o del testimonio *Biografía de un cimarrón* de Miguel Barnet, no existe ninguna narrativa de esclavos; menos aún de esclavas. No caló la tradición puritana del “testimonio” de vida, como ejemplo de penuria y salvación. (Santos-Febres 18-19)

The collection of slave testimonies that Fe discovers thus “fill the silence” of black women’s personal testimonies of slavery in Latin America. Since the publication of *Fe en disfraz* in 2009, scholars have become aware of testimonies of slavery authored and dictated by enslaved and formerly enslaved black women in Latin America, such as Ursula de Jesús (Andrews, *Afro-Latin America* 48) and Esperança Garcia (Ferreira de Souza), but their testimonies of slavery have emerged more sporadically than the systematic production of slave narratives in the anglophone world. Martín attributes anglophone slave narratives’ abundance to the already existent “puritanical tradition” of autobiographical memoirs. Whereas such memoirs originally aimed to achieve the author’s penance and salvation, the slave narratives appropriate and repurpose the autobiographical form to denounce slavery.

Martín also suggests that Fe’s collection is more authentic to actual enslaved women’s experiences than the anglophone slave narratives, in which he says educated (white) women and representatives of elite abolitionist societies “picked” black authors’ words. The example of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* partly corroborates Martín’s assessment of the slave narratives. In “Text and Contexts of Harriet Jacobs’ Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,” Jean Fagan Yellin argues that a cache of Harriet Ann Jacobs’s letters prove that it was she, and not her editor, Lydia Maria Child, who wrote *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (262). Nevertheless, Jacobs’s language reflects the rules of respectability in a nineteenth-century context. Child

recognizes the risk that she and Jacobs took by publishing Jacobs's narrative for its scandalous discussion of sex:

I am well aware that many will accuse me of indecorum for presenting these pages to the public for the experiences of this intelligent and much-injured woman belong to a class which some call delicate subjects, and others indelicate. This peculiar phase of Slavery has generally been kept veiled; but the public ought to be made acquainted with its monstrous features, and I willingly take the responsibility of presenting them with the veil withdrawn. (Jacobs 410)

In the text itself, "Linda Brent" (Jacobs) describes with disgust the attempts of her master, "Dr. Flint" (Dr. James Norcom) to make her "submit" to him. Sex is not specifically mentioned within the text but rather communicated in veiled language:

He tried his utmost to corrupt the pure principles my grandmother had instilled. He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of. I turned from him with disgust and hatred. But he was my master. I was compelled to live under the same roof with him—where I saw a man of forty years my senior daily violating the most sacred commandments of nature. He told me I was his property that I must submit to his will in all things. (Jacobs 437)

With these words, Jacobs' text "unveils" the issue of rape within slaveholding households while simultaneously "veiling" it behind the codes of nineteenth-century writing. It was necessary to respect these codes for the formerly enslaved black female authors to persuade white readers of the authenticity of their accounts and to have their memoirs published in the first place. As Toni Morrison argues in "The Site of Memory," Jacobs and many other slave narrative authors "were silent about many things" for the purpose of "shaping the experience to make it palatable to those

who were in a position to alleviate it” (91). In short, abolitionists did not pick formerly enslaved authors’ words, but they did exercise considerable influence over them. This is even more true for slave narratives that were written by dictated testimonies such as *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), and *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* (1854). Formerly enslaved authors simultaneously influenced and were influenced by abolitionist discourse, whose main purpose was to expose the horrors of slavery to white readers who were not acquainted with black people’s experiences in captivity.

The slave testimonies in *Fe en disfraz* also serve this function, but they are directed toward the contemporary reader. They are therefore not bound by the rules of decorum which shaped Jacobs’s presentation of her experiences. Whereas *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* partly masks the topic of rape, *Fe en disfraz* “un-disguises” it to reveal its gruesome face. Martín describes the sexual content of Fe’s testimonies as “particularmente violento” (Santos-Febres 18). Like Esperança Garcia’s 1770 letter, some of them “tan solo recogían *testimonios* de ‘abusos’, en los cuales las esclavas pedían amparo real” (Santos-Febres 18). Others represent “documentos de condena por el Santo Oficio, declaraciones de tormentos y castigos”: “Mariana Di Moraes, Diamantina, la mulata Pascuala; los *testimonios* se sucedían uno tras otro. Relataban estupros con lujo de detalles” (Santos-Febres 18). One of the most explicitly violent testimonies is the “Registro Histórico del Valle de Matina, Costa Rica, Papeles del gobernador Diego de la Haya, Caso: María y Petrona. Condición; esclavas, 1719,” in which María and Petrona, after having arrived on Costa Rican shores, escaped from their English captors to the woods in search of food and help, but they are captured again by the Spanish sargento mayor Juan Francisco de Ibarra and raped repeatedly by him and six other armed guards (Santos-Febres 35-36). Whereas Harriet Jacobs says only that Dr. Flint that he had “peopled” her “young mind with unclean

images” (Gates 436), María and Petrona’s testimony explicitly describes such “unclean images” in graphic terms: “El primer día—cuenta Petrona—tres gendarmes entraron en María, uno por delante y otro por detrás, mientras otro le ponía su vergüenza en la boca hasta casi ahogarla. A mí me sujetaron dos y me hicieron mirar lo que hacían. Uno me tenía de las greñas y me forzaba a tomarlo con mi boca. Los otros dos tomaban turnos para entrar en mis naturas” (Santos-Febres 36). After four days of rape and torture, Petrona is sold while bearing one of the Spanish officer’s children. Later, when the child turned nine years old, she is sold again and separated from the child. For the extreme sexual abuse that she had suffered, Petrona presents her case before the royal court to free her son from his enslaver, doña Cecilia Vázquez de Coronado.

Within a Costa Rican context, María and Petrona’s testimony exposes black women’s experiences under slavery behind the leyenda blanca, which Dorothy Mosby defines as “the image of Costa Rica as a state formed by white, Catholic, Spanish-speaking peasants whose egalitarian attitudes towards one another and an absence of large-scale plantation economy supported by Indian and African labor forged an essentially democratic and peace-loving people” (9). The case of María and Petrona in *Fe en disfraz* is based on the true case of two enslaved Africans (also of lucumí descent, as they are in the novel) that are documented in María de los Ángeles Acuña’s historical study on “Mujeres esclavas en la Costa Rica del siglo XVIII.” The real-life slave testimony narrates a similar circumstance as the fictionalized one in *Fe en disfraz*:

... en el caso de María y Petrona ellas fueron a vivir a Bagaces relatan que fueron apartadas del grupo por Ibarra con otros seis de sus compañeros, cuatro hombres y dos mujeres, que fueron llevados a una casa en el monte y de allí a Bagaces donde Ibarra las vendió a Doña Cecilia Vázquez de Coronado esposa del Sargento Mayor Salvador Suárez de Lugo, quienes eran los dueños de la hacienda nombrada Tenorio. (Acuña 2)

A comparison of the historical and fictional versions of María and Petrona's testimony reveal not only similarities but also striking differences. In both versions, María and Petrona arrive on Costa Rica's shore on English slave ships in 1719. They escaped but were recaptured by Ibarra and six others and sold to Doña Ceilia Vázquez. Although there is no mention of Petrona's pregnancy and separation from her child, other cases of separation of mothers and children are examined in Acuña's article. The grizzly details of María and Petrona's rape are the product of literary license within the novel, but that does not necessarily mean that the brutality that they describe is a fiction. The lack of such violent and detailed descriptions from slave narratives and legal testimonies might be attributed to the limitations of abolitionist and legal discourses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. *Fe en disfraz* explores what was behind the veil that slave narrative authors like Harriet Ann Jacobs drew over their most traumatic experiences. In this way, horrifying truths about slavery that were unspeakable in the past are given words in *Fe en disfraz*.

There are many more slave testimonies in *Fe en disfraz*. The testimonies of Xica da Silva (Santos-Febres 37-38), Ana María (45-46); and Pascuala (57-59) also narrate scenes of rape and torture. Even though they are victims of horrible injustices, they denounce them in the Spanish and Portuguese colonial legal systems. The content and the juridical form of their testimonies thus illustrate black women and girls' agency within the slavery system during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ana María, "mulata de doce años," denounces the sexual and physical abuses that she had suffered from the nephew of her enslaver, Manuela Sancho. Manuela protests that her nephew was a novice of the Jesuit Order and therefore was incapable of such action. Sancho violently threatens Ana María in court, and the final sentence of the testimony is that "El gobernador del Valle acogió a la esclavilla en amparo real hasta que encontrara nuevo amo" (46).

The case of “Ana María, Cartagena de Indias, 1743,” recalls Esperança Garcia’s letter to the governor of Piauí, testifying against her captor’s physical abuse and requesting a change in captors. Unlike the letter, the novel uses the literary technique of irony to emphasize the tragedy of the situation. Despite Manuela’s protest that her nephew would have been incapable of rape, her violent threat toward Ana María (“este lo he de empapelar para pelar a esa perra zamba”) suggests that the family was indeed capable of the abuse that Ana María describes (Santos-Febres 46). Moreover, the solution on the part of the colonial justice system is to shelter the girl until finding a new owner. This is not a “happy ending” but rather opens the possibility of the cycle abuse to continue under new enslavers. Ana María’s case thus illustrates the agency of black women and girls to negotiate less oppressive situations within the colonial legal system, but the legal system that temporarily shelters Ana María is ultimately the same one that upholds the racial institution of slavery in the first place.

María and Petrona’s and Ana María’s testimonies denounce sexual abuse before the Spanish royal court, but another key strategy in negotiating better conditions in history and in the novel is claiming proximity to whiteness through *mestizaje*. Acuña concludes from other documents in the National Archives of Costa Rica that “El mestizaje significó un mecanismo de movilidad social para esta población de origen africano” (12). Just like the testimonies in Acuña’s study, the fictional version of María and Petrona’s testimony uses her son’s whiteness as a strategy to free him from Doña Cecilia Vázquez de Coronado’s estate. The most dramatic case of black social ascendancy through whitening is Diamantina’s testimony, which illustrates, as Martín describes, “cómo esclavas manumisas de diversas regiones del Imperio lusitano y del español lograron convertirse en dueñas de hacienda” (Santos-Febres 18). Patricia Valladares-Ruiz observes the similarities between Diamantina’s narrative, “Declaratoria ante el gobernador

Alonso de Pires, Aldea de Tejucó” (Chapter III of the novel) and the historical figure Xica da Silva (Santos-Febres 23-26). Diamantina is a composite character loosely based on Xica da Silva. Her name is the same as the present-day name of Arraial de Tejucó, Xica’s birthplace. The historical Xica and the fictional Diamantina were both born into slavery in Minas Gerais during the eighteenth century. They both provided obligatory sexual services to their enslavers, bore children, were freed, and inherited large fortunes. On their similarities, Valladares-Ruiz argues that

La mulatez de los hijos de Diamantina sugeriría que ellos son el producto de la relación con su patrón. Desde luego, la historia de esta esclava manumisa convoca algunos de los mayores temores de la sociedad colonial: las relaciones interraciales, el ataque a la pureza racial, el usufructo de las fortunas blancas por partes de afrodescendientes y el consecuente ascenso social de estos últimos. (Santos-Febres 608)

The novel therefore shows that racial mixing was not the product of racial harmony but rather, under slavery, the product of a steep power imbalance between white enslavers and enslaved black women. Sex between these groups implies a form of violence since black women could not refuse, but black women also use sex to their advantage to bear lighter-skinned children and thus improve their condition under the law. *Mestizaje / mestiçagem*, in other words, was a means for black women to claiming social privilege through whiteness—not a condition of racial harmony. On the contrary, racial mixture was feared by the ruling classes during the colonial era. It is only “the politics of erasure” that allowed mid-twentieth century intellectuals like Freyre and Tannenbaum to herald *mestizaje / mestiçagem* as evidence of historical racial harmony in Latin America.

Through its fictionalized slave testimonies, *Fe en disfraz* attests to several truths regarding the perspectives, experiences, and agency of black women that have been recorded in history and in slave narratives. This is no accident but rather is fruit of the author's research while writing. In the "Nota de la autora" at the end of the novel, Mayra Santos-Febres writes,

*Entre las fuentes consultadas, me alimenté de la investigación *Mujeres esclavas en la Costa Rica del siglo XVIII: estrategias fuente a la esclavitud*, de la doctora María de los Ángeles Acuña. También consulté las narrativas de los esclavos Olaudah Equiano, Juan Manzano, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs [sic], Sojourner Truth, Mary Price [sic], Nat Turner, así como los textos de *Esclavos rebeldes*, del doctor Guillermo Baralt; *Puerto Rico Negro*, del doctor Jalil Sued Badillo; *Biografía de un cimarrón*, de Miguel Barnet, y *The Southern Oral History Program*. (Santos-Febres 109)*

The verbal phrase "me alimenté" is crucial. While nourished by historical studies such as Acuña's, as well as slave narratives such as Harriet Ann Jacobs's, *Fe en disfraz* goes beyond these sources in its representations of sexual and violence against black women under slavery. The author's note confirms that the novel is based on "documentos falsos, falsificados, reescritos con retazos de declaraciones de esclavos que recogí de múltiples fuentes primarias y secundarias; que recombiné, traduje o que, francamente, inventé" (Santos-Febres 109). Invention is not the opposite of truth but rather a way of approximating it in ways that slave narratives could not because of the discursive limitations of previous centuries. Fiction is therefore not the opposite of history but instead a means of imagining black women's stories within the silences of the archives. Through its broad inclusion of black women in its recollections of the past, literary fiction becomes a more reliable source of history than history itself. Black women attest to bearing the children of their enslavers in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and "Mujeres

esclavas en la Costa Rica del siglo XVIII,” but sexual violence is usually absent or veiled in these nonfictional accounts. The unblinking descriptions of sexual violence in *Fe en disfraz* have the effect of ripping up the veil that was cast over scenes too gruesome for “those in a position to alleviate it” (Morrison 91). In a contemporary Latin American context, the slave testimonies in *Fe en disfraz* also destroy the cultural myths of *mestizaje / mestiçagem* and “racial democracy.”

Just as white authors in Latin America had exercised literary license to construct the dominant myths of racial harmony throughout the twentieth century, Mayra Santos-Febres uses her own literary license to deconstruct them. Santos-Febres’s use of that literary license does not take away from the truthfulness of her work but rather attests to the important role of literary authors as interpreters of history. However, *Fe en disfraz* reflects on not only history as a social construction but also its own medium of literary narrative. Like *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua, Biografía de un cimarrón*, and other slave narratives, *Fe en disfraz* is written and narrated from the perspective of a white man. Martín’s narration is not objective or neutral but instead a reflection of the inherent subjectivity of the *testimonio* at a metafictional level.

***Fe en disfraz* as Meta-Testimonio**

Scholars like Patricia Valladares-Ruiz (598)²²⁸ examine *Fe en disfraz* as a reflection of the past and its echoes in the present, but the novel also reflects how the past is constructed from the viewpoint of the present. Within the novel, the enslaved black women of Fe’s testimonies communicate their experiences first through numerous filters. The first filter is the writing of court scribes, who are invisible in the novel but whose participation is nonetheless important by

²²⁸ “En la lectura de esta novela examino el reciclaje de un pasado doloroso que denuncia tanto el proceso de erotización de las relaciones de dominación (hombres blancos) y sumisión (mujeres afrodescendientes) como la reproducción de estas dinámicas en las sociedades poscoloniales” (Valladares-Ruiz 598).

recording the (literal and figurative) trials of black women in colonial Latin America. The second filter is Fe's writing. The testimonies are not narrated from the Diamantina's, María and Petrona's, Ana María's, and Pascuala's first-person points of view like many dictated slave narratives (Mary Prince's, for example) and *testimonios*. Rather, Fe summarizes them in the third person point of view to convey the supposedly objective discourse of history. The third and final filter is Martín, the narrator. Throughout the novel, Fe sends her summaries of archival documents to Martín for revision. The reader therefore does not receive information from Fe or from the enslaved subjects of her research but rather from Martín. Just as the *gestor* within a *testimonio* organizes the information related by an informant, Martín organizes the novel's structural parallels between events occurring in the present and Fe's testimonies narrating the past. The authoritative third person voice within the slave testimonies is thus revealed within the novel as a collective of subjective voices, from the enslaved black women who dared to speak out against their abusers, to the invisible scribes who related their words in the colonial courts, to Fe the historian, and to the narrator of *Fe en disfraz*, Martín.

The testimonies of Fe's "Esclavas manumisas" attest not only to matters of the past but to matters of the present. This is best illustrated through the experiences of the testimonies' contemporary writers, Fe and Martín. In addition to interpreting and summarizing the legal cases of enslaved women in Latin America, both historians write testimonies of their own personal experiences. Fe's personal testimony of sexual violence during her own adolescence is written to reflect the conventions of the novel's slave testimonies. The slave testimonies typically open with a brief description of the case, the place, and the year (for example chapter III):

Declaratoria ante el Patriarcal Alonso Pires,
Aldea de Tejuco

Archivo Histórico de Minas Gerais

Caso: Diamantina. Condición: esclava

1785 (Santos-Febres 23).

Fe's own testimony is introduced in a similar fashion: "Ciudad de Maracaibo / Fe Verdejo / Circa / 1985" (Santos-Febres 81). Another sense of doubling is achieved through the revelation of Fe's full name, María Fernanda. Fe's first name is the same as her subjects María (Costa Rica) and Ana María (Cartagena de Indias). What distinguishes Fe's testimony from her subjects' is that it is written in the first person. In Fe's testimony, she not only bears witness to the sexual aggression to which she had been subjected by Aníbal Andrés, whom Fe characterizes as "blanco como la nieve" (Santos-Febres 83), but also confesses the taboo of having enjoyed the violent experience: "Tengo que admitir que me gustó aquella derrota. Aquella sumisión dolorosa, aquel dejarme hacer. No opuse demasiada resistencia" (Santos-Febres 84). Scholars like Valladares-Ruiz have argued that Fe's work with slave testimonies represent her way of processing this traumatic event during her adolescence (610),²²⁹ but within the fiction of the novel Martín is the character who organizes and composes the text like a *gestor* in a testimonio. Could the chapter featuring Fe's testimony thus reflect Martín's interpretation of events rather than Fe's? What implications would Martín's potential "textual manipulations" of Fe's testimony have regarding his own relationship with Fe? Could Fe's "confession" that she enjoyed her apparent rape reflect Martín's attempt to "justify" the violent acts that he himself performs with her?

²²⁹ "La infancia y adolescencia de Fe influyen claramente en sus relaciones adultas. A manera de ejemplo, la descripción que Fe hace de su primera experiencia sexual señala el inicio de su búsqueda del placer a través del sometimiento: 'Tengo que admitir que me gustó aquella derrota. Aquella sumisión dolorosa, aquel dejarme hacer. No opuse demasiada resistencia' (90). Este capítulo dedicado a la adolescencia de Fe ilustra su necesidad de aprehender el pasado, su relación con las historias de las esclavas y una sexualidad que convoca el dolor para convertirlo en gozo" (Valladares-Ruiz 610).

In the chapter just prior to Fe's testimony, Martín's confirmation that Fe's writing passes through the filter of his own suggests that he leaves his own personal interpretation of events on Fe's testimony. What we read in "Fe's chapter" is not Fe's writing at all, but a summary of Fe's personal documents written by Martín himself:

Recibí diez mensajes en total a lo largo de tres semanas y media. Algunos tardaban en llegar, pero yo los esperaba. Pasaba de desesperación al desencanto, de la curiosidad al temor, por qué negarlo. Pero, cada noche, en mi apartamento de investigador, los acogía. Los fui leyendo poco a poco. Incluyo aquí un resumen de los archivos completos de Fe Verdejo. Ahora que reviso estos apuntes, me doy cuenta de que los escribió con la esperanza de que nombraran su rabia y su soledad. (Santos-Febres 80)

Fe's testimony is thus not only hers but also Martín's. He condenses a total of ten messages sent to him over three and a half weeks into a single chapter, written in the first-person point of view from Fe's perspective, that deals primarily with her violent first sexual experience. Martín, too, presents his own personal testimony in chapter XX, which occurs one year prior to Fe's and opens like hers: "Isla de Puerto Rico / Aldea de Río Piedras / Circa / 1984" (Santos-Febres 89). In Martín's testimony, he also relates his first sexual experience, in which he confesses that he himself is a rapist. He brings a highly intoxicated woman home with him and awaking to find blood on his sheets. Martín's testimony therefore also represents an echo of the past in the present, accentuated especially by his costume as Don Juan Tenorio, who is not only the cautionary figure against the sin of lust in Tirso de Molina's play but also allegorizes the symbolic rape of the Americas by the Spanish Empire (Maddox, "Los hijos de la Xica que manda" 18-19). Here again we might read Martín's testimony in reverse. His confession to rape indicates that his preoccupation with sexual violence originates from an event that occurred in

his youth. This has important consequences on how we might read Fe's testimony, as well as each of the previous slave testimonies included and edited by Martín. His voice is present within not only Fe's testimony but also each of the slave testimonies. Their histories also place sexual violence at the center of the narrative, thus reflecting not only their own experiences but also Martín's. Fe's submission to sexual violence as an adult might reflect her attempt to reclaim power over the colonial past as well as her own personal past as Valladares-Ruiz argues (610), but this reading does not account for the power that Martín exercises over the text as its *gestor* within the fiction of the novel. How much of the novel reflects the facts and how much of it reflects Martín's interpretation of them? Is the ongoing theme of sexual violence a reflection of Latin American history or Martín's personal history (or both)? Is the Fe that the reader sees through Martín's narrative lens authentic or *en disfraz*?

Martín's position as the narrator and *gestor* of *Fe en disfraz* invites this line of questioning. *Fe en disfraz* is not just about Fe but also Martín reckoning with his place within the history of slavery in Latin America. Martín's control over the narrative implies a critique of *testimonios* like *Biografía de un cimarrón* in which a white male *gestor* positions himself as an objective interpreter of the same colonial history of which he is also part and participant. Santos-Febres is aware of the *testimonio* and *Biografía de un cimarrón* because they are in the novel (Santos-Febres 18-19). She even tellingly attributes the authorship of *Biografía de un cimarrón* to Miguel Barnet (Santos-Febres 19, 109). *Fe en disfraz* is therefore a *meta-testimonio* that invites the reader to reflect on not only history but also the problematic ways in which it is constructed from the white male gaze like Martín's. Scholars like Schulenburg examine Martín's whiteness (120-121),²³⁰ but his own physical description of himself suggests that the history of

²³⁰ "The visual concentration on his profound whiteness blends with that of the (computerized) page, which compounds its lack of color when compared with its tan acquired during a recent Caribbean voyage. In addition,

slavery behind cultural myths of racial harmony in Puerto Rico are a part of his personal history and identity as well: “Pelo negro, lacio. Nariz ancha que, quizás, declare algún signo de mulatez. No lo sé, esa información se ha perdido en el olvido” (Santos-Febres 15). Unlike Fe, Martín’s whiteness within a Puerto Rican and greater Latin American context has allowed him to “forget” his racial origins. As for Fe, both the sexual violence that she experiences and the power she wields as a famous historian are reflected within the slave narratives that she examines. Her empowerment derives from the power that black women have always had despite centuries of racial and gender oppression—and the resilience that black women had to develop to survive systems of slavery, patriarchy, and white supremacy. However, we must avoid innocent readings of *Fe en disfraz* that assume that we are reading the words of the enslaved, or of Fe, or even simply of Martín. The novel is all these voices simultaneously in dialogue, and it therefore has the effect of raising similar questions as the *testimonio*: What would Fe say if she wrote her own account of events? How would she represent her story from her own perspective? Would it be different from Martín’s? Would the testimonies of enslaved black women be different in her narration?

We can only speculate possible responses to these questions, but the questions themselves suggest that *Fe en disfraz* is not just a novel about echoes of the past in the present. It is also a novel about how the present shapes how the past is remembered. The themes of sexual violence and black women’s agency are emphasized in “Esclavas manumisas en Latinoamérica” because they are also present in the lives of the historians. *Fe en disfraz* thus invites the reader to reflect on history as a social construction rather than an indisputable matter

Martín’s moment of conflating body and written discourse contains dangerous undercurrents in his perceived lack of bodily protection due to his whiteness” (Schulenburg 120-121).

of the past. Poststructuralist historians such as Hayden White have long made this point,”²³¹ but Santos-Febres teases out its implications with consideration of slavery in Latin America. Within the fiction of the novel, Martín wields gatekeeping power over the narrative as its *gestor*, but it is ultimately Mayra Santos-Febres’s who questions dominant constructions of history through the framing of her novel through Martín’s perspective. Santos-Febres is not the only author to portray slavery from black women’s perspectives in Afro-Puerto Rican literary narrative. Only a few years after Santos-Febres, Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro wrote a book that revisits slavery from the perspectives of “*las Negras*.”

IV. Slavery from *las Negras*’ Perspectives: Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro

Like Mayra Santos-Febres, Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro (1970-) is a contemporary Afro-Puerto Rican author whose fiction has gained notable acclaim in recent years. She has written many titles over the course of the twenty-first century. Her oeuvre boasts many firsts and literary prizes in Puerto Rico. *Caparazones* (2010) is “La primera novela lésbica publicada en la Isla” (Arroyo Pizarro), and she has won the National Institute of Puerto Rican Literature Prize in 2008 and 2011, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture Prize in 2012 and 2014, and the PEN Club Prize for Best Novel in 2006. She also won the PEN Club Prize again for her collection of short stories *las Negras* in 2013 (148). Whereas her previous works tend to be set in present-day Puerto Rico, *las Negras* dives into the past. The collection’s three short stories—“Wanwe,” “Matronas,” and “Saeta”—explore, in the author’s own analysis, “los límites del devenir de personajes femeninos que desafían las jerarquías de poder” (*las Negras* 148). The stories’ protagonists—Wanwe, Ndizi, and Tshanwe, respectively—are all African women who witness and suffer appalling

²³¹ See “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” from *Metahistory* (1978), by Hayden White.

abuses while finding ways to resist their condition of enslavement within the roles assigned to black women in the “New World.” In addition to the original three stories, the fourth edition of *las Negras* (2016) includes a fourth story, “Los amamantados,” which takes place in San Juan. The settings of the first three stories also possibly take place in colonial Puerto Rico, but this is not made explicit. The ambiguity of their setting suggests that Wanwe, Ndizi, and Tshanwe’s experiences represent the collective experiences of enslaved black women throughout the Americas.

Like *Fe en disfraz*, *las Negras* “fills the silences” of enslaved black women in Latin America left by the “official” story. Many scholars have compared Mayra Santos-Febres’s and Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro’s literary work. Marie Ramos Rosado examines how black women’s subjectivity in both authors’ works questions “la invisibilidad a la que los relatos oficiales la han condenado históricamente, tanto por negra como por mujer” (185).²³² Ramos Rosado affirms that “Los personajes femeninos negros han sido generalmente marginados e invisibilizados por la historia oficial en la sociedad puertorriqueña; si bien en ocasiones han sido representados, siempre ha sido encarnando papeles sumisos y domesticados, nunca protagónicos y liberadores” (185). The first short story that Ramos Rosado analyzes in support of her analysis is “Marina y su olor” by Mayra Santos-Febres from her short story collection *Pez de vidrio* (1995), winner of the Letras de Oro literary prize. In contrast with the submissive and domesticated roles assigned to black women in Puerto Rican society, Ramos Rosado argues that “en el relato ‘Marina y su olor’ la escritora nos presenta a un personaje femenino negro y desafiante, Marina, a través de quien se cuestionan los domesticamientos a los que la cultura dominante somete al cuerpo femenino” (186). To Ramos Rosado’s analysis, one could add that Fe also questions the

²³² See Marie Ramos Rosado’s “Mayra Santos-Febres, Yvonne Denis Rosario y Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro: narradoras afrodescendientes que desafían jerarquías de poder” (2012).

domesticity that society imposes on black women in her position as an intellectual. Santos-Febres's work is populated by not only suffering black bodies but also black women that challenge the colonial order of white supremacy and patriarchy in the past and in the present.

In addition to "Mariana y su olor," Ramos Rosado finds another group of "narradoras que desafían jerarquías de poder" in *las Negras*. She observes that Arroyo Pizarro dedicates the collection of short stories "'a los historiadores por habernos dejado fuera'" (qtd. in Ramos Rosado 188). Arroyo Pizarro's dedication is followed by a passage from Baralt's *Esclavos rebeldes*, in which the historian suggests that the number of slave revolts in Puerto Rico is probably much higher than the official number.²³³ Ramos Rosado notes that Baralt revises "la historia oficial con respecto a las rebeliones" (188). Baralt himself notes in *Slave Revolts in Puerto Rico* that "the conventional wisdom was that slaves in Puerto Rico were docile, had no reason to rebel, and were generally treated well" (vii). Baralt therefore also revises the whitewashed, sanitized version of Puerto Rican history. Nevertheless, Ramos Rosado observes that *las Negras* exposes and fills yet another gap in the official story:

La historia puertorriqueña, como la universal, ha sido narrada desde una óptica patriarcal. Por tanto, la dedicatoria del libro denuncia la historia oficial y reclama la visibilidad histórica de las mujeres esclavas. En *Las Negras*, los textos de ficción dan visibilidad a todas las mujeres negras, destacando las aportaciones que han realizado para la humanidad" (Ramos Rosado 188).

²³³ "Hasta fecha muy reciente, solamente se tenía conocimiento de un muy reducido número de conspiraciones y sublevaciones de esclavos ocurridas durante el pasado siglo XIX. Sin embargo, esta investigación basada principalmente en las fuentes primarias documentales de varios municipios de Puerto Rico, demuestra que, contrario a lo que siempre se había creído, los esclavos de la isla se rebelaron con frecuencia. El número de conspiraciones conocidas para apoderarse de los pueblos y de la isla, más los incidentes para asesinar a los blancos, y particularmente a los mayordomos, sobrepasa los cuarenta intentos. Mas, si tomamos en consideración la secretividad y el clandestinaje de estos movimientos, el número resultaría, indiscutiblemente, muy superior" (qtd. in Ramos Rosado 188).

Ramos Rosado specifically names some of the roles that black women in the Americas have played beyond the role of slaves in her concluding remarks:

En conclusión, el libro supone una aportación para la valoración y reconocimiento de los trabajos ejercidos por las mujeres negras en América, donde han sido comadronas, curanderas, yerberas, sobadoras, nodrizas, santiguadoras, cuenteras, sirvientas, cocineras, ordeñadoras de vacas, etc. Se considera cómo las negras limpiaron, organizaron, curaron y amamantaron a los hijos de los hacendados en el Nuevo Mundo. Además, se visibiliza las luchas de resistencia de estas heroínas negras al situarlas en papeles protagónicos.

(Ramos Rosado 189)²³⁴

Ramos Rosado's study is centered specifically on the work of Afro-Puerto Rican authors, but this passage illustrates the "New World" scope of *las Negras*. Like *Fe en disfraz*, Arroyo Pizarro's short story collection is not only Puerto Rican but also Latin American and Interamerican.

Arroyo Pizarro's work has also been read comparatively with black feminist theory. Diego Falconí Trávez examines several of Pizarro's works through the lens of Audre Lorde's theory of the erotic, not as a sign of female authority²³⁵ but rather as a tool of personal and political transgression of and liberation from heteropatriarchal and white supremacist social norms (56).²³⁶ Falconí Trávez demonstrates an ongoing theme in Arroyo Pizarro's work of the distant mother who has internalized such norms. She does not understand her lesbian daughter and has thus forgotten the fluid homosocial / homosexual bonds that are, for Lorde, inextricably

²³⁴ An abbreviated version of this passage appears in *las Negras*: "Las negras es un libro que aporta a los valores y reconocimiento de los trabajos ejercidos por mujeres negras esclavas en América: comadronas, curaderas, yerberas, sobadoras, nodrizas, santiguadoras, cuenteras, sirvientas, cocineras, etc. Además, se visibiliza las luchas de resistencias de estas heroínas negras en papeles protagónicos" (qtd. Arroyo Pizarro 18).

²³⁵ See Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" (1978).

²³⁶ See Diego Falconí Trávez's "Puerto Rico erizando mi piel: Intertextos/intercuerpos lordeanos en la narrativa de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro" (2016).

bound with black women's African ancestry. Arroyo Pizarro's *las Negras* represents a shift in her work by exploring theme of community-building from African women's perspectives:

Esa débil y negativa figura de la madre, que es distante de su hija lesbiana, no obstante, cambia completamente en los relatos de la colección *Las Negras*, que se centran en las acciones de tres mujeres africanas llevadas como esclavas a Puerto Rico; especialmente en el cuento “Wanwe” que narra el secuestro de una mujer negra de África por parte de los hombres blancos, la figura de la madre es trascendental por el componente erótico originario. (Falconí Trávez 59)

In other words, the representation of the mother in *las Negras* exemplifies Lorde's theory of the fluid boundary between eroticism and community that had been severed by the enslavement of African women in the United States and Puerto Rico. Falconí Trávez also argues that the intertextual reference to Lorde²³⁷ and the text's capitalization of “N” for *las Negras* (just as Lorde characteristically capitalized “B” for black women) further demonstrates Lorde's influence on Arroyo Pizarro's work (61).²³⁸ While Lorde recovered black women's lost origins in a US context, Falconí Trávez argues that Arroyo Pizarro does so within a Puerto Rican context.

In addition to Lorde, Arroyo Pizarro's work has also been compared with Patricia Hill Collins's seminal *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1991). Edgar J. Nieves López²³⁹ argues that black women's self-definition deconstructs sensualized stereotypes of African and Afrodescendant women in the context of Puerto Rican literature. He defines “autodefinición” as “un mecanismo de empoderamiento que

²³⁷ The epigraph to “Saeta” is originally from Lorde's essay “A Burst of Light: Living with Cancer” (1988): “Even the smallest is never to be taken for granted. Each victory must be applauded” (qtd. in Arroyo Pizarro 102).

²³⁸ “Así como también es interesante que la palabra ‘Negra(s)’ está, intertextualmente, en este texto y en la autobiografía de la autora estadounidense, escrita con mayúscula” (Falconí Trávez 61).

²³⁹ See Nieves López's article “Autodefinición y subversión en *Fe en disfraz* de Mayra Santos-Febres y *las Negras* de Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro” (2018).

permite a la mujer negra desmitificar las concepciones que los grupos dominantes le han impuesto tanto a ellas como a sus comunidades” (Nieves López 49). The subjects of Fe’s research defy the roles of “esclava, sumisa, criada, objeto sexual y personaje pobre” through the colonial legal system, as does Fe through her role as a scholar. Nieves López compares the subjects of Fe’s research to the protagonists of *las Negras* insofar as they both subvert the identities imposed on them in colonial society. His analysis focuses on two protagonists in particular: Ndizi, from the short story “Matronas,” and Tshanwe, from “Saetas.” He argues that Ndizi takes advantage of whites’ perception of her as the “mammy” stereotype to lead a clandestine rebellion (Nieves López 71-72).²⁴⁰ Tshanwe rejects her captor’s definition of her as a sexual object—symbolized by his renaming her as “Teresa”—instead reclaiming her identity as a warrior by killing her enslaver with his own arrow, or “Saeta” (Nieves López 60). Tshanwe’s revenge also illustrates poetic justice through the phallic symbol of the arrow that penetrates her former captor, just as he had penetrated her repeatedly throughout the short story.

Previous scholarship on *las Negras* focuses on its representation of black women’s identities under slavery as rebels and warriors beyond stereotypes and silences within official historical records, but its representations of colonial and sexual violence are nonetheless central to *las Negras*’s deconstruction of the myths of *mestizaje* and “racial democracy.” Just as these myths are a common trait in Caribbean, Latin American, and Puerto Rican cultures, their deconstruction and negation are a common thread in Afro-Puerto Rican and Afro-Latin American literary narrative at large. In Ramos Rosado’s, Falconí Trávez’s, and Nieves López’s articles, the issue of rape is treated lightly despite its pervasive presence in the first three short

²⁴⁰ “De hecho, este personaje nos remite al estereotipo de la *mammy*. Según Hill Collins esta figura de la esclava doméstica fiel y obediente es importante para el sistema esclavista pues por medio de esta imagen se pretende dar forma al comportamiento de las mujeres negras como madres, lo que a su vez perpetua la opresión racial, en caso de que éstas internalicen la imagen de la *mammy*” (Nieves López 71–72).

stories of *las Negras*. Moreover, the fourth edition of the collection adds an additional story, “Los amamantados,” which deals even further with the issue of rape within relationships between whites and enslaved women. It is the only story that explicitly takes place colonial San Juan. The repeated representations of violence and rape in *las Negras* continue the work that Toni Morrison called “ripping up the veil” that was cast over scenes of violence in nineteenth-century slave narratives such as *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.²⁴¹ Falconí Trávez shows that Audre Lorde is an intertextual reference in *las Negras*, but so are Morrison (Arroyo Pizarro 25) and Harriet Jacobs (Arroyo Pizarro 66). *las Negras* dialogues with Morrison and Jacobs “ripping up” the not only the proverbial veil of the slave narratives but also the narrative of racial harmony through *mestizaje* in Puerto Rico and Latin America.

“Ripping Up” the Myth of *Mestizaje*

Like *Fe en disfraz*, *las Negras* is composed of slave testimonies that disrupt the myth of historical racial harmony in Latin America through their representations of sexual violence. The fourth edition of *las Negras* includes not only an “Exordio” by Dra. Marie Ramos Rosado²⁴² but also a review entitled “Llenar el vacío” by Puerto Rican author Carmen Dolores Hernández on June 10, 2012, for the Puerto Rican newspaper *El Nuevo Día*. Dolores Hernández argues that the Spanish speaking world has no equivalent to slave narratives such as those by Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Olaudah Equiano, Venture Smith, and many other “relatos de infortunios y superación” (qtd. in Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 19). The three short stories that

²⁴¹ See Morrison’s essay “The Site of Memory” in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* (1995), edited by William Zinsser.

²⁴² Marie Ramos Rosado’s “Exordio” reiterates her article “Narradoras afrodescendientes que desafían jerarquías de poder” with regards to its dialogue with historians, particularly with Baralt’s *Esclavos rebeldes*. Rosado writes in the preface that “Se está reclamando la visibilidad histórica de las mujeres esclavas” (qtd. in Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 18).

composed the first editions of *las Negras*—“Wanwe,” “Matronas,” and “Saeta”—have the effect of “filling the silence” by revealing what Dolores Hernández calls “la increíble残酷 y la impunidad con la que unos seres humanos tratan a otros, la absoluta indefensión de los esclavos y, también, la capacidad del espíritu humano para sobreponerse y resistir, aunque sea internamente” (qtd. in Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 19). Dolores Hernández’s claim that there is “no Hispanic American equivalent” to the anglophone slave narrative excludes slave narratives in Latin America like *Autobiografía* (Juan Francisco Manzano) and *Biografía de un cimarrón*. It also obscures the ways in which *Reyita*, *Fe en disfraz*, and other literary Afro-Hispanic texts like *El harén de Oviedo* (re)construct the voices, perspectives, and memories of the enslaved through testimonial and fictional literary narrative. Dolores Hernández’s evaluation of *las Negras* thus only partly does the book justice. *las Negras* is important not just because there are relatively few slave narratives in Latin America, but also because previous works of literary narrative do not adequately capture the brutality of slavery from black women’s perspectives. Slave narratives such as *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* daringly exposed rape as a common aspect of life for black women under slavery, but Jacobs encodes her language as to not offend the sensibilities of her nineteenth-century readers.²⁴³ Like *Fe en disfraz*, *las Negras* describes the brutal sexual abuse that white men committed against black women. These descriptions have the effect of shocking contemporary readers out of their complacency and thus “violating” the myths of racial mixture and harmony in Latin America. The reality of sexual violence during slavery is

²⁴³ Jacobs writes powerfully about rape without naming it explicitly in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: “Every where the years bring to all enough of sin and sorrow; but in slavery the very dawn of life is darkened by these shadows. Even the little child, who is accustomed to wait on her mistress and her children, will learn, before she is twelve years old, why it is that her mistress hates such and such a one among the slaves. Perhaps the child’s own mother is among those hated ones. She listens to violent outbreaks of jealous passion, and cannot help understanding what is the cause. She will become prematurely knowing in evil things. Soon she will learn to tremble when she hears her master’s footfall. She will be compelled to realize that she is no longer a child. If God has bestowed beauty upon her, it will prove her greatest curse. That which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens the degradation of the female slave” (437).

not the only thing that *las Negras* has to say,²⁴⁴ but it is a central concern throughout the book that has not been adequately studied in existing literary scholarship.

Twentieth century authors such as Gilberto Freyre in Brazil and politicians such as José Luis Alberto Muñoz Marín in Puerto Rico had promoted racial mixture and harmony as features that distinguished Latin American societies from the United States during the twentieth century, but the many instances of rape in *las Negras* suggest that violence—not the supposedly “amicable” relations between “masters and slaves,”—is at the root of Latin America’s largely mixed racial societies.²⁴⁵ Violence is a major theme of *las Negras* starting with its first story, “Wanwe,” named after its protagonist, who is a young African girl. The story is divided into chapters that represent Wanwe’s memories, which are narrated in free indirect discourse. Her first memory is of the ship and the violent abuse that black women suffered as they were packed onto it by white men. The narrator describes women of various ethnicities and languages chained together on a canoe that was taking them to the main ship. When one woman attempts to escape, her captors punish her by beating her and tearing out her ear and nose rings to set an example to the others (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 28). The woman’s punishment as an “acto de control” has the effect of recalling Alejo Carpentier’s historical novel *El reino de este mundo* (1949). The novel narrates how Mackandal led a slave revolt in eighteenth-century Saint Domingue (present-day Haiti) by poisoning whites. In retribution, he is burnt at the stake as a warning to black people in the French colony. The brutal realism of *las Negras* is different from Carpentier’s

²⁴⁴ Ramos Rosado mentions the many different roles that black women played in colonial Hispanic American societies (18) and Dolores Hernández argues that memory played a fundamental role in black women’s resilience and resistance: “El recuerdo de sus orígenes, de sus familias, de sus costumbres, de su entorno logra darles la fuerza para sobrevivir o — en dos ocasiones — para una retribución terrible” (20). However, again, rape is implied in Dolores Hernández’s allusion to “a terrible retribution” but is not explicitly named like it is in *las Negras*.

²⁴⁵ *The Masters and the Slaves* is the title of the English-language translation of Freyre’s *Casa grande e senzala*.

“marvelous realism.”²⁴⁶ Mackandal had survived his punishment through transformation,²⁴⁷ but there is no such salvation for the black woman punished for her attempted escape. Looking at Wanwe’s capture, Falconí Trávez argues that *las Negras* “busca reescribir la Historia (y las historias) de mujeres afrodescendientes en Puerto Rico” (61). Given *las Negras*’s dialogue with Inter-American literature and the story’s ambiguous place setting, “Wanwe” also represents the experiences of displaced African women across the Americas.

Violence in the slave ships is a common theme in literature depicting the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Nineteenth-century abolitionist literature such as Castro Alves’s poem “O navio negreiro,” Maria Firmina dos Reis’s *Úrsula*, and *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* describe Africans’ internal experience of suffering on the slave ships, but “Wanwe” describes the external conditions of suffering in much more graphic detail—particularly through the unnamed woman’s punishment for attempting to escape. *las Negras* continues to narrate violence from black women’s perspectives, but violence takes on a sexual dimension in the three short stories following “Wanwe.” The first is “Matronas,” which is the only short story narrated in the first-person point of view. The protagonist-narrator, Ndizi, awaits execution for having organized a conspiracy to murder black children. The first-person narrative emphasizes Ndizi’s point of view rather than the perspectives of her captors. She is therefore able to tell the reader that his objective is to (literally) snuff out slavery in the cradle (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 96). Ndizi’s narration also reveals that the white townspeople’s ire derives not from moral outrage but from

²⁴⁶ Alejo Carpentier coins the term *lo real maravilloso* in the prologue to his novel *El reino de este mundo* (1949). Carpentier distinguishes *lo real maravilloso* from the European avant-garde and associates it with Afrodescendant perspectives, religions, and traditions in the Americas, wherein *lo maravilloso* is indistinguishable from *lo real*.

²⁴⁷ Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro pays homage to Mackandal as a symbol of Black power and pride in her collection of poetry *Yo, Makandal* (2017). In the collection’s titular poem, the poetic voice alludes to Carpentier’s novel by declaring that “se nos va la vida / a mí, a mis hermanos de lucha, a nuestros hijos y nietos por venir / al reino de este mundo” (Arroyo Pizarro, *Yo, Makandal* 24).

their loss of human property (95-96).²⁴⁸ Ndizi's punishment for her organized defiance of slavery is sexual in addition to physical. Ndizi describes that, while she awaits trial, she is beaten and raped night after night by prison guards (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 74). During one of these rapes, she bites a guard, steals his keys, and frees other captives so that they can end slavery through their positions in colonial society as "Matronas." They thus assume the role of midwife to collectively resist their conditions of oppression and attack slavery despite the ways in which black women are disempowered through violence.

The inclusion of explicit scenes of rape in "Matronas" adds an important layer to the short story's intertextual dialogue with the slave narrative genre. In Nieves López's analysis, Ndizi resembles slave narrative authors like Jacobs by positioning herself at the center of her narrative (55). Moreover, borrowing from Hazel V. Carby's book *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelists*, Nieves López argues that both Jacobs and Ndizi "document their sufferings and brutal treatment but in a context that is also a story of resistance to that brutality" (qtd. in 56). As a testament to its dialogue with Harriet Ann Jacobs, "Matronas" even alludes to *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in its epigraph (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 55).²⁴⁹ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was revolutionary in the nineteenth century for having denounced white men's sexual coercion of black girls using Jacobs's own personal experiences. Just as the fictional testimonies in *Fe en disfraz*, Ndizi's testimony is more graphic than Jacobs's because it engages with contemporary readers and not only with abolitionist benefactors. "Matronas" dialogues with not only abolitionist slave narratives but also

²⁴⁸ "Una nodriza blanca, de bebé blanco me raja el cabello frente a todos. Los dueños que han perdido mercancías por mi culpa, aplauden" (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 96).

²⁴⁹ "'My home now seemed more dreary than ever. The laugh of the little slave-children sounded harsh and cruel. It was selfish to feel so about the joy of others. My brother moved about with a very grave face. I tried to comfort him, by saying, 'Take courage, Willie; brighter days will come by and by'" (qtd. in Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 66).

with contemporary Afro-Puerto Rican literature²⁵⁰ and with the other stories in the collection.

The penultimate story is “Saeta.” Beyond what other scholars have already argued, “Saeta” also narrates sexual violence from the protagonist Tshanwe’s perspective beginning in its first chapter. Georgino Pizarro rapes Tshanwe and Jwaabi repeatedly throughout the story (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 106, 116) but is himself penetrated by his own arrow in the end.

The recurring theme of rape throughout *las Negras* is important by making visible the imbalance of power along racial and gender lines in colonial Latin American societies, including Puerto Rico. The final story, “Los amamantados” has been largely unexamined because it was published in 2016 in the fourth edition of *las Negras*, but it is perhaps the greatest testament to the collection’s revision of Puerto Rico and Latin America’s cultural myths of *mestizaje*. Unlike the original three stories, “Los amamantados” takes place explicitly in San Juan. It is narrated in third-person free indirect discourse mainly from the perspectives of Petra, who is enslaved as a wet nurse, and Jonás Cartagena, who is the heir to a wealthy white landowning hacienda. Petra is assigned to take care of her young captor from infancy. In his adolescence, Jonás interacts with a classmate who says that “Dice mi padre que las negras están aquí solo para montarlas. Se disfrutan mejora que las blancas” (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 140). These words provoke Jonás’s loss of innocence, as well as the loss of his fleeting interest in abolitionism. Just as Richard Jackson argues that Carlos Guillermo Wilson “overloads with *tremendista* description to better shock and sensitize the complacent reader of today to the ‘white’ horrors of the past,” (“Remembering the ‘Disremembered’” 135), I argue that Arroyo Pizarro achieves a similar effect by combining elements of motherhood with sexual violence: “Jonás se arrodilla, y ante la cascada cremosa pega sus labios. Se los echa a la boca. Succiona fuerte y comienza a mamar,

²⁵⁰ Arroyo Pizarro herself acknowledges *Fe en disfraz* as one of “las maravillosas obras que me inspiraron” (*las Negras* 147).

mientras cubiertas las mejillas de lágrimas, le abre las piernas” (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 145).

The final story’s final passage suggests that Jonás rapes Petra, who had acted as a mother to him, thereby compounding the horror of rape with that of incest.

“Los amamantados” thus falls outside of previous analyses of *las Negras*, as well as other works by Arroyo Pizarro such as *Yo Makandal* (2017), which privilege the figure of the African woman warrior. Whereas the recurring warrior figure in “Wanwe,” “Matronas,” and “Saeta” emphasizes black women’s strength and resourcefulness in the face of overwhelming brutality, Petra’s resignation to Jonás in “Los amamantados” instead has the effect of emphasizing what Arroyo Pizarro herself describes as “los límites del devenir de personajes femeninos que desafían las jerarquías de poder” (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 148). “Los amamantados” also illustrates the disparity between white men and black women’s points of view. The stereotype that black women enjoy sex more than white women (“se disfrutan más”) is negated by the short story’s first sentence, that “Para Petra es difícil aceptar las actuales acciones del señorito” (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 137). For Petra, there is nothing enjoyable about the incestuous act to which she is forcibly submitted by Jonás. Like *Cecilia Valdés*, “Los amamantados” proposes a critique of colonial society through the theme of incest but aims at the twenty-first century reader. Its treatment of sexual violence continues to be more explicit than in nineteenth century literature and further combats contemporary myths of racial harmony with the reality of slavery from black women’s perspectives.

The Authority of *las Negras*

The final story in *las Negras* thus deepens the book’s recurring theme of rape and violence as a means of maintaining white colonial control in Latin America. Previous studies on

las Negras have tended to focus on the themes of black women's resistance, agency, and subversion in the first three stories, but agency is also expressed through the acts of bearing witness to violence through narration. In other words, black women are not just the passive receptors of violence but rather serve as agents in narrating suffering as a critique of slavery behind the cultural narrative that, in Latin America, "Iberian colonial practices bequeathed the region a relatively benign form of slavery, fluid racial identification, and widespread intermixture" (Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 264). Narrating violence from black women's perspectives unmasks this cultural narrative as the product of colonial patriarchal hegemony that persists to this day. Doris Sommer's book *Proceed with Caution, when Engaged by Minority Writers in the Americas* (1999) leans into moments where literature creates a respectful distance between the text and the reader: "A variety of rhetorical moves can hold readers at arm's length or joke at their pretense of mastery, to propose something different from knowledge. Philosophers have called it acknowledgement. Others call it respect" (xi). Such rhetorical moves include Rigoberta Menchú's refusal to reveal her people's "secrets" to the reader in *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú, y así me nació la conciencia* (115), and Jesusa Palancares's (Josefina Borquez's) final send-off in *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* (138). In both *testimonios*, the *gestores* (Elizabeth Burgos and Elena Poniatowska) preserve their distance from the informants in the text. In "Literary Liberties: The Authority of Afrodescendant Authors," Sommer extends her argument to Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía*, in which she argues that the author "doubled himself as the predictable object of liberal pity and also the surprisingly authoritative subject of his own narrative" (327). As evidence, she describes one scene in which Manzano "paused at a particularly painful moment that he would not describe":

Still enslaved, the writer performs a refusal, a self-authorizing discretion even under his benefactor's pressure to reveal everything. In control now as he narrates, Manzano records an unguarded moment when he attacked the slave drivers who made him watch as his own mother was beaten. He writes of his brutal handling, 'I was about to lose my life ... But let us pass over the rest of this painful scene in silence.'" (Sommer, "Literary Liberties" 327)

Beyond *Autobiografía*, Sommer observes that this maneuver is common in slave narratives such as Douglass's and Jacobs's as well,²⁵¹ but for Toni Morrison such refusals are not "self-authorizing" (Sommer, "Literary Liberties" 327). Rather, Morrison argues that "Whenever there was an unusually violent incident, or a scatological one, or something 'excessive,' one finds the writer taking refuge in the literary conventions of the day" (90). In the nineteenth century, such conventions were defined by what William Luis calls the dominant white aesthetic, in which Europeans and Eurodescendants set the boundaries of what was acceptable and what was not in social, political, and literary discourse (*Literary Bondage* 65).

George Reid Andrew's *Afro-Latin America: Black Lives, 1600-2000* (2016) offers a direct rebuttal to Sommer: "very few authors are driven primarily by a desire to conceal. Most seek to communicate" (45). In *las Negras*, power is in the act of describing the horror of slavery. Detailed descriptions of the subjugation of black women's bodies in the stories is not a testament to their powerlessness. On the contrary, these descriptions attest to the black women's power in narrating the past from their own perspectives. The story that best illustrates black women's power over the narration is "Matronas" since it is narrated in the first person by Ndizi, who

²⁵¹ Although whereas Sommer argues that "Manzano's strategy recalled passages written by former slave Frederick Douglass and by the escapee Harriet Jacobs," it would be more correct to say that Douglass and Jacobs's strategy recall Manzano's since Manzano wrote *Autobiografía* in 1835, and Douglass and Jacobs did not write their narratives until 1845 and 1861, respectively ("Literary Liberties" 327).

exercises her power to reveal or conceal information as she sees fit. Even in concealing certain information from other characters in the story, Ndizi simultaneously reveals it to the reader. One of her secrets is her knowledge of several languages, including Spanish, even though she is not a “ladina”²⁵² but rather a “bozal” or captured African. She confides her knowledge of colonizer’s language in the reader,²⁵³ but not (initially) in Fray Petro, who pays regular visits to Ndizi in prison. Upon their first meeting, Ndizi pretends that she does not speak Spanish²⁵⁴ to protect her secrets: “Debo tener cuidado con este hombre, anoto en mi cabeza. Debo recordar no contarle jamás todo lo que sé, lo que he visto, lo que he sentido” (73). Ndizi’s concealment of her knowledge and feelings from Fray Petro illustrate Doris Sommer’s concept of “the authority of Afrodescendant authors,” but paradoxically, Ndizi’s first person narration reveals to the reader the very knowledge that she conceals from Petro. Ndizi’s authority is thus reflected in not only what she conceals from other characters in the story but also what she chooses to reveal to the reader as the story’s central protagonist and narrator.

Ndizi continues to conceal information from Fray Petro, but she also gradually reveals more and more to both him and the reader throughout the story. This technique has the effect of building suspense leading up to the ultimate revelation at the end of the story that she had led a conspiracy to destroy slavery on the island by murdering black children. At first, Ndizi responds to Petro in Yoruba to perform the role of the African bozal (Arroyo Pizarro 73), but when Petro shows that he knows Yoruba as well, she pretends to not know Yoruba either (Arroyo Pizarro

²⁵² In this case, a descendant of Africans who is born in the Spanish colonies and is raised in Spanish language and customs.

²⁵³ “No soy de la casta de los mandingos, pero cierto tipo de lealtad me hizo no dejarles y fungí como traductora ya que varios no entendían el idioma de los amos. Aunque no soy ladina lo entiendo a la perfección” (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 71).

²⁵⁴ ¿Hablas castellano?, pregunta y me le quedo mirando esa primera vez. Finjo que no he comprendido y el capataz me pega en el rostro alegando que sí sé” (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 72).

76).²⁵⁵ Her goal is ultimately to protect the secret that she possesses deadly knowledge, namely her ability to concoct poison from plants (Arroyo Pizarro 77).²⁵⁶ In these instances, Ndizi continues to confide in the reader the knowledge that she conceals from Petro, thereby illustrating the power that she exercises over her own narrative. However, she does not conceal everything. She allows him a glimpse of her linguistic skills by speaking to him once in French and Igbo (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 82), and she weeps when she reveals that she has lost faith in the Orishas (84-5). She also confides in him her theory of oppression: “El problema de los que oprimen, Fray Petro, no es la opresión en sí, es la subestimación que hacen del oprimido” (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 86-87). By allowing society to underestimate her power within the positions as “curandera, yerbera, sobadora, comadrona,” and “todas las faenas de una esclava doméstica,” she places herself in a position of power to attack slavery without anyone suspecting (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 90). She only reveals the taboo methods of her resistance to slavery—to both Petro and the reader—at the end of the story, when her job of fomenting a full-blown rebellion is complete. Ndizi’s authority over her narrative therefore derives from not only concealing her role as the leader of a slave rebellion but also revealing it in the end.

Petro himself reveals that his motivation in visiting Ndizi in prison is to write a slave narrative, but it is ultimately Ndizi, and not Petro, who exercises control over her narrative. This distinguishes “Matronas” from nineteenth century slave narratives that were written or edited by white abolitionists. To convince Ndizi to allow him to write her narrative, Petro assures her that his sole interest is to help her by writing about her suffering. He continues by saying that other

²⁵⁵ “Finge no saber yoruba. El papel de Petro: ‘Son una serie de papeles en los que ha escrito algunas fases en yoruba. Me las lee y le contesto. Pausadamente. Imitando el desconocimiento que demuestran los novicios de una lengua’” Arroyo Pizarro (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 76).

²⁵⁶ Ndizi confides in the reader that “le cuento cualquier cosa, con pocos detalles, pero en realidad sé cocinar todo lo que me pongan de frente, y de modo exquisito. Puedo incluso confeccionar veneno de lenta interacción, aderezado con guarapo y canela” (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 77).

priests across the Caribbean have used this strategy to denounce slavery, and he will keep her proficiency with languages a secret:

Petro me asegura que guardará el secreto. Lo único que quiere es saber, documentar esta violencia que se ha desatado en la humanidad, explica, esta histórica bestialidad. Hay frailes en otras islas escribiendo crónicas sobre los eventos; yo quiero narrar este. Nos hacemos pasar por colaboradores de la corona, pero no es así. Juro que no voy a traerte líos” (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 84).

The “other islands” that Petro mentions probably refer to the British West Indies.²⁵⁷ West Indian slave narratives like *The History of Mary Prince* also deal with themes of abuse in captivity,²⁵⁸ but Ndizi’s narrative represents the sexual violence that often (literally) fell outside of abolitionist authors’ field of vision. “Matronas” thus not only condemns slavery but also suggests the shortcomings of slave narratives and testimonial novels by white authors. When Petro leaves the prison after his first meeting with Ndizi in “Matronas,” she relates that she is raped by the guards after he leaves: “Entonces el capataz y el sereno vuelven a golpearme, a amarrarme y a penetrarme con sus penes rancios” (Arroyo Pizarro, *las Negras* 74). This ending to the chapter illustrates the grotesque sexual violence, captured by the description of “penes rancios,” that occurred just outside of abolitionists’ periphery. “Matronas” thus not only condemns slavery but also suggests the shortcomings of slave narratives and testimonial novels by white authors.

²⁵⁷ Nicole Aljoe’s book *Creole Testimonies: Slave Narratives from the British West Indies, 1709-1838* shows that many white abolitionists in the Caribbean wrote slave narratives from the perspectives of enslaved Black West Indians. Some of these West Indian slave narratives include *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), which was written by Thomas Pringle so that “good people in England might hear from a slave what a slave had felt and suffered” (Gates, *The Classic Slave Narratives* 229).

²⁵⁸ Other “creole testimonies” that Aljoe analyzes include *Joanna, or the Female Slave, a West Indian Tale* (1824), *Negro Slavery as Described by a Negro* (1831), and *A Narrative of Events, Since the First of August 1834, by James Williams, an Apprenticed Labourer in Jamaica* (1837).

In sum, Ndizi exercises control over her own narrative through not only the concealment of information as Sommer suggests but also through its disclosure. Revealing violence outside of Petro's gaze further attests to Ndizi's power over her narrative. Her narration in "Matronas" thus subverts the control that white abolitionists had exercised over slave narratives like the one Petro proposes to write. Through his reunions with Ndizi, Petro does not discover the narrative of black victimhood that he sought. Rather, he himself becomes part of Ndizi's narrative about how she organized herself and other black women to use their power against the slavery system. The three other stories in *las Negras* also narrate black women's perspectives through free indirect discourse. The narrator in "Wanwe" narrates its protagonist's memories of her capture and childhood in Africa. Rape is narrated from the perspectives of Tshanwe and Petra in "Saeta" and "Los amamantados," respectively. In all four stories, exposing violence from black women's perspectives is not an act of submission but an act of power. Black women's suffering and humiliation are central themes in *las Negras*, but the narrators' condemnation of slavery is an affirmation of their personhood despite their enslavers' attempts to rob them of their humanity through violence.

Black Women's (Her)Stories

The power and authority to narrate slavery from black women's perspectives belongs not only to the fictional and fictionalized characters in *Fe en disfraz* and *las Negras* but ultimately to the authors themselves. Mayra Santos-Febres and Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro use literary narrative to make necessary interventions in Latin American history and social memory. By narrating slavery in Latin America from black women's perspectives, their works represent a "decolonial shift"—as Walter Mignolo has called it in *The Idea of Latin America* (2005)—in three concrete

ways.²⁵⁹ First, they do not merely appropriate conventions of slave testimonies but instead transgress the discursive limitations of eighteenth and nineteenth century legal and abolitionist discourse. Second, their representations of violence reveal the issue of rape behind what Isar Godreau calls the “politics of erasure” in which predominantly male scholars and intellectuals during the twentieth century like Gilberto Freyre and Frank Tannenbaum argued that widespread racial mixture in Latin American societies were part and parcel of racial harmony or “racial democracy.” Lastly, their focus on black women’s perspectives “fills the silence” in not only the slave narrative genre but also male-centric historical studies such as Guillermo Baralt’s. *Fe en disfraz* and *las Negras* also contribute to the “politics of un-erasure” by revising “history” to account for black women’s “her-stories.”

As I mention in the introduction to this chapter, black women have always been present in Puerto Rican literature, but there is a new generation of black Puerto Rican authors who are creating needed representations of black women, by black women. This generation includes not only Mayra Santos-Febres and Yolanda Arroyo-Pizarro but also Yvonne Denis Rosario, whose book *Capá Prieto* (2009) is composed of twelve short stories and that reaffirm “la negritud puertorriqueña” by centering “hombres y mujeres afrodescendientes, en general de clase trabajadora” (Ramos Rosado 187). These stories tend to depict historical figures like Pura Belpré, “la primera mujer puertorriqueña negra que dirigió la sala infantil de la Biblioteca de Nueva York,” who is the protagonist of “La cucaracha y el ratón” (Ramos Rosado 187). *Capá Prieto* also involves enslaved fictional characters like the protagonist of “Ama de leche,” Josefa Osorio Villarán, who is an enslaved wet nurse like Petra in Arroyo Pizarro’s “Los

²⁵⁹ Mignolo acknowledges the intellectual debt he pays to Frantz Fanon or “Fanonism,” which he defines as “a critical current of thought (parallel with and complementary to, but not reducible to, “Marxism”) that is producing a decolonial shift in the domain of knowledge and action inspired by the twentieth century Maritanian intellectual and activist Frantz Fanon” (xi).

amamantados.” Slavery is only one theme amongst many others in *Capá Prieto*. According to Millicent A. Bolden, the collection’s overarching themes include

the significance of the past for understanding the present and the future; the notable contributions of people of African descent to Puerto Rican society and culture; the value of the manual arts such as sewing, carpentry, and bookbinding; and the censure of social and economic discrimination, racism, ethnocentrism, and stereotypes” (Bolden 200).

Nevertheless, slavery continues to be a recurring theme in Yvonne Denis Rosario’s growing body of work. Published in the Spring 2018 edition of the Afro-Hispanic Review, her short story, “Guanábana cimarrona,” is dedicated to “nuestros ancestros” and is narrated by a junior archeologist on an expedition. She and Bárbara, a junior anthropologist, are the only two black women on the expedition. One of the more experienced archaeologists on the expedition earlier in the story had claimed that it was “imposible hallar en ese mangle evidencia de la existencia de cimarrones africanos, porque eran unos pocos los que se sublevaron” (Denis Rosario 184-185). However, the narrator and Bárbara serendipitously discover the remains of a nuclear family of *cimarrones*. Their discovery is not only an academic triumph but also tells the story of their ancestors and of their legacy rebellion, or *cimarronaje*, as the use of “nosotros” in the story’s final sentence suggests: “Porque todos, repetían, hemos resistido” (Denis Rosario 186).

Slavery is far from the only theme explored in twenty-first century Afro-Puerto Rican literary narrative, but it is an if not the most prevalent one. Because of their important contributions, a serious discussion of slavery in Afro-Latin American literary narrative would be incomplete without the inclusion of black Puerto Rican women authors. As the fields of slavery studies and Afro-Latin American studies continue to grow, it will be necessary to include Mayra Santos-Febres, Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, and Yvonne Denis Rosario in discussions of Afro-Latin

American literary narrative and in broader discussions of slavery in literature. The inclusion of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Puerto Rican authors in transnational concept of antislavery literature is essential because neither Cuba nor Puerto Rico is an island intellectually. The Caribbean is connected to a greater network of antislavery literature that includes not only North America but also South America. In other words, antislavery literature by black authors in Latin America encompasses an entire continent beyond the Caribbean.

CHAPTER 3

THE ANTISLAVERY CONTINENT: TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AFRO-SOUTH AMERICAN NARRATIVE

Y en América del Sur / al golpe de sus dolores / dieron los negros tambores / ritmos de esclavitud. -Nicomedes Santa Cruz²⁶⁰

Latina, / hispana, / sudamericana / con sangre africana latiendo en mis venas, / soy, ante todo, / un ser humano; / una mujer negra. -Cristina Rodríguez Cabral²⁶¹

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes that the major “African American experience” unfolded not only throughout the Caribbean but also South America (*Black in Latin America 2*). This chapter therefore explores how Afro-South American authors have continued to write about slavery in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Just as Luis writes that “the antislavery narrative did not end with the emancipation of slaves” in Cuba, the same could be said for various countries in South America (*Literary Bondage 3*). More African captives disembarked in South America than any other continent in the world. *Slave Voyages* estimates that nearly 5 million (4,864,373) disembarked in Brazil alone (Eltis and Richardson). It also estimates that 267,500 disembarked in the Spanish Circum-Caribbean, which includes not only the Caribbean islands but also Mexico, Central America, and South American Colombia and Venezuela (Sanz 1).²⁶² 67,235 disembarked in the Río de Plata region (Argentina and Uruguay), and 152,742 disembarked in the “Other” Spanish Americas throughout Central and South America (Eltis and Richardson).

²⁶⁰ “Ritmos negros del Perú,” 481.

²⁶¹ “Candombe de resistencia,” 3.

²⁶² See Ileana Sanz, “Early Groundings for a Circum-Caribbean Integrationist Thought” (2009). Sanz writes that “the last decade of the twentieth century heralds an important moment in the exploration of the relations, concepts and perceptions of what has been defined as the Circum or Wider Caribbean, a space which includes the insular Caribbean, together with the northern coastal states of South America, Central America, and the Caribbean coast of Mexico” (1).

These numbers help scholars understand the impact of slavery on Latin American societies, but literature helps readers understand the human stories behind the statistics. Literary narratives written by black authors in South America reflect not only the horrors of slavery but also the ways in which black people resisted the conditions of enslavement. Writing for the silenced is itself a form of resistance against slavery and its ongoing legacy. South America is thus what I call “the antislavery continent” because of the number and importance of antislavery works that Afro-South American authors have produced. I focus on Brazil and Colombia, but there are many South American countries where black authors have written about slavery from the colonial era through the present day. Úrsula de Jesús describes the hard labor that she performed not only as a slave but as a free servant in mid-seventeenth century Peru (Andrews, *Afro-Latin America* 48). *Las almas del purgatorio* is thus an early example of Afro-Peruvian antislavery narrative, but slavery continues to be a major theme Afro-Peruvian literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Slavery in Twentieth- and Twenty-First Century Afro-Peruvian Literature

The twentieth century antislavery novel *Matalaché* (1928),²⁶³ by Enrique López Albújar (1872-1966), vindicates the figure of the enslaved black man, José Manuel, over his enslaver, the cruel and monstrous Don Juan Francisco. Don Juan Francisco’s wickedness and tyranny is juxtaposed against José Manuel’s innocence and reason, which only infuriate Don Juan to the point that he kills José Manuel in a fit of rage. *Matalaché* is therefore like the nineteenth century antislavery narratives that portray their black protagonists as martyrs.²⁶⁴ Their moral superiority in contrast with the senselessness of their suffering are part and parcel of the antislavery

²⁶³ See Enrique López Albújar, “*de Matalaché*” (2011).

²⁶⁴ See, for example, Juan Francisco Manzano’s *Autobiografía* and Maria Firmina dos Reis’s *Úrsula*.

narratives' indictment of the slavery system. Slavery had been officially abolished in Peru in 1854, but the depiction of racism and religious hypocrisy in *Matalaché* hold a mirror to twentieth century Peruvian society. In the final moments of his life, José Manuel tells Don Juan that if he were white, he would not be in his situation but at church amongst a congregation of hypocrites.²⁶⁵ The vindication of José Manuel's character thus comes not only from his unjustified punishment and murder but also his courage in speaking truth to power—even if it costs him his life. His denouncement of the church's willingness to accept racism is a fierce criticism of not only the time in which the novel is set but also twentieth century Catholic Peruvian society.

The brutal depictions of slavery in López Albújar's work are important because they refute the myth that a relatively benign or "relaxed" version of slavery existed in Peru.²⁶⁶ Nicomedes Santa Cruz is another major figure in Afro-Peruvian literature whose depiction of slavery in his work refutes this myth. His decima poem "Ritmos negros del Perú" expresses the oppression of slavery through its diction ("amarguras y penas") and somber musicality set to the beat of chains ("Al compás de las cadenas / ritmos negros del Perú") (Santa Cruz 481). It also connects the history of slavery directly to the speaker's ancestors:

De África llegó mi abuela
vestida con caracoles
la trajeron lo' españoles
en un barco carabela.

²⁶⁵ "Si fuera blanco no estaría aquí sino en la iglesia, delante de un sacerdote y de mucha gente hipócrita" (López Albújar 489).

²⁶⁶ In *Black in Latin America* (2011), Gates writes about how various Peruvian scholars like Carlos Aguirre endorse the notion of a "more fluid" (97), "more relaxed," or "more flexible" (100) version of slavery in Peru, especially in Lima, where *jornaleros* or wage slaves did not necessarily endure the same harsh punishments as black people enslaved on haciendas. Like many other Latin American countries, Peru therefore has its own brand of the "benign slavery" myth.

La marcaron con candela,
la carimba fue su cruz.

The image of the branding iron as a cross casts the speaker's grandmother as a Christ-like figure and resonates with antislavery discourse through the words of Juan Francisco Manzano, "mis manos se atan como las de Jesucristo" (qtd. in Luis, *Autobiografía* 321). In continuation, Santa Cruz's poetry suggests that not just Peruvian but South American culture at large owes a debt to enslaved Africans' suffering: "Y en América del Sur / al golpe de sus dolores / dieron los negros tambores / ritmos de esclavitud. (Santa Cruz 481). In this way, "Ritmos negros del Perú" depicts not only the oppression of slavery but also the survival of African cultural heritage in Peruvian culture through music (el tamborete)²⁶⁷ and dance (la zamacueca).²⁶⁸ "Ritmos negros del Perú" is therefore both a condemnation of slavery and a celebration of black Peruvian culture. The tamborete and the zamacueca live on in Peruvian popular culture and in Santa Cruz's poetry itself. Martha Ojeda argues that "Nicomedes Santa Cruz (1925–1992) is notably the foremost Afro-Peruvian poet of the twentieth century and one of the most important representatives of the African legacy and its contribution to Peruvian national culture" because, through his poetry, he "challenged Peruvian intellectuals to rethink and redefine their conception of *peruanidad*".

The official discourses on *peruanidad*, up until the beginning of the twenty-first century, had essentially ignored the important role Blacks played in the formation of our national culture. Santa Cruz identified and called attention to prevalent Peruvian cultural practices that are examples of the African cultural legacy, such as the procession of Our Lord of Miracles and La Marinera (Peru's national dance). In doing so, Santa Cruz

²⁶⁷ Enslaved indigenous and black people suffer side by side but pass on their musical traditions to future generations: "... los indios con sus quenas / y el negro con tamborete / cantaron su triste suerte / al compás de las cadenas" (Santa Cruz 481-482).

²⁶⁸ "Murieron los negros viejos / pero entre la caña seca / se escucha su zamacueca" (Santa Cruz 482).

irrevocably transformed and decolonized our national imaginary by incorporating diverse and heterogeneous cultural histories. (120)²⁶⁹

Santa Cruz therefore shows that Africans' contributions to Peruvian culture were not limited to music and dance but included the poetry that he used to represent these traditions in literature.

By writing about Peru's African heritage, Santa Cruz "paved the way for contemporary Afro-Peruvian writers such as Lucía Charún-Illescas" (1959-), whose work also opens the concept of *peruanidad* to include Afrodescendant identity (Ojeda 120). Charún-Illescas's novel *Malambo* (2001) is named after "Lima's Black district" on the Rímac river, where enslaved Africans historically entered in la Ciudad de los Reyes and black Peruvians lived segregated at its margins.²⁷⁰ At the same time as Malambo is a place of oppression it is also "a place where Blacks find protection and fortitude" because they are able to practice their ancestral cultures outside of the control of the Spanish Inquisition (Heredia 81). In Malambo, Francisco Parra and his 11-year-old daughter Pancha seek the old painter Tomásón's help to escape slavery.²⁷¹ Like *Matalaché* and "Ritmos negros del Perú," *Malambo* deconstructs the myth of a "more relaxed" slavery in Peru. The conditions of slavery were even worse in the haciendas—such as the one in la Sierra where Parra was enslaved—than in the city.²⁷² Francisco becomes a *cimarrón* in hopes of procuring freedom for himself and Pancha, but the dire consequences of running away are

²⁶⁹ See Martha Ojeda's "Nicomedes Santa Cruz and Black Cultural Traditions in Peru: Renovating and Decolonising the National Imaginary," from *Critical Perspectives on Afro-Latin American Literature* (2011), edited by Antonio D. Tillis.

²⁷⁰ See Aida Heredia's "Yoruba Cosmology as Technique in *Malambo* by Lucía Charún-Illescas," from *Critical Perspectives on Afro-Latin American Literature* (2011), edited by Antonio D. Tillis: "The term 'Malambo' designates the compound built in 1633 in the district of San Lázaro, on the opposite side of the city of Lima, with the expressed purpose of housing incoming enslaved Africans as a measure to prevent diseases from spreading in Lima when slave traders brought their cargo into the city" (80).

²⁷¹ See Lucía Charún-Illescas, "de Malambo," in the *Black Peru: Literature, Art & Culture* edition of *Callaloo*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Spring, 2011), pp 470-473.

²⁷² Carlos Aguirre explains in *Black in Latin America* that "Slaves in plantation areas worked long hours, sometimes lived in miserable conditions, and were subjected to very harsh punishment. Urban slavery was generally more fluid — there was the possibility of freedom. Plantation slavery was more permanent — a static condition" (qtd. in Gates, *Black in Latin America* 97).

revealed when he goes to Lima to collect money from his aunt but is killed by a coachman, leaving Pancha in Malambo under Tomásón's care (Heredia 88).²⁷³ Neither Francisco nor Pancha achieve their freedom in the novel, illustrating the power of the slavery system in colonial Peruvian society (Heredia 89). Tomásón Bullambrosio himself is a cimarrón who had fled the Jesuit monastery of the Valle de Chincha that he describes as “the place of the merciless. Trap, whip and torture, nothing more than that” (qtd. in Heredia 90). Tomásón had received training in the Jesuit monastery as a painter of religious art, but this privilege did not come without abuse due to his status in society as a slave. Tomásón, Francisco, and Pancha's stories in *Malambo* all legitimize their *cimarronaje* and destabilize dominant historical narratives of slavery in Peru.

Like Santa Cruz's poetry, *Malambo* not only denounces slavery for its dehumanization of Afrodescendants but also celebrates Afro-Peruvian culture. A major theme in *Malambo* is the syncretism of Catholicism and what Aida Heredia calls “Yoruba sacred cosmology,” which she describes as being

characterized in the novel by the memory of the ancestors and the socialization among enslaved Africans of ways of apprehending the world through ancient oral tradition, botanical healing rites, the interaction between spirits and humans, and the notion of social space as spheres inhabited by the dead whose connections with the living, far from disappearing, are reaffirmed in daily life. (Heredia 77)

In the novel, Yoruba cosmology “vindicates the humanization of Africans and their descendants in Peru while it subverts the alienation to which they are subjected as enslaved individuals” (Heredia 77). *Malambo* therefore “brings into dialectical perspective the presence of Afro-

²⁷³ On the night that Francisco solicits his help, Tomásón reflects on the special risk that Francisco took by escaping slavery with his daughter: “Era la primera vez que veía un cimarrón con u escapan con sus criaturas, pero guaguas, no grandecitas. A la edad de Pancha son un lastre, caviló Tomásón contento de que Francisco Parra hubiera asumido tal riesgo” (Charún-Illescas 471).

descended people obscured by the racist practices that inform canonical Peruvian historiography” (Heredia 77). In dialogue with Ojeda’s discussion of *peruanidad*, Charún-Illescas’s novel is like Nicomedes Santa Cruz’s poetry in that it uses literature to correct the exclusion of blackness from Peruvian history and identity. It also brings antislavery discourse into the twenty-first century and contributes to the un-erasure of black people from Latin American history and identity. However, Charún-Illescas’s novel is not the only Latin American novel to express an Afrocentric worldview through its form and content, nor is it the first.

Slavery in Twentieth- and Twenty-First Century Afro-Colombian and Afro-Brazilian Literary Narrative

Changó, el gran putas (1983), by Afro-Colombian author Manuel Zapata Olivella (1920-2004), reflects not only the Yoruba cosmology worldview described by Heredia (77) but also the syncretistic Pan-African and Inter-American worldview of the “*Nuevo Muntu*,” the central theme of John Maddox’s book *Challenging the Black Atlantic: The New World Novels of Zapata Olivella and Gonçalves* (2020). The *Nuevo Muntu*, a play on words coined by Zapata Olivella, combines “Nuevo Mundo” in Spanish with “Muntu.” Maddox defines the *Nuevo Muntu* as “a vision of the Americas, or América, that unifies the history of the continent and makes the African diaspora its protagonist” (*Challenging the Black Atlantic* 2). Maddox argues that the *Nuevo Muntu* is more inclusive than Paul Gilroy’s concept of the Black Atlantic²⁷⁴ because it includes the African diaspora in not only the United States and West Indies but also Spanish and Portuguese America.

Like Yoruba cosmology, the concept of the *Nuevo Muntu* emphasizes Afrodescendant identity in the “New World,” and it even syncretizes European and African concepts in its very

²⁷⁴ See Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993).

name, “Nuevo” (New) and “Muntu” (Humanity). On *Malambo*, Heredia writes that “Charún-Illescas’s focus on Black spirituality as a legitimate way of being in the world is in itself a profoundly meaningful act in the affirmation of Black people’s humanity” (77). Similarly, Maddox argues that not only *Changó, el gran putas* but also *Um defeito de cor* (2006), by Afro-Brazilian author Ana Maria Gonçalves (1970-), humanize Afrodescendants’ diverse experiences and identities in the Americas by narrating the stories of the enslaved from the lens of syncretized African viewpoints emblemized by the concept of the *Nuevo Muntu*:

The points of view in Zapata and Gonçalves’s texts syncretize the timeless, mythical worldview of traditional sub-Saharan peoples with Western notions of historical evolution. *Muntu* is the singular of *bantu*, or “human,” rooting civilization in Africa. However, it is more fluid than “man” is and includes contact between everything surrounding the subject (nature, community) and interaction with the dead and the spirits. Humanity is thus able to communicate with the silenced enslaved of the past in these novels, or at least what these contemporary scholars understand of them, based on archival research as well as an understanding of syncretic oral traditions. In its texts the enslaved’s point of view, which is informed by an oral worldview, captivity, and a hybrid of Western logic with non-Western mythology, is represented. It goes beyond the territory of the nation due to the cultural mixture and frequent displacement. It empowers the enslaved and their descendants by showing that they have always been a part of the experience of the Americas. (Maddox, *Challenging the Black Atlantic* 2-3)

Maddox also notes that *Changó, el gran putas* and *Um defeito de cor* “have black authors, a twentieth- and twenty-first century phenomenon with important precursors” (*Challenging the Black Atlantic* 3). In a Latin American context, these precursors include ones hereto discussed in

this dissertation: Juan Francisco Manzano, Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua, Maria Firmina dos Reis, and Esteban Montejo.²⁷⁵ In a Brazilian context, another important precursor to *Um defeito de cor* is Carolina Maria de Jesus, who also wrote about the legacy of slavery in her own family through the figure of her grandfather. Like Chapter 2, this chapter analyzes twentieth and twenty-first century Afro-Latin American literary narrative in dialogue with its predecessors in not only a national but Inter-American context. Through embracing a syncretized Afrocentric worldview, the texts discussed here break the chains that bound their nineteenth-century precursors to merely denouncing the horrors of slavery and shrouding possible allusions to African spirituality in ambiguity.²⁷⁶

Slavery is thus the central preoccupation of Afro-Latin American literature from the nineteenth century through the present. The lives of the enslaved and their ways of seeing the world continue to inspire literary authors' works in across Latin America. Antislavery discourse remains committed to justice for the enslaved but reaches the pinnacle of its expression so far in South America. *Changó, el gran putas* and *Um defeito de cor* are Latin America's "biggest" antislavery narratives not only due to their immense size (696 pages and 951 pages, respectively) but also due to their immense application of literary imagination to the task of writing for the silenced. The novels involve the greatest amount of creative license out of any work analyzed in this dissertation so far, but they are not purely fictional. Rather, they retell nonfiction through the imaginative vantage point of fiction. This allows for both novels to "fill in the blanks that the slave narratives left," as Toni Morrison says in "The Site of Memory" (93-94). Morrison explains that "a very large part of my own literary heritage is the autobiography. In this country

²⁷⁵ As I discuss in Chapter 1, even if Baquaqua and Montejo did not literally write their narratives, they still exercised their authorship through their oral narrations.

²⁷⁶ See Matthew Pettway's book *Cuban Literature in the Age of Black Insurrection: Manzano, Plácido, and Afro-Latino Religion* (2019).

the print origins of Black literature (as distinguished from the oral origins) were slave narratives” (103). Just as Arna Bontemps argues in *The Great Slave Narratives* that African American narrative was founded on the narratives of ex-slaves, so does Toni Morrison.²⁷⁷ Early narratives of slavery have not only influenced contemporary African American literature in the United States but also contemporary Afro-Latin American fiction. *Changó, el gran putas* and *Um defeito de cor* also build on the slave narrative tradition in the Americas, and they do so in epic fashion through their broad historical scope.

Although the “neo-slave narrative” literary genre emerged from African American literary studies, some of its most ambitious and experimental examples come from Latin America. Borrowing the term coined by Ishmael Reed to describe his 1976 novel *Flight to Canada*, scholars of African American studies, Gates,²⁷⁸ classifies novels that reimagine the lives and experiences of the enslaved from their own perspectives as “neo-slave narratives.” These scholars include novels such as Morrison’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Beloved* (1983), but we might add Colson Whitehead’s *Underground Railroad*, which also won a Pulitzer Prize in 2016. In addition to depicting the “the interior life of people who didn’t write it,” as Morrison puts it in “The Site of Memory” (103), these novels also combine history with elements of the fantastic. *Beloved* is based on a newspaper report of a woman who murdered her children so that they

²⁷⁷ Referring to the slave narrative tradition, Bontemps writes that “Hindsight may yet disclose the extent to which this writing, this impulse, has been influential on subsequent American writing, if not indeed on America’s view of itself. Certainly neither Mark Twain nor Herman Melville escaped its influence completely, and writing by Black authors from James Weldon Johnson to Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin shows a profound indebtedness to this tradition” (xviii-xix). See also Robert Stepto’s *From Beyond the Veil* (second ed. 1992), Toni Morrison’s “The Site of Memory” (1995), and the introduction to Gates’s *The Classic Slave Narratives* (2012).

²⁷⁸ For more examples, see also “Beloved: A Womanist Neo-Slave Narrative; or Multivocal Remembrances of Things Past, from *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison’s Beloved* (1998), edited by Barbara H. Solomon; *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered* (1999), by Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu; and *Callaloo*’s special issue on the neo-slave narrative, Vol. 40, Iss. 4, (Fall 2017). In this issue, John Maddox also includes *Um defeito de cor* under the neo-slave narrative umbrella and argues that it challenges Paul Gilroy’s term “The Black Atlantic” as an Anglocentric concept.

would not be enslaved. One of those children, named Beloved, comes back as a ghost, thereby producing the effect of slavery's haunting legacy. *The Underground Railroad* puts a spin on the network of secret routes that enslaved black people in the US South followed to freedom in Canada and free states. In the novel, these routes are literally an underground system of railroads. Like *Beloved*, the novel focuses on a female protagonist, Cora, who takes refuge in the railroad after killing her captor. By imagining the lives and experiences of the enslaved beyond the limitations of the nineteenth-century slave narrative, *Beloved* and *The Underground Railroad* represent some of the most prominent examples of the neo-slave narrative genre in a US context.

Published four years before *Beloved* and thirty-three years before *The Underground Railroad*, *Changó, el gran putas* also combines elements of myth and history to narrate slavery and its legacy in the Americas. The novel uses fiction to take a sweeping look at black history through the perspectives of not only its most prominent actors but also their ancestors and their deities, the “biggest” among whom being Changó himself. In this way, *Changó, el gran putas* fits the description of a neo-slave narrative while also expanding this genre to include Afro Latin-American perspectives beyond the US African American novel. Like many slave narratives, Part One of *Changó* begins with representations of Africa and of the slave trade. From the slave ship revolt of Part One, the narration passes through the Benkos Biojo’s rebellion in Colombia, the Haitian Revolution, and the African ancestry of several Latin American historical figures. Whereas it begins with the origins of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in the fifteenth century, the novel arrives at the crossroads between the United States’ Civil Rights and Black Power movements during the second half of the twentieth century. The novel thus draws a trajectory of history that parallels the slave narrative arc from slavery to freedom, but the struggle continues after the novel’s conclusions. *Changó* expands the neo-slave genre through

not only its content but also its form. The living, the dead, and the divine all participate in the unfolding of black history. *Changó* therefore both exemplifies and transcends the neo-slave narrative genre by adding the dimension of African religion and mythology to a reimagining of black history from an Afro-centric point of view.

Changó, el gran putas and *Um defeito de cor* build on multiple traditions. The focus of this chapter is on their engagement with the transnational slave narrative tradition, but their roots are planted in Afro-Colombian and Afro-Brazilian literature, respectively. Candelario Obeso is an important poetic precursor to Zapata Olivella as “Colombia’s first major writer of African descent” (Prescott 3).²⁷⁹ The themes of his poetry include slavery and race. The stanza “Negro nací. La noche aterradora trasmitió / su color sobre mi cara; / pero al teñir mi desgraciado cuerpo / dejó una luz sobre el cristal de mi alma” is attributed to Obeso, but Laurence Prescott argues that it is a misattribution by Vicente Caraballo in his biographical study *El negro Obeso*. The stanza comes from “Amor de negro” by the Mexican poet Joaquín Villalobos (Prescott 6). Even though “Negro nací” is not his, Obeso does address the theme of black identity in his poem “Serenata.” With “the insistent, unwavering voice of one who speaks as a free and equal citizen both for the masses and his individual self,” the speaker of the poem declares the end of slavery and that black people are now as free as white people: ““Ya pasó er tiempo / Re loj eclavos; / Somo hoi tan libre / Como lo branco...”” (qtd. in Prescott 8).²⁸⁰ The poem’s construction of an individual and collective voice of the formerly enslaved declaring their status as free persons destabilizes the argument that there are only a few slave narratives in Latin America. “Serenata” is a poem, not prose; and it does not deal with the horrors of slavery per se, but it declares black

²⁷⁹ See Laurence E. Prescott’s “‘Negro Nací’: Authorship and Voice in Verses Attributed to Candelario Obeso” (1993) in the *Afro-Hispanic Review*.

²⁸⁰ For more analysis of Obeso’s “Serenata,” see María del Pilar Melgarejo’s “The Production of Multiple Consciousness: Candelario Obeso and Linton Kwesi Johnson” (2013).

and white equality and the end of the time of “slaves.” Moreover, the title implicitly suggests the joy of the “serenade” in contrast with the sorrow of slavery. “Serenata” therefore shows that black authors addressed themes of slavery and freedom in Colombian literature before the twentieth century. From a national perspective, Obeso broke ground in the antislavery tradition in Afro-Colombian literature to which *Changó, el gran putas* contributes over a century later.²⁸¹

Um defeito de cor has many prominent precedents in a Brazilian context. The novel’s original source materials are an autobiographical letter “Carta a Lúcio de Mendonça” and a poem “A minha mãe” by abolitionist poet-lawyer Luís Gama. His mother, Luísa Mahin, supposedly fought in the Malê Revolt in Bahia in 1835. She generally expresses “the common desire to fill the gaps in the history of slavery from the slaves’ point of view with empowering myths to support the political movements of the moment,” but “there is no evidence she existed” (Maddox, *Challenging the Black Atlantic* 82). In his book, Maddox traces her trajectory “from poetry to history” (*Challenging the Black Atlantic* 85). João José Reis, “the leading historian on the Revolta dos Malês,” writes that “the heroic inflation of Mahin to rebel leader is “‘um misto de realidade possível, ficção abusivo e mito libertário’” (Maddox, *Challenging the Black Atlantic* 89). Nevertheless, Luísa Mahin has ultimately grown as an important figure in Brazilian intellectual discourse not despite but because historians like José Reis have questioned her existence. Maddox mentions other important contributors to her mythology like Pedro Malmon, Arthur Ramos, and most importantly, “the Black feminists of the 1980s” who “recreated Luísa Mahin for their own political purposes, which would align with Gonçalves’s own” (*Challenging*

²⁸¹ Maddox observes that Zapata Olivella himself called Obeso’s poetry a “‘merienda cotidiana’ (daily snack) for a mulatto elite that denied their blackness” (55). Zapata Olivella preferred instead Jorge Artel, whom he saw as a “rupture with Colombia’s other well-known black poet, Candelario Obeso (1849-1884),” because “Artel used blackness to foment the overthrow of oppressive structures” (55). Nevertheless, in the same edition of *The Afro-Hispanic Review* that Zapata Olivella published his essay, William Luis places Obeso alongside Juan Francisco Manzano as “meritorious authors” who deserve “their rightful place among classic or canonical authors” (5).

the Black Atlantic 90). Two black women poets associated with the Quilomboje literary group who wrote about Luísa Mahin are Miriam Alves and Alziara Rufino. Alves's "Mahin amanhã" (1986) and Rufino's "Luiza Mahin" (1988) have the effect of "molding the life of a woman who may not have existed to create community and implement political change for women in Brazil" (Maddox, *Challenging the Black Atlantic* 92). They contribute to Mahin as a powerful legendary warrior figure. Gonçalves follows in their footsteps, but her "sprawling and human narrative sometimes confirms and sometimes challenges this background of constant heroism and rebelliousness" (Maddox, *Challenging the Black Atlantic* 94). *Um defeito de cor* thus has a humanizing effect in its portrayal of Luísa Mahin as not only a symbol of "strong black women" and "black female rebels" (Maddox, *Challenging the Black Atlantic* 90) but also as "Kehinde," a human being with whom the reader can identify and empathize.

Um defeito de cor is thus unique in its approach to a tradition of antislavery writing in Brazil, but there are many more Afro-Brazilian narratives that depict slavery from the perspective of the enslaved. Maddox calls Gama's "Carta a Lucio de Mendonça" "a text of close parentage to the slave narrative" (*Challenging the Black Atlantic* 87). Another text that fits the same description is Esperança Garcia's letter to the governor of Piauí (1770). The letter is not an abolitionist document written for the reading public, but it does aim to move the sympathies of its target reader with details about abuses suffered under her current captor. Garcia's letter represents an early text in a rich lineage of Afro-Brazilian women's antislavery writing to which *Um defeito de cor* contributes significantly. Also contributing to this tradition are not only Maria Firmina dos Reis in the nineteenth century²⁸² but also Carolina Maria de Jesus and Conceição Evaristo in the twentieth. Slavery in their works combat the narratives of harmonious slavery,

²⁸² See Chapter 1 for my analysis of Maria Firmina dos Reis's *Úrsula*.

mestizaje / mestiçagem, and “racial democracy” in a Brazilian and wider Latin American context.

There are many more authors that are worthy of analysis in the context of Afro-South American literature beyond the ones mentioned in this introduction. US-based Afro-Uruguayan poet Cristina Rodríguez Cabral (1959-) addresses black women’s collective historical experiences of enslavement and resistance throughout Latin America in her collection *Memoria y resistencia* (2016). The title poem “Memoria y resistencia” and its references to the *Casa Grande*, *Senzala*, and Orixás reflect the impact of the author’s travels to Brazil on her work, as well as the ways in which her poetry creates a space for the recognition of black women’s experiences throughout Latin America (Valero 153).²⁸³ Rodríguez Cabral is thus a not only Afro-Uruguayan but also simultaneously cosmopolitan poet whose expression of black womanhood and human experience transcend national borders. Nevertheless, this chapter’s focus on Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Colombian narrative provides more than sufficient evidence of slavery’s enormous impact on South American culture, society, and literature. These works analyzed further problematize the scholarly consensus that there are few slave narratives in Latin America. Antislavery literature by black authors has proliferated in not only the Caribbean but also South America beyond the nineteenth century. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Afro-South American literary narrative further contributes to black Latin Americans’ collective social memory through the expansion of antislavery discourse to include broader literary experimentation and more black women’s perspectives.

²⁸³ For an interview in which Rodríguez Cabral talks about Brazil’s impact on her work and life, see “Cristina Rodríguez Cabral: el proceso continuo de la identidad y su proyección poética,” by Silvia Valero (2016). It was in Brazil that Rodríguez Cabral says, “descubrí mi negritud” (qtd. in Valero 153).

The first example considered at length here is Carolina Maria de Jesus. Maddox mentions Carolina in his analysis of Luísa Mahin: “A Wikipedia article presents her with the face of Carolina Maria de Jesus to tie her to literature and black female leadership” (*Challenging the Black Atlantic* 93). Carolina is widely recognized as an important figure in Afro-Brazilian literature. She was even featured in Mangueira’s 2019 Carnaval samba parade along with many other black historical and literary figures, including Dandara, Esperança Garcia, Luísa Mahin, and Marielle Franco (Valéria Mendonça). It is a testament to Carolina’s status as a “heroína negra do Brasil” that her image would be associated with Luísa Mahin (Arraes),²⁸⁴ but Carolina is not a major part of Maddox’s study. It is therefore necessary to recognize her contributions to antislavery literature here. Slavery is a central element of her work due to the memory of her grandfather from when she was a child. Passages depicting Benedito are some of the best examples of the simultaneous testimonial and aesthetic value of her prolific writing.

I. The African Socrates: Benedito José da Silva in the Posthumously Published Manuscripts of Carolina Maria de Jesus

O vovo pediu: não é preciso vestir o luto. O luto está é na alma, na saudade e no coração.
-Carolina Maria de Jesus²⁸⁵

Carolina Maria de Jesus (1914 – 1977)²⁸⁶ is most widely recognized for having written about her personal reflections on life at the margins of Brazilian society in *Quarto de despejo*, but an overlooked aspect of her work are her memoirs depicting her maternal grandfather,

²⁸⁴ See Jarid Arraes’s *Heroínas negras do Brasil* (2016).

²⁸⁵ “O Sócrates africano,” 223.

²⁸⁶ Carolina questions the year of her birth in *Diário de Bitita*. “No dia 27 de agosto de 1927 o vovô faleceu. Minha mãe disse-me que eu estava com seis anos. Será que eu nasci no ano de 1921? Há os que dizem que nasci no ano de 1914” (147). However, official records show that he was in fact born in 1914. “‘Certifico que, às fls 99 do livro 12, sob nº de Ordem 203, foi lavrado o assento de nascimento de Carolina Maria de Jesus, do sexo feminino, nascida no dia quatorze (14) de março de mil novecentos e quatorze (1914), filha de João Cândido e de Dona Maria Carolina de Jesus.’” (qtd. in Farias 15-16).

Benedito José da Silva. Benedito is a major figure in her manuscripts that were published posthumously under various titles. *Diário de Bitita*, the autobiographical short story “O Sócrates africano” and the poem “Meu avô” all depict Benedito as a naturally gifted man who was prevented from reaching his potential in life because he was forced to continue living under conditions of semi-slavery well into the twentieth century in Brazil’s rural interior.

In *Carolina: uma biografia* (2017), published by Malê, Tom Farias²⁸⁷ describes what these conditions looked like for black men and women who lived through the turn of the twentieth century:

Nas Minas Gerais do final do século 19, algumas cidadezinhas pareciam ainda viver sob o jugo do período cruel da escravidão. Era natural, mesmo após a Abolição, ou Triângulo Mineiro, por exemplo, encontrar o homem ou a mulher, ambos negros, nos serviços mais ordinários, pesados, sempre braçais, e em geral vestidos de forma rota, maltrapilha, escravidão na aparência. Era natural, igualmente, ver negros e negras sem frequentar escolas, analfabetos de pai e de mãe, sem casas que não fosse a de chão batido, de telhado coberto de palhas ou de capim, com paredes de estuques, ou barro socado.

Os trabalhadores negros sacramentanos tinham, a rigor, um labor diário muito desumano, praticamente sob o duro látigo, mesmo sob o sol forte ou a chuva torrencial. Ordinariamente, insalubres, as tarefas no núcleo urbano ou na chamada “roça”, na grossa maioria das vezes, não pagava o prato de comida, nem de longe o teto para o descanso merecido. A origem escrava era o registro ancestral que marcava a vida da grande maioria dessa população, desde os seus primórdios, no século 18, ainda sob o domínio dos bandeirantes. (Farias 11)

²⁸⁷ As a biographer, Farias specializes in prominent Afro-Brazilians in history and literature. He also wrote biographies of João Cruz e Souza and José do Patrocínio.

It is significant that these are the first two paragraphs of Carolina's most recent biography. The social background that Farias describes represents the conditions in which Benedito lived and Carolina was raised.

It is also significant that *Carolina: uma biografia* begins with the history of slavery in Brazil. Farias's choice reflects a shift in Carolina studies to understand her work not only in the context of urban poverty but in the greater historical context of slavery. Farias summarizes Brazil's "ciclo escravista bastante intenso até meados de 1700" (11). He analyzes Brazil as a unique case in independence and liberation movements throughout the Americas sparked by the declaration of independence in Saint Domingue: "Ocorreu uma série de movimentos abolicionistas e de outras ordens libertadoras no mundo inteiro (menos entre nós), tomando conta de lugares como São Domingos, no Haiti, já a partir de 1791, sob a liderança do ex-escravo Toussaint-Louverture, que decretou a abolição daquela região mas não sem antes de cortar a cabeça de brancos de três exércitos imperiais" (Farias 11). What followed was a series of antislavery laws on both sides of the Atlantic:

Já em 1807, o Império Britânico e os Estados Unidos acabaram com o tráfico em seus territórios. No ano de 1815, em um congresso realizado em Viena, com a presença e o apoio de países como a Rússia, França, Grã-Bretanha, Áustria, Suécia e Portugal, foi declarado "ilegal o comércio internacional de escravos". Em seguida, as colônias espanholas da América, desde o início do século 19, foram declarando sua independência e abolindo a escravidão de seus domínios: nos anos 1820, Chile, Peru, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panamá, Guatemala, Bolívia e México. (Farias 11-12)

The abolition of slavery in these countries in Latin America as well as "Colômbia (1851), Havaí (1852), Jamaica e Venezuela (1854), Peru e Moldávia (1855), Índia (1860) e Rússia (1861)," as

well as the United States (1865), pressured the Empire of Brazil to abolish slavery. However, “O Brasil, mísope à vista do progresso das ideias, foi o último país a abolir a escravidão, em 1888” (Farias 12).

Amidst these global shifts, slave-owning whites migrated Westward from urban areas like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro to rural ones like Sacramento, Minas Gerais, the birthplace of Carolina Maria de Jesus (Farias 12).²⁸⁸ Despite the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the proclamation of the Brazilian Republic in 1889, the remoteness of rural Brazil permitted the continued practice of *de facto* slavery (Farias 14, 18).²⁸⁹ White supremacy in rural Brazil represents the context of Carolina Maria de Jesus’s upbringing:

Em síntese, os negros escravizados dessa região do Rio das Velhas, estariam ligados na sua origem, à origem da família de Carolina Maria de Jesus. Tais negros, associados ao garimpo do ouro e à agricultura de subsistência, lavoura e criação de gado, no final do século 19 e começo do século 20, por ocasião do nascimento de Carolina, passaram à condição de diarista ou trabalhadores domésticos.

²⁸⁸ “No limiar do século 20, a minúscula Sacramento, saída há pouco da escravidão, recebeu fortemente os impactos dessas grandes transformações sociais, no caso a mudança brusca do regime monárquico para o republicano. Mudanças na política, mudanças na economia: a migração da ária mineradora, no garimpo do ouro e pedras preciosas, para a da agricultura, com a lavoura e criação de gados. Essa mudança representou um movimento violento de saída de fazendeiros e seus escravos para o oeste mineiro como Desemboque, onde teve início toda a sorte de fundação de vilas e de cidades. Em 1872, por exemplo, o censo brasileiro registrava 1.310.806 cidadãos africanos e seus descendentes brasileiros escravizados, concentrados 61% em Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Bahia e Rio de Janeiro” (Farias 12).

²⁸⁹ “... na virada do século 19 para o 20, não havia mudado muito a sorte do burgo nem de seus poucos mais de 10 mil habitantes. O tempo em Sacramento, estava bastante estagnado, para não dizer totalmente atrasado. Tudo permanecia como nos primórdios escravistas, de mistura com Colônia e o Império. Tanto nas relações sociais, quanto nas relações do mundo do trabalho. A diferença permanecia única e crítica: o pobre (negros na sua esmagadora maioria) continuava a ser pobre, muitas vezes miserável, como na época do eito, e o branco (na sua esmagadora minoria) continuava a ser rico, abastado e preconceituoso, como quando era senhor de negros africanos e brasileiros escravizados. Raramente era amável e acolhedor com a população escravizada ou simplesmente negra” (Farias 14).

Ou seja, os negros mineiros desse período do desenvolvimento de Sacramento, cidades pioneiras, continuaram à margem da sociedade local, explorados de todas as maneiras e conveniências, sem direitos, como no tempo do escravagismo. Práticas antigas de exploração da população negra se mantiveram com outra roupagem, mostrando o desnível social, o cunho de poder econômico sobre o humanitário. Os negros viviam acuados, aceitando qualquer migalha, com receio da reação dos brancos. (Farias 18)

Carolina represents these social conditions of oppression in rural Brazil through her writing about her grandfather. However, what makes Benedito such a compelling and unique figure in Carolina's writing is not only his status as a former slave but also his intelligence, moral integrity, and even good looks. In other words, Benedito not only reflects the conditions of slavery that continued after abolition but also symbolizes the injustice that, were it not for the same conditions, he would potentially have been a materially successful person in life.

Even though she was a child at the time, Carolina remembers with clarity the wisdom that he passed down to her and those who knew him. Recreating his words from memory is not only an act of recollection but also literary creation on Carolina's part. It is impossible to know which words are Benedito's and which are Carolina's, but since Carolina was only 10 years old when Benedito died, it is most likely that they are primarily the product of Carolina's writing talent. Carolina's depictions of Benedito thus have a testimonial quality not only because they are a testament to injustice but also because they are a testament to Carolina's status as a bona fide Brazilian author. The literary quality of Carolina's work is significant within the context of how Carolina was read by her contemporaries and even today as a "semianalfabeta" whose writing was more testimonial than literary (Sebe Bom Meihy, "Ditos e interditos" 256). In vindicating Benedito's unrecognized intellect in her memoirs, she thereby vindicates her own.

Carolina: Testimonial and Literary Author

Carolina Maria was launched to national prominence by her first book *Quarto de despejo*.

The book is composed principally of Carolina's diary entries dated from July 15, 1955, to January 1, 1960. Contemporaries of Carolina doubted that she could have written the book by herself. Critics of Carolina have continued to write that *Quarto de despejo* should be attributed to her editor, Audálio Dantas. The literary critic Wilson Martins wrote that *Quarto de despejo* represents a "literary hoax": "Expressão que, aliás, serve de título de seu primeiro artigo sobre a escritora, 'Mistificação literária – 'Quarto de Despejo', 'best-seller' de 1960, deve ser atribuído a Audálio Dantas", publicado no Jornal do Brasil, 23 / 10 / 1993, em ocasião da reedição de *Quarto de Despejo* pelo Editora Ática" (Barcellos 17). Dantas himself responded to these accusations by revindicating the literary quality of Carolina's writing, insisting that his own style does not reflect hers and donating her manuscripts to the Biblioteca Nacional in Rio de Janeiro and the Museu Afro in São Paulo (Barcellos 12).²⁹⁰ *Quarto de despejo* is composed of 15 notebooks,²⁹¹ but the rest of Carolina's manuscripts are located throughout Brazil. There are 56 manuscripts in total: 37 notebooks in the Acervo Carolina Maria de Jesus in Sacramento, 14 in the Biblioteca Nacional, 2 in the Instituto Moreira Salles (also in Rio), and 1 in the Museu Afro (Barcellos 13-14). Even though *Quarto de despejo* is based on Carolina's original manuscripts, it nevertheless reflects Dantas's "authorship" through his organization of her diary entries,

²⁹⁰ "São quinze os cadernos que deram origem ao primeiro livro, *Quarto de Despejo*, e que estiveram sob a guarda de Audálio Dantas até 2012, quando o jornalista os doou à Biblioteca Nacional (com exceção de um caderno, do período de 10/08/59 a 26/10/59, que se encontra no Museu Afro Brasil, em São Paulo, também doado por Dantas" (Barcellos 12).

²⁹¹ "Disse, recentemente, em evento no Instituto Moreira Salles, que ao conhecer o texto de Carolina viu que estava diante de uma narrativa humana, com valor humano, que 'às vezes se aproximava da mais pura literatura'. Mas revelou também que jamais escreveria daquela forma, com os rodeios e preciosismos de Carolina. Declara enfim que: 'Os cadernos que a Carolina me confiou eu guardei como documentos para mim mas achei que não deviam ficar comigo e ofereci todos à Biblioteca Nacional.'" (Barcellos 18).

according to Martins: “‘Tudo indica que a editoração de Audálio Dantas foi muito além da ‘excessiva presença’ que admite na preparação do texto. Cortes, seleções, vocabulário e até, penso eu, notações inteiras, sugerem que é tempo de lhe restituir a autoria do ‘diário de uma favelada’” (qtd. in Barcellos 18). Sergio Barcellos, author of the guide to Carolina’s manuscripts,²⁹² critiques Martins’s “cáusticos ataques” of Carolina’s writing and literary integrity but concurs that Dantas played an important role in the realization of *Quarto de despejo*.

To suggest that Dantas played a role in the authorship of *Quarto de despejo* is not to discredit Carolina’s legitimacy as a literary author but rather acknowledges the structures of power behind the book’s production. The dynamic between Carolina and Dantas reflects a longstanding precedent in Afro-Latin American literary narrative beginning in nineteenth-century Cuba when Domingo del Monte requested Juan Francisco Manzano to write an autobiographical narrative about the horrors of slavery. Just as Domingo del Monte shaped Juan Francisco Manzano’s *Autobiografía* through the specificity of his request for a history of his life under slavery, Dantas shaped *Quarto de despejo* by encouraging Carolina to continue writing first-person accounts depicting daily life in the *favela*.²⁹³ She wrote poetry, plays, novels, and many other genres of writing, but Dantas, a journalist for the *Folha de São Paulo*, saw her as the ideal messenger to denounce inequity amidst Brazil’s rapid urbanization during the second half of the twentieth century. She played the part with Dantas’s promise of publication, on which he delivered. Two years after meeting Carolina in 1958, Dantas published a selection of Carolina’s manuscripts as *Quarto de despejo* in 1960. He writes in the first edition’s prologue that “Escritor

²⁹² See Barcellos’s *Vida por escrito: guia do acervo de Carolina Maria de Jesus* (2015).

²⁹³ Carolina criticized Dantas for the control he exercised over her writing and career in her second book, *Casa de Alvenaria*. See Levine, “The Cautionary Tale of Carolina Maria de Jesus” (62).

nenhum poderia escrever melhor aquela história: a visão de dentro da favela” (qtd. in De Jesus, *Quarto de despejo* 4). Dantas’s prologue thus reflects his “authenticating function” of the text like the role of slave narrative editors (Stepto 3). *Quarto de despejo* is different than *Biografía de un cimarrón*, published 6 years later, but the relationship between Carolina as an eyewitness to social problems and Dantas as an “creator of memory” illustrates overlap between her work, slave narratives, and the testimonial novel (Luis, “The Politics of Memory 480).

Carolina caused a stir in Brazil with her fierce denunciation of poverty, inequality, and racism in modern Brazilian society. Her book became Brazil’s best-selling book in Brazilian history the year of its publication (Levine, “The Cautionary Tale of Carolina Maria de Jesus” 55). Despite the success of *Quarto de despejo*, Carolina’s subsequent publications gained little popular or critical attention.²⁹⁴ After Carolina’s death in 1977, publishers and scholars have published more of Carolina’s manuscripts, including prose and poetry that feature her grandfather Benedito. The French publishing house Editions Métailié translated these manuscripts as *Journal de Bitita* in 1982. Ironically, the book is not a “journal” at all. It is divided by chapters rather than journal entries. The book deals not with Carolina’s adult life at the margins of urban São Paulo but rather her childhood in Sacramento, Minas Gerais, in Brazil’s rural interior. She recalls her brief education—a rare privilege for black people in the rural interior—and her memories of her family while she was growing up. One of her most beloved family members was her maternal grandfather Benedito, who used to tell stories about life during slavery. Carolina comments that, when she was a child, these stories struck her for their resemblance to the present. Like *Quarto de despejo*, *Diário de Bitita* also compares similarities between the present and the past, but it does so through Carolina’s reflections on her

²⁹⁴ Other works published during her lifetime include *Casa de Alvenaria* (1961), *Pedaços de fome* (1963), and *Provérbios* (1963).

grandfather. Carolina's manuscripts reflect the presence of antislavery discourse in twentieth century Brazil through her reflections on Benedito. Published in *Cinderela negra* by José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy in 1994, Carolina's short story "O Sócrates africano" recalls that the whites in Sacramento used to call Benedito "The African Socrates" for his intelligence despite never having received a formal education. In "O Sócrates africano," José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy also published in a collection of Carolina's poems entitled *Antologia pessoal* (1996). One of the poems, entitled "Meu avô" is written from the perspective of Benedito himself. In the poem, Benedito playfully reprimands Carolina for tattling on him to the *sinhá* and *sinhô* ("masters"). The poem ends with Benedito saying that because of Carolina's tattling, they get locked up in the *senzala* (slave quarters). The poem "Meu avô" uses the language of slavery to describe their lives in the rural interior of Brazil, even though Carolina was born decades after slavery had ended. Like *Biografía de un cimarrón*, Carolina's "O Sócrates africano," *Diário de Bitita*, and "Meu avô" observe the continuity between slavery and post-abolition life for black people in Latin America. Carolina's representations of Benedito José da Silva therefore show that antislavery discourse did not end with the abolition in 1888 but continued well into the twentieth century in Brazil (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 3).

Carolina's works also resemble *testimonios* by reflecting multiple levels of authorship. In her book *The Social Conscience of Latin American Writing* (1998), Naomi Lindstrom includes *Quarto de despejo* in her overview of testimonial narrative in Latin America. Lindstrom first notes that *Quarto de despejo* is different from *testimonios* like *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* because "it does not involve one collaborator who offers material orally and another who develops it into a written narrative" (77). Although *Quarto de despejo* is therefore not a *testimonio* per se, it nevertheless illustrates a key problem of testimonial narrative

in Latin America: “Even if a representative of a disadvantaged and marginalized population is literate enough to compose a written account, he or she is still dependent upon a partner from the mainstream culture to bring the writing into print and obtain publicity” (Lindstrom 77). In response to the question of the title of her chapter, “Whose Text?”, Lindstrom answers that *Quarto de despejo* is as much Dantas’s as it is Carolina’s. Although Carolina wrote her diary entries, Dantas used his power as a journalist to compile, edit, and publicize them as *Quarto de despejo*. Moreover, Carolina adjusted her writing to fit Dantas’s aims to publish her writing after their chance meeting in 1958. In these ways, Dantas plays a role not equal but like that of the *gestor* in *Quarto de despejo*. However, beyond *Quarto de despejo*, Carolina’s representations of her grandfather complicate Lindstrom’s comparison of Carolina’s writing to the *testimonio*. Whereas Barnet narrates Montejo’s life from an ethnographer’s point of view, Carolina narrates aspects of Benedito’s life from her personal memories of childhood. Furthermore, while Carolina’s writing exemplifies antislavery discourse by portraying the injustice of Benedito’s bondage, it does so with the tenderness of a granddaughter and family member. In her work beyond *Quarto de despejo*, Carolina writes that, since she never knew her father, she was raised largely by her mother and grandfather.²⁹⁵ Carolina condemns slavery for having limited such an intelligent man’s potential. Her depictions of Benedito therefore resonate with her depictions of herself: just as slavery had prevented Benedito from potentially becoming Brazil’s “African Socrates,” poverty and racial discrimination had hindered her from achieving long-term success as an author during her lifetime. Carolina’s relationship with her grandfather does not reflect the *novela-testimonio*’s vertical relationship between the *gestor* (organizer) and *informante*

²⁹⁵ See *Diário de Bitita*: “Várias vezes pensei interroga-la para saber quem era meu pai. Mas faltou-me coragem. Achei que era atrevimento da minha parte. Para mim, as pessoas mais importantes eram minha mãe e meu avô” (De Jesus 8)

(informant) but rather is based on shared ancestry and racial solidarity between writer and subject.

In this way, Carolina's writing is more like Daisy Rubiera's than Barnet's. Both demonstrate a trajectory in which black female authors have claimed a greater and greater role throughout the century in writing for the silenced, not only as authors but also as their direct descendants. Carolina's writing reflects the *testimonio*'s concern with giving a voice to the enslaved. Like Benedito José da Silva in the writings of Carolina Maria de Jesus, Tatica is from Cabinda, an exclave of the present-day People's Republic of Angola.²⁹⁶ In dialogue with one another, Carolina's and Daisy Rubiera's writing therefore illustrate the shared origins of Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Cuban cultures in Sub-Saharan Africa. Her writings on Benedito show that Carolina occupies a unique in-between space within Barnet's paradigm of testimonial writing. While she depended on Dantas, Métailié, and Sebe Bom Meihy to be published to a wide audience of readers Benedito depends on Carolina's writing to "speak" as well. Despite their differences, Carolina's posthumously published manuscripts resemble the *testimonio* in that they (re)create the voice to someone who had survived slavery in Latin America. Regardless of her dependence on publishers such as Dantas, Carolina contributes Benedito's voice to Afro-Latin American literature and represents the growing role of black women over representing the experiences of the enslaved in writing.

Antislavery Discourse in *Quarto de despejo* and *Diário de Bitita*

Quarto de despejo and *Diário de Bitita* engage in antislavery discourse by observing continuity between conditions for Afro-Brazilians in the past and in the present. In *Quarto de*

²⁹⁶ "Actual provincia de la República Popular de Angola. Antiguamente formó parte del Reino del Congo" (Rubiera Castillo 171).

despejo, Carolina Maria de Jesus reflects on her own life as an illustration of the ways in which slavery had not truly ended in Brazil in 1888. On July 15, 1955, Carolina writes that she and her daughter Vera Eunce were “escravos ao custo de vida” (slaves to the cost of living) (*Quarto de despejo* 13). As Carolina’s first entry in *Quarto de despejo*, July 15, 1955 introduces the reader to its discourse of social criticism from the beginning. The location of this diary entry at the book’s outset reflects not only Carolina’s keen observations of the world but also Audálio Dantas’s role as the book’s editor. Dantas was interested in turning Carolina’s miscellaneous writings into an eyewitness account of urban poverty (*Quarto de despejo* 4). Carolina’s word choice of “slaves” to the cost of living also highlights the antislavery character of the socially critical discourse of *Quarto de despejo*.

Carolina continues to draw attention to the relationship between her condition of poverty and the history of slavery throughout the rest of the book. In the entry marked May 13, 1958, Carolina observes that it is raining on Abolition Day in Brazil: “É um dia simpático para mim. É o dia da Abolição. Dia que comemoramos a libertação dos escravos” (*Quarto de despejo* 27). In 1958, slavery had been abolished in Brazil for 70 years since the Princess Regent Isabel signed the Lei Áurea on May 13, 1888. Carolina goes on to describe the downpour and her struggle to gather enough food to feed her children. She therefore establishes irony through what the celebration that the day should represent on the one hand, and her struggles that she faces that day on the other. The rain increases and the temperature drops, illustrating that the day worsens as it wears on. Carolina writes that, since she could not go out to make any money that day, she instead resorts to asking neighbors for various food items to make a *virado*. She concludes the entry by writing that, through their struggle to collect enough food for a meal, she and her family spent Abolition Day fighting hunger, which she calls the slavery of the present day: “E assim no

dia 13 de maio de 1958 eu lutava contra a escravatura atual – a fome!” (De Jesus, *Quarto de despejo* 27). This passage of *Quarto de despejo* therefore illustrates that antislavery discourse is part and parcel of the works larger discourse of criticizing conditions of poverty faced by not only Carolina but all of São Paulo and Brazil’s mostly black communities living at the nation’s margins.

Carolina’s entry on May 13, 1958, and the larger discourse of social criticism in *Quarto de despejo* is partly the product of Dantas’s influence. This is one of the principal arguments of José Sebe Carlos Bom Meihy, whose scholarship contributed invaluable to Carolina’s continued fame in Brazil and beyond. He and the US scholar Robert Levine published many important books about Carolina that feature her unpublished work.²⁹⁷ Bom Meihy argues in *Cindarella Negra*, Dantas selected entries from Carolina’s diaries in the *Folha da Noite* beginning on May 9, 1958 (28). It is therefore likely that Carolina wrote the entry for May 13, 1958. anticipating that it would be published. Furthermore, *Quarto de despejo* includes a gap from Carolina’s entries from 1955 to May 2, 1958, just around when she and Dantas had met.²⁹⁸ From 1955 to 1958, the entries include more detailed descriptions of poverty in Canindé likely because Carolina anticipated that Dantas would publish them (as he did, not just in *Folha da Noite*, but also in *Quarto de despejo*). Barcellos also observes changes in Carolina’s writing after she met Dantas. She even began writing in larger print, leaving spaces between lines, and compartmentalizing her writing in ways that she had not before: “Provavelmente, após a

²⁹⁷ Elizabeth Barboza Pereira writes in Carolina’s “Cronologia Biográfica” that, in 1994, “Os professores José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy e Robert M. Levine escreverem o livro *Cinderela Negra: A Saga de Carolina Maria de Jesus*, despertando a atenção novamente sobre vida e obra de Carolina” (qtd. in Barcellos 29). They also published *The Life and Death of Carolina Maria de Jesus* (1995), *Meu estranho diário e Antologia pessoal* (1996), and *The Unedited Diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus* (1999).

²⁹⁸ To excuse her absence from writing diaries, Carolina writes on May 2, 1958, “Eu não sou indolente. Há tempos que eu pretendia fazer o meu diário. Mas eu pensava que não tinha valor e achei que era perder tempo” (De Jesus, *Quarto de despejo* 25).

intervenção de Audálio Dantas, Carolina perece dispor de mais cadernos ou recursos para adquiri-los – então, começa tanto a escrever com uma letra mais volumosa quanto a deixar linhas em branco. Nesse período, ou após esse período, passa a concentrar em cadernos distintos os gêneros distintos” (Barcellos 16). Sebe Bom Meihy’s and Barcellos’ observations regarding Carolina’s manuscripts resonate with William Luis’s analysis of *Biografía de un cimarrón*. Just as Luis argues that Miguel Barnet’s interview questions shaped Esteban Montejo’s oral narration in *Biografía de un cimarrón*, Dantas shaped Carolina’s writing in *Quarto de despejo*. Barnet and Dantas are creators of memory for Montejo and Carolina, respectively (“Memory and Politics 408). In response to the journalist’s request for her manuscripts, Carolina rose to the task of performing the role of an eyewitness to life in the favela as one of its residents. *Quarto de despejo* is thus like the *testimonio* in that the assignment shaped the text.

Nevertheless, Carolina’s criticism of slavery’s legacy is not limited to *Quarto de despejo* and is not merely the product of Dantas’s editing. Antislavery discourse is a major theme throughout Carolina’s vast body of work. Tom Farias notes that “Carolina Maria de Jesus era uma apaixonada pelo tema da Abolição, e por abolicionistas como o poeta Castro Alves, José do Patrocínio, Rui Barbosa, entre outros” (26). He cites Carolina’s Abolition Day diary entry from May 13, 1958 (Farias 26-27), but he also cites *Diário de Bitita*. In the chapter entitled “Ser pobre,” she connects the illiteracy and impoverishment for blacks that she witnessed in Minas Gerais as a child to the history of slavery in Brazil: “A maioria dos negros era analfabeta. Já haviam perdido a fé nos predominadores e em si próprios. O tráfico de negros iniciou-se no ano de 1515. Terminou no ano de 1888. Os negros foram escravos durante quase 400 anos” (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 30). In a footnote it says that “A autora se refere ao tráfico interno (Nordeste-Sudeste), já que o externo tinha terminado em 1850,” but from her perspective it did

not matter when the external slave trade was officially abolished because the law had such little impact on black people's conditions in Sacramento (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 30). In *Diário de Bitita*, Carolina shows that she is separated from legal slavery by only two generations through her grandfather Benedito José da Silva. "Infância," the first chapter, opens *Diário de Bitita* with none other than her recollections of Benedito. The first sentences of *Diário de Bitita* describe where she lived as a child and how Benedito was responsible for purchasing the land: "Os pobres moravam num terreno da Câmara: 'Patrimônio'. Não tinha água. Mesmo furando um poço eles tinham que andar para carregar água. Nós morávamos num terreno que vovô comprou do mestre, um professor que tinha uma escola particular. O preço do terreno foi cinquenta mil-réis. O vovô dizia que não queria morrer e deixar seus filhos ao relento" (7). Because Carolina's narration begins with her grandfather and the central role that he played in providing his family with the land that they lived on, *Diário de Bitita* suggests the importance that he has in Carolina's writing. She goes on to explain that, since she never knew her father, the most important people in her life were her mother and grandfather. In describing him, Carolina writes that Benedito's identity represents the legacy of slavery: "O pai da minha mãe foi Benedito José da Silva. Sobrenome do seu Sinhô. Era um preto alto e calmo, resignado com sua condição de soldo da escravidão" (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 7-8). Whereas she goes on to describe him as handsome and having a pleasant voice despite not knowing how to read, she first characterizes him as a product of slavery from his name to his personality. From its very first passages, *Diário de Bitita* demonstrates Carolina's awareness of slavery and its impact on the present through her characterizations of her grandfather.

Carolina continues to draw connections between the past and the present through the figure of Benedito José da Silva beyond "A infância." In the chapter entitled "Os negros," she

describes that her grandfather continued performing hard labor late in his life while the whites did not work as hard: “Eu notava que os brancos eram mais tranquilos porque já tinham seu meio de vida. E os negros, por não terem instrução, a vida era-lhes mais difícil. Quando conseguiam algum trabalho, era exaustivo. O meu avô, com setenta e três anos, arrancava pedras para os pedreiros fazerem alicerces das casas” (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 66). Because he continued doing the same back-breaking labor as he had done under slavery, Carolina observes that slavery had not ended at all. She makes this point explicitly when discussing Benedito’s relationship with the police. In addition to containing the voice of Benedito, Carolina’s writing contains the voice of her great grandmother, Maria Abadia, who says that whereas whites now shoot to scare black people, they used to shoot to kill: “Os brancos de agora já estão ficando melhores para os pretos. Agora, eles atiram para amedrontá-los; antigamente atiravam para matá-los” (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 66). After also noting that black people feared the police because of harassment,²⁹⁹ Carolina reflects on the authenticity of freedom from black people in a society where they must run from the police: “E os pretos sorriam dizendo: -O Benedito virou lebre, quando viu os policiais. Quando os pretos falavam: ‘-Nós agora, estamos em liberdade’ eu pensava: ‘mas que liberdade é esta se eles têm que correr das autoridades como se fossem culpados de crimes? Então o mundo já foi pior para os negros?’” (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 40). Like *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Reyita, sencillamente*, *Diário de Bitita* notes the ways in which life had remained the same for black people after abolition but in a Brazilian context.

Diário de Bitita narrates Benedito’s memory of slavery. In the same chapter, “Os negros,” Carolina attests to Benedito’s exploitation by his captor, who was from Portugal: “Meu avô era um vulto que saía da senzala alquebrado e desiludido, reconhecendo que havia

²⁹⁹ “Os pretos tinham pavor dos policiais, que os perseguiam” (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 66).

trabalhado para enriquecer o seu sinhô português, porque os que haviam nascido aqui no Brasil tinham nojo de viver explorando o negro” (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 68). Carolina’s antislavery and pro-Brazilian nationalist discourse is overtaken by none other than Benedito himself who, through Carolina’s writing, praises Brazil and curses slavery:

O vovô dizia que os brasileiros eram os bons homens, de mentalidade pura, iguais às nuvens no espaço. — Deus que ajude os homens do Brasil! e chorava, dizendo: — O homem que nasce escravo, nasce chorando, vive chorando e morre chorando. Quando eles nos expulsaram das fazendas, nós não tínhamos um teto decente; se nos encostávamos num canto, aquele local tinha dono e os meirinhos nos enxotavam. Quando alguém nos amparava, nós já sabíamos que aquela alma era brasileira. E nós tínhamos fé: os homens que lutaram para nos libertar hão de nos acomodar. O que favorece é que vamos morrer um dia e do outro lado não existe a cor como divisa; lá predominarão as boas obras que praticamos aqui. (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 68)

This long quotation, attributed almost entirely to Benedito, illustrates the multiple authorships at work. Benedito José da Silva “speaks” through Carolina’s memory and writing just as Tatica does through Reyita’s oral narration and Rubiera’s writing later in *Reyita, sencillamente. Diário de Bitita* thus contributes to the complexity of authorship in antislavery writing in Latin America.

Diário de Bitita involves yet another layer of authorship. It is based on Carolina’s manuscripts, but it was organized, edited, and published posthumously by the French publishing house Métailié as *Journal de Bitita* in 1982.³⁰⁰ The book was then retranslated back into

³⁰⁰ See, for example, Raffaella Fernandes’s “Vários ‘Prólogos’ para um *Journal de Bitita/Diário de Bitita*: “Como sabemos, as edições brasileiras de *Journal de Bitita* (1982) são uma cópia do texto estabelecido e traduzido pela jornalista brasileira Clélia Pisa que, em 1972, recebeu das mãos de Carolina Maria de Jesus dois cadernos manuscritos, um com diversos poemas intitulado “Um Brasil” e outro contendo diversas narrativas autobiográficas nomeado “Um Brasil para brasileiros” (285).

Portuguese in 1986. One of the most obvious differences between Carolina's physical writing and *Diário de Bitita* is that the copies of the manuscripts are not separated by chapters, but the supposed “*Diário*” is. *Diário de Bitita* is thus not a diary at all, but rather a book loosely based on Carolina's manuscripts with chapter titles fabricated by the editors. Furthermore, this retranslation contains many examples of the French, which are not present in Carolina's other writings. Two examples are “Avant-première” and “Vis-à-vis” (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 07, 62).³⁰¹ Therefore, Benedito's voice passes through not only the filter of Carolina's memory and writing, but also the organization and translation of Métailié, and the retranslation of *Journal de Bitita* back into Portuguese. Despite these layers of potential unreliability, there is evidence that Benedito existed. Carolina suggests that he is 73 years (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita*), but her biographer Tom Farias argues that “Benedicto José da Silva, teria nascido por volta de 1852, de origem africana, como relatou Carolina. Quando morreu, às 16 horas, aos treze dias de agosto de 1924, tinha 62 anos de idade. Em suas memórias, Carolina afirma que o avô morreu aos 82 anos, em 17 de agosto de 1927, depois de vários dias acamado” (28). However, official records from the city of Sacramento suggest that he in fact died at 62 years old:

Revendo no livro de assentos de óbitos, deste Serviço Regional consta o registro de óbito de teor seguinte: Aos 13 de Agosto de 1924, nesta cidade de Sacramento, em meu cartório, de acordo com o atestado do Dr. José da Cunha e Oliveira, registro hoje, BENEDICTO JOSÉ DA SILVA, preto, 62 nos de idade, brasileiro, casado, falecido hontem, às 16 horas, nesta cidade. Morreu sem assistência medica. Para constar, fiz este

³⁰¹ Emanuelle Oliveira and Beth Joan Vinkler's translation, *Bitita's Diary: The Childhood Memoirs of Carolina Maria de Jesus* says that Carolina “uses the French,” but archival research is needed to confirm if French terms in *Diário de Bitita* are actually vestiges of its re-translation from French to Portuguese (qtd. in *Bitita's Diary* 3).

termo, que assigno. Eu, José Francisco da Silva Neto, escrivão, o escrevi. (qtd. in Farias 28-29)³⁰²

The official records thus contradict Carolina's memory with regards to the exact age of Benedito, but her memory of him nonetheless reveals the conditions that black people in rural Brazil continued to face after abolition. Carolina's work gives testimony of racism through her representations of Benedito, but she also offers a vindication of him as a counter-discourse to black inferiority that whites used to "justify" black subservience in the first place. Benedito recurs several times throughout *Diário de Bitita* but is the central figure in Carolina's short story "O Sócrates africano" and the poem "Meu avô."

Benedito in "O Sócrates africano" and "Meu avô"

Like *Diário de Bitita*, "O Sócrates africano" and "Meu avô" were published posthumously by José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy. He published "O Sócrates africano" in *Cinderela negra* (1994) and "Meu avô" in *Antologia pessoal* (1996). The original manuscripts of both may be found in the Instituto Moreira Salles in Rio de Janeiro. The notebooks entitled "Um Brasil para os Brasileiros" (196-) and "Meu Brasil" (196-) were donated in 2006 by Clélia Pisa, who had translated fragments of these and other manuscripts into French (Barcellos 98).³⁰³ Whereas only parts of *Diário de Bitita* can be found in "Meu Brasil," and "Um Brasil para os Brasileiros," these manuscripts contain complete versions of "O Sócrates africano" and "Meu avô," respectively.³⁰⁴ These two texts more faithfully reflect Carolina's original writing than

³⁰² From the Registro Civil de Pessoas Naturais, de Interdições e Tutelas de Sacramento (Farias 29).

³⁰³ "O acervo Carolina Maria de Jesus chegou ao Instituto Moreira Salles em 2006, entregue por Clélia Pisa. Inicialmente depositado na unidade de São Paulo, foi transferido, no primeiro semestre de 1009, para o prédio da Reserva Técnica Literária, no Rio de Janeiro, especialmente construído para guarda de acervos" (Barcellos 98).

³⁰⁴ "Meu avô" is located on page 115 of "Um Brasil para os Brasileiros," and "O Sócrates africano" is between pages 76 and 115 of "Meu Brasil."

Diário de Bitita.³⁰⁵ Like *Diário de Bitita*, “O Sócrates africano” and “Meu avô” highlight the important role that Benedito played in Carolina’s life while she was growing up. They develop his role as a wise and admirable figure. In this way, they continue to reveal antislavery discourse within the writings of Carolina Maria de Jesus. Because Carolina writes words for Benedito in “O Sócrates africano” and “Meu avô,” these short pieces also show Carolina’s role as a literary author.

By not only depicting Benedito but also writing from his perspective, “O Sócrates africano” and “Meu avô” challenge the view of Carolina’s writing as primarily a reflection of her editors Audálio Dantas and Clélia Pisa. Carolina’s writing serves their purposes in constructing an eyewitness account of life on the margins of Brazilian society in both *Quarto de despejo* and *Diário de Bitita*, respectively, but Carolina’s manuscripts more broadly serve her own purpose of establishing herself as a renowned writer, despite the circumstances that she faced as the descendent of enslaved people. Benedito José da Silva’s numerous appearances in her work thus reflect his central importance to Carolina’s identity, sense of self, and writing. Nevertheless, even “O Sócrates africano” and “Meu avô” illustrate the complex dynamics of power behind even the most unfiltered versions of Carolina’s writing. The short story was published in José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy and Robert M. Levine’s book *Cinderela negra: a saga de Carolina Maria de Jesus* (1994). Like *Quarto de despejo*, “O Sócrates africano” therefore still depended on, in Lindstrom’s words, “a partner from the mainstream culture to bring the writing into print and obtain publicity” (77). Moreover, there is yet another layer of subalternity in “O Sócrates africano” and “Meu avô” through their representations of Benedito José da Silva. Carolina’s

³⁰⁵ *Diário de Bitita* includes passages from “Meu Brasil” but not the entire manuscript. It is likely that *Diário de Bitita* is based on multiple manuscripts cobbled together and translated into French by Clélia Pisa of Editions Métailié. These manuscripts, probably including “Meu Brasil,” were edited, organized into chapters, and retranslated back into Portuguese in 1986.

work relies on researchers like Sebe Bom Meihy and Barcellos to reach an audience, and Benedito's voice depends on not only the same researchers but also Carolina's writing to be heard. We might therefore not only compare Carolina with Esteban Montejo, as Lindstrom does in her book, but also with Miguel Barnet. Just as Barnet brings Montejo's voice to life through his writing, Carolina does the same for Benedito. However, for Carolina, Benedito is not only a voice for the enslaved but also a beloved and influential family member who had also suffered racial discrimination just as she had in her own life. Because of her racial and family solidarity with the subject of her work, Carolina's writing about her grandfather more closely resembles Rubiera's, but Carolina wrote "O Sócrates africano" and "Meu avô" in the 1960s,³⁰⁶ around the same time as *Biografía de un cimarrón* and long before *Reyita, sencillamente*. In dialogue with each other, all three works illustrate the complex, diverse processes of writing slave testimony in twentieth century Latin America.

"O Sócrates africano" bears similarities and differences with the chapter of *Diário de Bitita* entitled "A morte do avô." In both pieces, Carolina narrates Benedito's death and praises him as wise and well-spoken. Both also mention that, due to these characteristics, Benedito was nicknamed the "African Socrates" by whites in Sacramento. Although they contain similar information, they are different texts. "A morte do avô" begins with Carolina's reflections on marriage and on other people and incidents in Sacramento before describing a memory of her grandfather when she was a child: "Eu deixava de brincar e sentava-me ao lado da cama [do avô]. O meu avô me olhava. Depois fechava os olhos. Eu ficava preocupada fitando o seu rosto, o seu nariz afilado. Eu queria ser bonita igual ao vovô. Que linda boca! Não tinha o nariz chato da raça negra" (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 138-139).³⁰⁷ Carolina's praise of Benedito reflects

³⁰⁶ The exact year is unspecified. "Um Brasil para os brasileiros" and "Meu Brasil" are dated (196-).

³⁰⁷ Tom Farias quotes this passage in his biography of Carolina but does not analyze it (27).

Eurocentric beauty standards in Brazil that uphold phenotypically white physical characteristics over phenotypically black ones. It could be argued that Carolina problematically associates Benedito's beauty as a black man with white features like having a sharp nose rather than a flat one. However, in both *Diário de Bitita* and "O Sócrates africano," Carlolina is writing about not only her memories of childhood but also her reflections as a child through the lens of adulthood. In its entirety, "A morte do avô" is ultimately a vindication of Benedito's blackness. Carolina writes that "O vovô era descendente de africanos. Era filho da última remessa de negros que vieram num navio negreiro. Nos negros cabindas, os mais inteligentes e os mais bonitos" (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 138-139). Carolina therefore connects Benedito's intelligence and beauty to his African heritage as being a descendant of the Cabindas, the same ethnic group to which Tatica belongs in *Reyita, sencillamente*. "A morte do avô" and *Reyita, sencillamente* together attest to the common African ancestry of Brazil and Cuba, respectively, and just how late the slave trade ran in both countries despite nineteenth century antislavery laws.³⁰⁸ In dedicating her memory of Benedito to writing, Carolina immortalizes her memory of Benedito him beyond his death: "Com o decorrer do tempo fui olvidando o vovô, que foi o preto mais bonito que já vi em minha vida. Que lindo nariz! A testa e a boca eram magníficas" (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 148). "O Sócrates africano" echoes "A morte do avô" when Carolina writes that "Foi o preto mais bonito que já vi até hoje" (De Jesus, "O Sócrates africano" 225). In both these passages, Carolina celebrates Benedito's African heritage, and in doing so thus also celebrates her own.

While *Diário de Bitita* describes Benedito's physical characteristics and African heritage in greater detail, "O Sócrates africano" more closely develops intellect as one of his most

³⁰⁸ The "Lei Feijó" (1831) was supposed to abolish the importation of enslaved Africans in Brazil, but *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* and *Diário de Bitita* both show that slave trafficking was still practiced. *Reyita, sencillamente* also shows that slave trafficking continued in Cuba during through the nineteenth century and alludes to the *Ley de vientres libres* (Rubiera Castillo and Castillo Bueno 21).

prominent characteristics. In “A morte do avô,” Carolina mentions that she had heard Benedito’s nickname from the people who visited him during his illness: “Que homem inteligente. Se soubesse ler, seria o Sócrates africano” (De Jesus, *Diário de Bitita* 146). This theme is fleshed out in more detail in Carolina’s story by the same title. “O Sócrates africano” adds that Benedito had impressed even the wealthy men who had visited him: “Os homens ricos iam visitá-los, e ficavam horas e horas ouvindo-o. E saiam dizendo: — foi uma pena não educar este homem. Se ele soubesse ler, ele seria o homem. Que preto inteligente. Se este homem soubesse ler poderia se [sic]³⁰⁹ o nosso Sócrates Africano” (221). Carolina gives us a direct example of Benedito’s intelligence in the story. He gives a brief philosophical monologue while on his deathbed: “Vou viajar para a eternidade. O que será que estará a minha espera do outro lado. Não adianta ter medo de morrer porque temos que morrer mesmo. O mundo, não é nosso. O homem passa por aqui” (223). Here and elsewhere in “O Sócrates africano,”³¹⁰ Carolina assigns Benedito’s words to reflect his philosophical outlook on life. However, the poetry of Benedito’s words is ultimately Carolina’s as the writer. Carolina thus demonstrates the same eloquence that she attributes to Benedito in “O Sócrates africano.” Just as Benedito may have become a kind of African Socrates if slavery had not restricted his access to education, Carolina might have achieved long-term fame and wealth as a writer if racial discrimination and poverty had not been obstacles.³¹¹ Carolina thus subverts the *testimonio*’s vertical relationship between the *gestor* and the *informante*. By giving a voice to not just a former slave but to her grandfather, she writes

³⁰⁹ This is the editor’s error. Carolina writes “se este prêto soubesse ler poderia ser o nosso Sócrates africano” on page 78 in the notebook “Meu Brasil,” located in the Instituto Moreira Salles.

³¹⁰ See “O Sócrates africano,” 220 and 224.

³¹¹ In her verses published in *Quarto de despejo*, Carolina writes, “Não digam que fui rebotalho, que vivi à margem da vida. / Digam que eu procurava trabalho, mas fui sempre preterida. / Digam ao povo brasileiro que meu sonho era ser escritora, / mas eu não tinha dinheiro para pagar uma editora (*Quarto de despejo* 110).

from a position of ancestry and racial solidarity as his direct descendant and as a black woman in Brazil.

Benedito speaks not only in Carolina's prose but also her poetry. José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy argues in the introduction to *Antologia pessoal* that “Carolina foi e era por autodefinição poeta. Sequer dizia-se poetisa” (17).³¹² The poem “Meu avô” is located on page 115 of the manuscript entitled “Um Brasil para os brasileiros,” located in the Instituto Moreira Salles. José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy published not only “O Sócrates africano” in *Cinderela Negra* (1994) but also “Meu avô” in *Antologia pessoal* just two years later in 1996. In the poem, Benedito playfully reprimands his granddaughter's tendency to gossip. The poem begins with Carolina's voice describing her grandfather: “Quando estava contente, cantava...” and then transitions to Benedito's voice (De Jesus, *Antologia pessoal*, 157). Despite its light, musical tone, which Benedito “sings” through rhyming verse, the poem reflects the language of slavery through references to Benedito's sinhá (“mistress”), sinhô (“master”), and senzala (slave quarters):

Cuidado com essa negra!
Que essa negra vai contá
Cuidado que esta negra
É puxa-saco da sinhá. (De Jesus, *Antologia pessoal*, 157)

In this first quatrain, Benedito identifies Carolina as the of his female captor, the “sinhá.” Despite the gravity of what he is saying, the first line of the poem and rhymes that follow indicate that Benedito

³¹² “É certo que ser poeta lhe evocava nobilidade e nobreza e isto era tudo o que se lhe fazia necessário para se distinguir do grupo de outros negros analfabetos e de pobres esquecidos no mundo rural. Esta mesma Carolina que aspirava a modos finos de vida apaga de sua temática rememorações de terra natal. Apenas recompõe figuras idílicas através da reconstrução do avô, o Sócrates africano e da mãe sofrida” (Sebe Bom Meihy, “O inventário de uma certa poetisa” 19)

sings these lines with jocular levity. The poem continues in the voice of Benedito, who says that Carolina is a “puxa-saco” to his male captor as well:

Cuidado com esta negra
Que esta negra já contô
Cuidado que esta negra
É puxa-saco do sinhô. (De Jesus, *Antologia pessoal*, 157)

Benedito continues by humorously calling Carolina a “caçambeira” who likes to spy on him, and a talker who tells everything to the “sinhá.” Carolina’s selection of the term *caçambeira* reflects not only Carolina’s memory of the past but also her conditions as a former trash picker.

Esta negra é caçambeira.
Gosta só de espioná.
Esta negra é faladeira
E conta tudo pra sinhá. (De Jesus, *Antologia pessoal*, 157)

The poem concludes by characterizing Carolina as “dangerous” because she tells everything she sees to Benedito’s master. This last quatrain is the darkest since it refers to the damaging effect Carolina’s gossiping has on him. The “sinhá” gets nervous and catches them in the slave house, or “senzala.”

Esta negra é perigosa!
Tudo que vê ela fala
E a sinhá fica nervosa
E nos prendem na senzala. (De Jesus, “Meu avô” 157)

“Meu avô” is thus not only a portrait of the author Carolina Maria de Jesus as a tattle-telling child. It is a portrait of Benedito as a man whose good humor belied a deep-seated fear of punishment for himself and his family by whites who continued to hold enormous power in rural

Brazilian society. Speaking through her grandfather's voice suggests that Benedito remained living under slave-like conditions. Although slavery had been abolished for several decades by the time Carolina wrote "Meu avô" in homage to her grandfather. She also illustrates the complexity of post-abolition life for former slaves. Her grandfather's singing represents a strategy to survive the serious, slave-like living conditions that he was singing about.

The poem, like her prose writing about Benedito, illustrates Carolina's personal awareness and connection to the legacy of slavery that she believed obstructed her from attaining recognition as a serious author within her lifetime. It has been argued that Carolina's African heritage extended, not just in her surface representations of her formerly enslaved grandfather, but also deep into her style of writing. Elena Peres Pajaro, for example, has studied the black spiritual element in not only "Meu avô" but also other works such as Carolina's "Proverbios""

Carolina tem uma herança africana em sua escrita, tanto pela influência do avô, quanto por trazer certa espiritualidade e temporalidade típicas africanas, presentes nos pensamentos premonitórios que Carolina tinha e em seus conhecimentos de ervas e plantas.

Essa valorização da sabedoria popular que o provérbio denota tem relação com as experiências que a autora teve ouvindo seu avô Benedito, o Sócrates africano. A sabedoria popular, entendida em seu sentido ético, voltado ao mundo para organizá-lo, remete-se inclusive a uma tradição africana cabinda, que via nos provérbios uma maneira de criar o bem viver. (Conceição da Silva 160)

In her work, Carolina has also chosen to write about other family members who were close to her during her childhood, like her mother, Cota, whom she describes as a poet, even though she also

says in *Diário de Bitita* that she was illiterate as well.³¹³ Carolina immortalizes her mother in several poems published in Sebe Bom Meihy's *Antologia pessoal*, such as "Suplica de Mãe" (77) "Saudades da mãe" (81), "Prece de mãe" (96), and "mamãe" (114). Like Benedito, Cota also played an important role in not only Carolina's childhood but also her racial consciousness:

Pelo perfil, Cota nasceu, certamente, após a Abolição, não antes. Quando a filha veio ao mundo, ela teria, por volta de 24 anos, idade em que as mulheres, naquela época, já estavam cansadas de ter filhos. Mas, segundo os escritos de Carolina Maria de Jesus, a mãe 'era do ventre livre,' o qual dá a entender que nasceu após 1871, e ela dizia que nessa época, "os brancos..." eram "os donos do mundo." (Farias 29).

Carolina returns to the subject of her grandfather because his condition as a former slave was expressive of Carolina's own limitations as an author, or in other words, her own bondage. It marks her as the inheritor of a slave legacy that gave expression to her frustration as an under-recognized author. "Meu avô" stands out from other Latin American testimonial writing, in which it is not common for a female author to represent a male subject. Nevertheless, "Meu avô" resembles the *testimonio* on multiple levels. As a formerly enslaved black man who had never learned to read, Benedito had no way of accessing the means of written expression, even despite the profound intelligence that he possessed by Carolina's account. Carolina therefore plays a role like the *gestor* of a *testimonio* by constructing a voice for the silenced that denounces injustice.

Breaking the Racial Silence: Carolina, Benedito, and the Archives

³¹³ "Carolina lembra que a mãe teria sido poetisa. Seu pai biológico era músico popular e atuava em casas noturnas" (Gomes da Silva 102).

The testimonial style of writing that Carolina used in her writings on her grandfather served the function of breaking the “racial silence” that Brodwyn Fischer, Keila Grinberg, and Heme Mattos attribute as the culprit of continued racial inequality beyond abolition:

Brazil was the New World’s first, largest, and most enduring slave society. The fact and fear of bondage shaped Afrodescendants’ place in Brazil’s legal order until emancipation in 1888. For a century thereafter, legally institutionalized racial inequalities in 1888. For a century thereafter, legally institutionalized racial inequalities persisted, both produced and cloaked by racial silence. That Silence was largely shattered in the late twentieth century. As racism was named and denounced more clearly, the legal legacies of slavery became increasingly apparent, and for the first time legal remedies to racialized injustice and inequality assumed tangible form... (Fischer, Grinberg, and Mattos 131).

“Law, Silence, and Racialized Inequalities in the History of Afro-Brazil” argues that the silence surrounding post-abolition racial inequality was shattered in the late twentieth century, but Carolina wrote her diaries in the 1950s and 60s, before the black movement gained momentum in Brazil during the 1970s (Alberto). Carolina was therefore a precursor of the black movement in her denunciations of racism in *Quarto de despejo*. Her works on Benedito, however, were not published until the 1990s and 2000s. As a result, Benedito’s voice remained silenced decades after Carolina’s death.

The timing of Carolina’s writing on her grandfather being published is important because it shows that the veil of silence surrounding post-abolition inequality is still in the process of being lifted and analyzed in the wake of the black movement that has helped generate interest in publishing her works posthumously. The work scholars do with Carolina’s writing on her grandfather continues the work of shattering the racial silence that intercepted Benedito, Carolina

herself, and other contemporary black authors from reaching their full potential during their lifetimes. Finally, the fact that Carolina wrote her diaries about her grandfather in the 1960s also has the potential to challenge the notion that resistance to the idea of Brazil as a model of multiracial harmony or “racial democracy” did not gain traction amongst black intellectuals until the black movement of the 1970s. Despite or perhaps because of Carolina’s distance from black intellectuals and their exchanges, not only *Quarto de despejo* but also her writing about her grandfather demonstrates skepticism of abolition and of Brazil being a model of racial equality for the world. One contribution of Carolina’s testimonial writing to scholarship, in other words, is its potential to alter the timeline of how black writers viewed anti-black racial discrimination beyond slavery and abolition in twentieth century Brazil. For Fischer, Grinbert, and Mattos, the history of slavery and abolition in Brazil should be considered in its own terms, which is why George Reid and Alejandro de la Fuente’s *Afro-Latin American Studies* has a chapter unto itself: “The Brazilian experience should not be mistaken for Latin America’s. Both legal and racial practices are intensely localized historical phenomena that cannot be easily generalized to an entire diverse region” (Fischer, Grinbert, and Mattos 130). According to their chapter “Law, Silence and Racialized Inequality in the History of Afro-Brazil,” Fischer, Grinbert, and Mattos argue that emancipation did not translate to any immediate action taken to set up education and training systems designed to advance freed slaves or train them for anything beyond a life of bondage.

Brazil’s Lei Áurea, signed by Princess Regent Isabel on May 13, 1888, disintegrated the legal foundation of Brazilian racial inequality with deceptive simplicity: Slavery is declared abolished in Brazil: All legislation to the contrary is revoked.” The decree angered former slave owners with its terse refusal to provide indemnification or legally

mandate forced labor; it disappointed abolitionists such as Joaquim Nabuco and André Rebouças by failing to fortify abolition with ‘rural democracy,’ educational commitments, or vocational training (Fischer, Grinbert, and Mattos 143).

They also suggest that “Once emancipated, freedpeople and their children would be mere persons, neither marked nor aided by special legal status” (Fischer, Grinbert, and Mattos 143). In other words, the lack of special status granted by national abolition meant that freedpeople were left to fend for themselves and therefore absorbed back into the same or similar positions that they had occupied before.

Carolina herself would appear to confirm the lack of educational initiatives provided by the Brazilian government after abolition in “O Sócrates africano,” as well as its effects. During colonial times, she writes, enslaved black people were prohibited from learning to read: “Enquanto português predominou no Brasil, o negro foi tolhido. As escolas não aceitavam os pretos” (De Jesus, “O Sócrates africano” 222). However, just because there were no laws to prohibit black people from going to school did not mean that black suddenly had equal access to education after abolition. “O Sócrates africano” suggests, through its discussion of Ruy Barbosa, that the fight to educate “freedpeople and their children” waged on long after abolition. Benedito and his daughter Cota, after all, remained illiterate throughout their lifetimes. One of the potential historical contributions of Carolina’s testimonial writing on her grandfather is that it offers a correction to the “documentary omission” of racial inequality after abolition in Brazil. Although not reliably “history” per se, Carolina’s work nevertheless offers a corrective to the silence surrounding life for freed slaves in Brazil since they generally could not document their lives themselves. With the dearth of documentary evidence of freed slaves’ lives, Fischer,

Grinbert, and Mattos argue that a dominant yet false narrative of post-abolition racial equality has filled the vacuum of “documentary omission”:

Documentary omission matters to the history of law and race because it has often been mistaken for incipient racial equality. But it represented instead a deeply rooted and strategic commitment to the ethic of racial silence, capacious enough to encompass both dreams of equality and affirmations of prejudice. After abolition, in the context of radicalized republican demands for civic equality, racial silence became a zone of compromise wherein deep prejudice could exist without provoking political resistance (Fischer, Grinbert, and Mattos 143).

Carolina’s writing about her grandfather is important because it combats the racial silence Fischer et. al. argue had contributed to the perpetuation of racial inequality in Brazil. Specifically, “Meu avô” illustrates Benedito’s fear of re-enslavement, causing trouble, or getting “caught” that Fischer et. al. refer to in their chapter: “In a context where racialization was almost inevitably associated with discrimination and the fear of re-enslavement, Afrodescendants across Brazil often—though certainly not always—chose to embrace a silent, sinuous pursuit of full freedom” (144). In this way, Carolina’s poem breaks the “racial silence” and “documentary omission” surrounding black life after abolition that kept Benedito and even Carolina from achieving equality in a society stacked against their opportunities for education and success.

Insofar as Carolina developed her criticism of continued racial inequality after abolition in the 50s and 60s, her work changes the timeline of black intellectual thought presented by not only Fischer, Grinberg, and Mattos, who argued that it took a century after abolition to break the “racial silence” that had allowed racism to persist beyond emancipation, but also the timeline presented by Paulina Alberto in her book *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-*

Century Brazil (2011), which argues that black intellectuals tended to enthusiastically support the idea of Brazil as a racial democracy and model for other multi-racial societies like the United States and South Africa until the black movement of the 1970s. Carolina's indictment of slavery and scrutiny of black people's condition in Brazil after abolition position her, therefore, as a precursor to the black movement of the 1970s. As Fischer, Grinberg, and Mattos, as well as Carolina, may agree with, Paulina Alberto writes that "The stigmas of race and servility associated with African slavery extended beyond those in bondage, shaping the lives of a large population of free people of color as well. After abolition, freedom and citizenship were similarly conditioned by racial and class inequities that survived and evolved in the absence of slavery" (18). One intellectual Alberto indicates as a wind vane of black intellectual thought is the late activist, author, and artist Abdias do Nascimento, who subscribed to dominant notions of *democracia racial* during the 1950s and 60s but during the 1970s and 80s, due to the influence of the black movement, openly regretted his previous opinions and emphasized the discrimination and oppression still faced by black people in Brazil:

In the early 1980s, at the height of black intellectuals' denunciation of the "myth" of racial democracy, Abdias do Nascimento berated himself for his earlier "excessively conciliatory" descriptions of Brazil as a place marked by racial harmony. In the final decades of the century, most black activists and many sympathetic scholars followed his lead in reading an earlier generation of black thinkers' hopeful engagement with ideologies of racial inclusiveness as evidence of capitulation to debilitating, elite-controlled myths of racial harmony (Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion* 17).

Perhaps not despite but because Carolina was engaged or included, not in discussions like Abdias do Nascimento, a prominent and influential black intellectual, but rather in her own

struggle for survival, her trajectory of ideas does not follow the one traced by Paulina Alberto. Rather, Carolina expressed frustration with racism and black post-abolition life while the idea of relative racial equality in Brazil was still in vogue amongst leading black intellectuals like Do Nascimento. As Alberto remarks, “as powerful as [the black movement] was, it should not obscure the equally compelling history of earlier generations of black thinkers who, since the first decades of the century, played a vital role in constructing and contesting Brazilian ideologies of racial harmony” (4). History would be well served to look to Carolina to find her among them, writing all but in a vacuum and yet fully aware of and highly critical of the legacy of slavery long before it became a dominant current in black intellectual thought.

In the world of Carolina’s vast body of writing, Benedito José da Silva is the symbol of slavery’s legacy in Brazil despite the nation’s dominant narrative of racial harmony through *mestiçagem*. He has the effect of reminding the reader that black Brazilian were only removed from slavery only by two generations. Racism was a barrier for not only Benedito as a formerly enslaved person but also held Carolina back from achieving long-term success as a writer during her lifetime. She attests to impoverishment and marginalization as obstacles to literary recognition in a quatrain published in *Quarto de despejo*:

Não digam que fui rebotalho, que vivi à margem da vida.

Digam que eu procurava trabalho, mas fui sempre preterida.

Digam ao povo brasileiro que meu sonho era ser escritora,

mas eu não tinha dinheiro para pagar uma editora (De Jesus, *Quarto de despejo* 110).

Quarto de despejo continues to be an iconic work of Brazilian literature, it represents an ensemble of Carolina’s writing that was hand-picked by Audálio Dantas and reflects the

journalists' primary interest in anti-poverty discourse. *Quarto de despejo* barely scratches the surface of the depth of Carolina's vast manuscripts written in notebooks and mostly unpublished.

The efforts of researchers like José Carlos Sebe Bom Meihy, Robert Levine, and, more recently, Raffaella Fernandez³¹⁴ and Sergio Barcellos to bring original versions of her manuscripts to life are invaluable, as Barcellos himself comments in *Vida por escrito*:

“Assim, reitero a importância de vislumbrar essa ordem original do material de arquivo de Carolina – seja pela riqueza de possibilidades de abordagem da obra da escritora que essa ordem sugere, seja, ainda, para utilizar essa organicidade como argumento irrefutável de um labor literário, por parte de Carolina, que demonstra a seriedade com que ela lidava com seu fazer literário, derrubando tese que a acusam – e a sua obra – de gratuidade ou fruto do acaso. (Barcellos 17)

The archives beyond not only *Quarto de despejo* but also *Diário de Bitita*, “O Sócrates africano,” and “Meu avô” reveal the ubiquity of antislavery discourse throughout Carolina’s work. Tom Farias argues that her unpublished manuscripts reveal that her great grandfather was “sold many times” by wealthy whites in Rio de Janeiro: “Quando iniciou o tráfico de negros para o Brasil – escreve Carolina – os ricaços do Rio de Janeiro, foram os primeiros que compraram negros para revender. E entre eles estava o meu trasavô que foi revendido várias vezes” (Farias 24). Farias cites “O escravo,” “texto manuscrito inédito de Carolina Maria de Jesus, in Acervo Carolina Maria de Jesus, Arquivo Público de Sacramento” (24). However, *O escravo* is not an autobiographical text but an unpublished novel that deals primarily with unhappiness, marriage, and foiled ambitions rather than the institution of slavery (Barcellos 89). Renato, its protagonist, is a student of medicine whose mother Maria Emilia insists that he marry Marina for her family’s

³¹⁴ See *Meu sonho é escrever* (2018).

wealth rather than his true love Rosa. Renato acquiesces but his marriage to Marina has disastrous consequences: “Renato percebe que Marina tem o mesmo temperamento controlador de sua mãe e percebe o quanto é infeliz no casamento. Isso o faz adoecer e ter um desempenho medíocre nos estudos. O diretor da faculdade explica a Renato que ele teve um ‘abalo mental’ e que está ‘neurótico’” (Barcellos 237). Renato’s ongoing love for Rosa continues to afflict him throughout his life, and he reflects that “Somos escravos de tudo que desejamos possuir. Ninguém é livre neste mundo. Há diversas espécies de escravidões. Meu Deus, meu Deus!” (qtd. in Barcellos 239). Slavery in *O escravo* is not the racial institution but a state of mind, but the novel still reveals slavery as a major concern in her work. The recurrence of slavery throughout her work is related to not only her racial consciousness as a black woman in Brazil but also her direct lineage as the descendants of enslaved people, traceable to just two generations before her in the figure of her beloved grandfather Benedito José da Silva.

Avô’s Echoes in Afro-Brazilian Women’s Narrative

Family ties to slavery continue to be a recurring theme in Afro-Brazilian women’s narrative. Writing several decades after Carolina, Conceição Evaristo also connects the slavery of the past with the continued systemic racial inequality, oppression, and violence of the present. Just like Carolina, Conceição draws upon both writing and lived experience in her *romances memorialistas*. In Conceição Evaristo’s work, elderly characters (such as Maria-Velha and Tio Totó) carry and pass down their memories of slavery through storytelling. Like Carolina, Evaristo uses her writing to evoke the stories her ancestors told of slavery and connect them to the struggles that people, especially women of color, face in life in Brazil’s favelas, or improvised communities. This processes of “(con)fusing” memory and literary invention is

explicit in the introduction to her first memorial novel *Becos da Memória*, written in 1987 / 8 but unpublished until 2006: Foi o meu primeiro experimento em construir um texto ficcional con(fundindo) escrita e vida, ou, melhor dizendo, escrita e vivência” (Evaristo, *Ponciá Vicêncio* 9). Abolition was only 100 years old in 1988 when Conceição Evaristo first wrote *Becos*, a fact she herself notes in the introduction, her *obras memorialistas*—*Ponciá Vicêncio, Olhos D’Água*, and *Poemas da Recordação*—represent slavery’s continued impact on communities of color in Rio de Janeiro. In the (re)telling of slave stories, Evaristo illustrates themes such as the separation of families and inter-generational trauma. Read side by side, Carolina Maria de Jesus and Conceição Evaristo’s works thus show how contemporary women’s writing has played an important role in preserving and bringing to life slave memory in Brazil even over a century after abolition. Like *Reyita*, Carolina and Conceição’s work illustrate Afro-Latin American women’s efforts to use literature to construct solidarity against racial, class, and gender discrimination as *mujeres* and *mulheres negras*.

Ponciá Vicêncio (2003) and *Becos da memória* (2006), by Conceição Evaristo, illustrate the author’s term *escrevivência*, which posits that remembering the past is inherently an act of creation. Each of these works thus makes use of imaginative resources to bring the nonfictional lives, experiences, and perspectives of enslaved Africans and their descendants to life in literature. *Ponciá Vicêncio* is the first novel published by Conceição Evaristo, Ph.D. (1946-). It was not, however, her first novel, this distinction going to *Becos da Memória*, which was written between 1987 and 1988 before finally being published in 2006. In addition to these two novels, she has written collections of poetry and short stories, and she is generally regarded as one of the most prominent and respected voices in the field of Afro-Brazilian literature. Current academic debates center on how to read her work within the contexts of both Afro-Brazilian literature and

the traditional national canon. Although Evaristo is *an autora afro-brasileira* by her own definition, she is also a universal author whose work captures the human experience by representing the lives of black people in Brazil. Like Carolina's "O Sócrates africano" and "Meu avô," *Ponciá Vicêncio* directly tackles the issue of slavery in Brazil through the title character's grandfather, Vô Vicêncio. Vô inherited his surname from the masters of his own grandparents. Although Vô's exact age is ambiguous, the novel compares his conditions of exploitation to his ancestors'. Throughout his life, Vô labored for Coronel Vicêncio, the descendent of his grandparents' former captors. And even though the Lei Áurea had abolished slavery, life remained the same for him as it had before. Through its depictions of Vô Vicêncio and his social conditions, the novel illustrates the continuity between pre- and post-abolition life in rural Brazil.

Ponciá Vicêncio extends its antislavery message through its title character. Ponciá is represented as her grandfather's double through her mannerisms and characteristics. By highlighting similarities between Ponciá and her grandfather, the novel illustrates the ways in which the present is the heir to the past. First, Ponciá Vicêncio inherits her surname from her grandfather, representing slavery's continued legacy well into the twentieth century. The novel itself makes this point explicit by saying that Ponciá's signature conjures the name of her grandfather's enslaver: "O pai, a mãe, todos continuavam Vicêncio. Na assinatura dela, a reminiscência do poderio do senhor, de um tal coronel Vicêncio" (Evaristo, *Ponciá Vicêncio* 27). Ponciá mirrors her grandfather in more than just her name. Vô Vicêncio died when Ponciá was a baby. Nevertheless, the novel describes the uncanny way in which she learned to walk as if she had one arm missing, just like her grandfather. Another trait linking Ponciá and her grandfather is their shared tendency to laugh and cry simultaneously. In her adolescence, Ponciá questions why she and her family continue to live like slaves if they are free: "Se eram livres, por que

continuavam ali? Por que, então, tantos e tantas negras na senzala? Por que todos não se arribavam à procura de outros lugares e trabalhos?” (Evaristo, *Ponciá Vicêncio* 14). To break free of the past and its hold on her, Ponciá moves from the countryside and the place of her ancestors to the city. However, her lack of preparation for urban life makes her vulnerable to similarly harsh conditions there. Ponciá learns to read but is overwhelmed by the struggle to find work, the physical abuse she faces from her partner, and her yearning to return to be reunited with her mother and brother. These hardships exacerbate her habit of crying and laughing at the same time, just like her grandfather used to do. The constant doubling of Ponciá and Vô Vicêncio is the novel’s way of expressing the ways in which the present reflects the past for black women in Brazil.

II. Colombia’s “Biggest” Neo-Slave Narrative: *Changó, el gran putas*

Slavery is a major theme in not only Afro-Brazilian but also Afro-Colombian literary narrative. The greatest novel in Afro-Colombian literature is *Changó, el gran putas*, by Manuel Zapata Olivella. It is partly about the history of slavery in Colombia. Part 2, “El muntu americano,” takes place during the 1500s in Cartagena de las Indias, “the origin of the slave trade on the Spanish American continent” (Luis, “*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home” (xxi). The first section, entitled “Nacido entre dos aguas,” “addresses the issue of the Christianization process” and tells the legend of Benkos Biojo, founder of San Basilio de Palenque (Luis, “*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home” xxi). He is raised as Domingo by Padre Claver, who is Benkos Biojo’s father: “no faltan las malas lenguas que aseguren que fue él quien embarazó a Potenciana Biojo” (Zapata Olivella 191). Part 2 is primarily narrated by Padre Claver’s interpreter Sacabuche, who was enslaved and converted to Christianity by force (Zapata Olivella

195),³¹⁵ but just like the rest of the novel “El muntu americano” is told by multiple narrators.

Luis writes that “Claver is obsessed by his desire to save Domingo’s soul, even if it means destroying the person. He and Sacabuche kidnap Benkos and attempt to alter his rebellious ways. However, Pupo Moncholo’s testimony clarifies that the Orichas had already decided Benkos’s destiny” (Luis, “*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home” xxi). “El muntu americano” explores themes of internalized racism (Zapata Olivella 205),³¹⁶ the hypocrisy of the colonizers who used religion to “justify” slavery (Zapata Olivella 218),³¹⁷ and the vindication of black protagonists as the heroes of Latin American history (Zapata Olivella 239).³¹⁸ These elements of Zapata Olivella’s antislavery discourse are like other works that are included in this dissertation, but *Changó* represents the antislavery continent as such by dealing with not only slavery in Colombia but throughout the Americas. The ambition of its historical scope and literary experimentation make *Changó* stand out from any novel in any literary tradition.

Because it resists facile categorization, *Changó, el gran putas* has been analyzed through multiple lenses. William Luis describes the novel as belonging to several genres at the same time as it transcends them. Luis observes that the novel illustrates continuity between the Boom and Post Boom periods of Latin American literature: “Though *Changó* belongs to the literature of the

³¹⁵ As he tortures Sacabuche to force him to confess his loyalty to Benkos Biojo, Padre Claver reveals Sacabuche’s origins: “-¡Habla impío! ¡Habla! Fuiste bautizado, la misericordia del Señor te sacó del fondo de la bodega donde te pudrías y te trajó hasta la sombra del Colegio donde te dimos pan y pretendimos salvar tu alma. Allí curamos tus llagas y te enseñamos la lengua que ahora dominas con tanta larguezza que hasta nos hace pensar que la mueve el diablo” (Zapata Olivella 195).

³¹⁶ “Los africanos no tendremos más padres espirituales que los blancos. Tratarán de matar nuestra magara pintándonos el alma con sus miedos, sus rencores y pecados. Y cuando nos veamos en un espejo con la piel negra, no nos quedarán dudas de que somos los hijos de Satán, pues, según predican, el Dios blanco hace a sus criaturas a su imagen y semejanza” (Zapata Olivella 205).

³¹⁷ “Más bien puedo confesar muchas injusticias, fornicaciones y sodomías que se cometen aquí en Cartagena por principales señores en quienes su Majestad y el Papa han depositado la guarda de las buenas costumbres” (Zapata Olivella 218).

³¹⁸ Benkos, the future King of San Basilio, says to Padre Claver: “-Sépa padre -le dijo con resentimiento- que poca diferencia hace usted en las obras del Señor. Al burro le hizo torpe y bien hace en callar, pero a los hombres nos dio entendimiento. Si yo fuera un asno no aspirara a tener una corona aunque fuera de papel. La voz de Satanás no le hubiese dejado tan pálido” (Zapata Olivella 239).

Post-Boom period of the seventies and eighties, in its aspiration toward the totalization and narrative experimentation and complexity, it has more in common with the Boom novels of the previous decade” (“*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home” xiii).³¹⁹ However, the novel breaks beyond the limitations of the Boom by embracing an Afro-centric perspective: “*Changó*, named after the orisha of thunder and lightning, entails an origin and a search, not associated with a Western perspective, as outlined by the Boom novels, but with Bantu or African traditions” (“*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home” xvi). While the Boom writers like Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez also pushed the boundaries of Western literary discourse, *Changó* does so through not only experimental techniques such as narrative fragmentation but also through the religious and spiritual beliefs brought to the Americas by enslaved Africans.

By representing an Afro-centric worldview through writing, *Changó, el gran putas* also exemplifies *lo real maravilloso*, a term coined in the prologue to *El reino de este mundo* (1949), by Alejo Carpentier. William Luis explains that *Changó, el gran putas* simultaneously transcends Carpentier’s application of *lo real maravilloso* by applying it beyond Haiti and even beyond Latin America:

For the Cuban master writer, Marvelous Realism is based on the coming together of African and European cultures in the Americas. Though Carpentier expresses the cultural tensions in the Caribbean in general and Haiti in particular, Zapata Olivella refers to this important region and others with similar characteristics, for his novel is broader in scope and encompasses a wider context. It documents the consequences of slavery in Haiti (and the Caribbean) but also in other pertinent countries, from North to South, of the Americas. (Luis, “*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home” xiv-xv)

³¹⁹ “*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home” is the introduction to Jonathan Tittler’s 2010 translation, entitled *Changó, the Biggest Badass*.

Under the name of magical realism, coined by the Avant Guard German artist Franz Roh, *lo real maravilloso* has influenced literature outside of Latin America, as William Luis also points out by citing authors based in the United States (Luis, “*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home” xiv-xv). Nevertheless, it is not *El reino de este mundo* but rather *Changó, el gran putas* that ultimately applies this term to all Latin America. *Changó* takes place across the Americas where Africans and their descendants have shaped the history, culture, and (as the novel itself shows) the literature as well.³²⁰ If *lo real maravilloso* combines African and European elements in *El reino de este mundo*, William Luis describes the ways in which *Changó* does as well: “It mixes poetry and narrative, the living and the dead, the spirit and the maternal body, humans and animals, one language region and another, magic and the mundane, history and myth, fact and fiction, African beliefs and Western cultures, oral and written traditions” (“*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home” xiv). In this way, *Changó* illustrates the concept of *lo real maravilloso* when Carpentier writes that “no era privilegio único de Haití, sino patrimonio de la América entera” (9).

There are more labels that *Changó* epitomizes (and confounds) beyond the literary experimentation of the Boom era and *lo real maravilloso*. In her introduction to the 1992 Letras Americanas edition, Dorita Piquero de Nouhaud suggests that saga and historical novel would be acceptable to a point,³²¹ but it is ultimately “Imposible exigir que *Changó, el Gran Putas* cuadre con estrictos cánones narrativos, pues se inaugura en verso, con inesperado cariz de epopeya” (35). In other words, the novel invokes an epic dimension by opening with verse in the style of

³²⁰ “Argentina, Chile, Uruguay no están presentes en la novela dado que por condiciones políticas, económicas y étnicas en el Cono Sur, el negro perdió su gran dimensión; con Bolívar el espacio se extiende hasta Bolivia” (Piquero de Nouhaud 23).

³²¹ “Saga, novela histórica, serían etiquetas aceptables hasta cierto punto” (Piquero de Nouhaud 15).

the griots, or African storytellers.³²² William Luis also calls *Changó* an “unprecedented epic novel” and explains that, to write it, “Zapata Olivella immerses himself, and by extension the reader, in the lives, customs, cultures, and religions of the peoples who inhabit the Sub-Saharan African continent” (“*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home” xvi). While these peoples represented many ethnicities,³²³ these cultural differences amongst Africans were erased by slavery:

Uprooted from lands inherited by their forefathers, separated from their families and other members of their communities, transported against their wills on a seemingly endless journey, cramped as cargo on slave ships, treated worse than animals, with little food, water, or possibility to relieve themselves, without medical attention, some unable to complete the journey—succumbing to the unimaginably harsh conditions and diseases or fighting with what little physical strength they had to regain their freedom (even in death)—Africans who survived the arduous journey did so only to have their lives shortened by the brutal work conditions imposed on them and their descendants. (Luis, “*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home” xvi)

At the same time as *Changó* unites elements of the Boom, *lo real maravilloso*, and the epic, it also reproduces antislavery discourse akin to the slave narrative. Like the slave narrative authors, “Zapata Olivella removes the historical muzzle placed on his characters, and offers them the unique opportunity to speak directly to the reader and transmit their side of the story” (Luis, “*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home” xvii). At the same time as *Changó*, *el gran putas* shares common ground with the Latin American Boom novels and with the epic novel, it also shares

³²² In continuation, Piquero de Nouhaud explains that “Estructura y escritura reflejan semejante inauguración, confiriendo al texto narrativo dimensión épica” (35).

³²³ Luis lists, “Ashanti, Yoruba, Wolof, Kru, Fon, Mandingo, Hausa, Fulani, Congo, Bib, Ganga, Ibos, and Bushmen, among many other tribes” (“*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home,” xvi).

common ground with the slave narrative. The novel therefore illustrates slave narratives as literary ancestors of black writing in not only the Anglophone world but *América*.

By drawing from postmodern thought to tell the stories of the enslaved from their own perspectives, *Changó* exemplifies the neo-slave narrative in addition to the other forms of writing hereto explored. Just as *Beloved* and *The Underground Railroad*, *Changó, el gran putas* incorporates elements of magical realism, or more precisely *lo real maravilloso*, to represent the lives of Africans and their descendants who were captured and taken to the Americas. Like other neo-slave narratives, *Changó* goes beyond the limitations of nineteenth-century antislavery discourse and even the limitations of testimonial novels such as *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Reyita*. Both the nineteenth-century slave narrative and the twentieth century *testimonio* tend to be bound by a single narrating voice and a chronological sequencing of events, but *Changó* is narrated by many narrators, both the living and the dead, throughout the centuries following European conquest as well as time immemorial. *Changó, el gran putas* thus not only exemplifies the neo-slave narrative but also contributes Afro-Latin American perspectives. Whereas West Africans were taken to European colonies across the Atlantic coast in the Americas, their deities continue to be celebrated in Afro-Latin American cultures as diverse as Candomblé and Umbanda in Brazil to Santería and Palo Mayombé in Cuba. These spiritual and religious beliefs are preserved not only in ceremonies, artifacts, and other cultural traditions of Latin America, but also, as *Changó* shows, in literary narrative. For this reason, the concept of the neo-slave narrative is strengthened through the inclusion of not only US African American novels but also Afro-Latin American epics like *Changó, el gran putas*.

Writing Rebellion: Twentieth Century Antislavery Discourse

Changó's inclusion of Frederick Douglass as a character in the novel gestures toward its lineage with the slave narrative genre.³²⁴ In the prologue to *Changó, el gran putas*, entitled “Al compañero de viaje,” Manuel Zapata Olivella writes that *Changó* is not one novel but five. One of the “Ancestral Combatants” in the fifth novel, “Los Ancestros combatientes” (“Ancestral Combatants”), is none other than Douglass himself, whom Henry Louis Gates, Jr. calls the most famous slave narrative author of all.³²⁵ The novel’s representation of Douglass also illustrates fundamental ways in which *Changó* engages with antislavery discourse. First, Part Five’s section entitled “La Guerra Civil nos dio la libertad, la libertad nos devolvió la esclavitud” states directly that abolition failed to emancipate black people from slavery. Although it takes place in the United States, the section resonates with other twentieth century antislavery texts that observe continuity between the eras of slavery and abolition in Latin America like *Biografía de un cimarrón, Reyita, sencillamente, Fe en disfraz*, and the works of Carolina María de Jesus.

Nevertheless, *Changó* breaks with these works of Afro-Latin American literary narrative by deconstructing a Western understanding of the world. In the Afro-centric world of *Changó*, the dead and the divine speak. Although set in the Civil Rights Era of the twentieth century, nineteenth-century historical figures dialogue with Part Five’s composite protagonist Agne Brown³²⁶ on nonviolent versus violent strategies of resisting racism. As a reaction to witnessing the violence of Jim Crow, “el abuelo Frederick” steadfastly maintains a nonviolent stance:

³²⁴ See Dorita Piquero de Nouhaud’s introduction to the first critical edition (1992): “Frederick Douglass llegó a ocupar un puesto muy importante en la vida de EE.UU. Se le nombró Jefe del Buró Negro, una organización que se hizo para atender a los negros que quedaron sin tierra, y sin amos, después de la guerra de Secesión. Pero lo más importante es que fue un escritor, narró su propia vida cuando los negros comenzaban a aprender a escribir, a ir a las escuelas. En la fantástica visión novelesca de Zapata Olivella, Douglass, convertido en ancestro viviente, participa en reuniones con personajes históricos que le antecedieron o vivieron en épocas contemporáneas, como Nat Turner y Martin Luther King” (29).

³²⁵ Out of the four works that Henry Louis Gates, Jr. includes in *The Classic Slave Narratives*, he writes that “The most famous of them all is Frederick Douglass’s 1845 *Narrative*” (xvii).

³²⁶ Dorita Piquero de Nouhaud aptly compares Agne Brown with Angela Davis, even though she is ultimately a “personaje fabulado” (27). Zapata Olivella’s choice to create a fictional character gives the novel greater freedom to

Siempre he tenido la presunción de que la esclavitud y la injusticia podrían ser destruidas sin sangre. Ahora veo con horror que ni siquiera la gran sangría de la Guerra Civil tuvo suficiente fuerza para lavar los perjuicios y rencores. La Constitución declaró ciudadanos a los esclavos pero los Códigos Negros de los Estados Sureños se burlan de ella. Sin embargo... aún persisto en creer que las ideas de la libertad que impulsan la moral y la política pueden vencer algún día a los violentos. (Zapata Olivella 660)

Continuing to demonstrate its fluidity between time and space, *Changó* later places the white nineteenth-century abolitionist “capitán” John Brown at the front lines of combat against the tanks, gas masks, and machine guns of twentieth century white supremacy. In protest to Brown’s rebellion, Douglass shouts, “¡Eso es un suicidio!... ¡El Negro siendo una minoría, no puede enfrentarse al poder avasallador de la Loba Blanca!” (Zapata Olivella 663). In these ways, while *Changó* commemorates Frederick Douglass for his efforts toward black liberation during the nineteenth century, the novel also represents him as a voice of protest to violent rebellion, whether against slavery or against Jim Crow.

Changó’s opposing stance to “el abuelo Frederick” gestures toward a rupture with the literary genre most associated with Douglass: the slave narrative. Rather than heed caution toward rebellion, the novel embraces violent struggle against slavery as a necessary step toward black liberation. The novel’s theory of liberation is not just political theory but also an interpretation of religious prophecy. Part One, “Los orígenes”, locates the “Origins” of black history in the Americas with Changó’s curse of his own people. Los “orígenes” is broken up into three parts: “La tierra de los ancestros,” “La trata,” and “La alargada huella entre dos mundos.” Written in verse, “La tierra de los Ancestros” corresponds not only with the oral tradition but

explore Brown’s relationship to The Ancestor Cult in Part Five. However, just as the novel’s historical characters contain an element of literary invention, its invented characters have a historical basis.

also the epic tradition. Whereas the origins of the epic tradition are usually traced back to Ancient Greece, *Changó, el gran putas* suggests that they may in fact be traced even further back to Sub-Saharan Africa. Just as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, “La tierra de los Ancestros” deals heavily with the themes of war and conflict. Characterized as simultaneously vengeful and revered for his glory, Changó wages war on the other orishas, his many brothers.³²⁷ However, his greatest crime is not merely his haughtiness but also his disrespect to the Boards of Ifá. Only they, and not Changó, may know the way. Orúnla, lord of Ifá’s Boards, punishes Changó with exile from his kingdom of Oyo. When Changó’s subjects turn their back on him in his absence, Changó exiles them just as he himself had been exiled by Orúnla, their destination being the Americas, referred to in the novel as “el continente exilio de Changó” (Zapata Olivella 59).

This origin story of slavery subverts its literary ancestor, the slave narrative, in at least two ways. First, it presents an Afro-centric retelling of slavery’s “Origins.” Whereas even twentieth century narratives such as *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Reyita, sencillamente* represent slavery as a European construct, Zapata Olivella’s novel represents it as a product of Changó’s wrath. As William Luis observes, “Changó condemned all of his people into exile and slavery, with the condition that they must liberate themselves from the yoke of slavery and its aftermath, before making their way back home. According to this version, slavery was not of European creation but a result of Changó’s wrath, and the White Wolf, the European colonizer, is but an instrument of the curse” (“*Changó*, Exile, and the Journey Home” xx). To add to Luis’s analysis, I argue that, by representing self-liberation as a necessary step toward undoing their exile, the novel therefore legitimates rebellion through violent means. It is not only the conditions of slavery that validate rebellion but also the conditions of Changó’s curse. By

³²⁷ The text includes Orún and Ochosí to Oke, Olokún, and Oko (74).

placing the onus of liberation on the shoulders of the enslaved, *Changó, el gran putas* marks a radical ideological shift from the nineteenth-century slave narratives. *Autobiografía* and *Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua* are nonetheless radical for their times by representing black people as sympathetic vis-à-vis an unjust slavery system, but their aim was for political reform not revolution. Whereas representing the enslaved as violent and rebellious would have been counter-productive to their presentation as sympathetic to white readers during slavery, *Changó* throws off the shackles of these nineteenth-century discursive limitations. Furthermore, while *Biografía de un cimarrón* also represents black self-liberation in the twentieth century when Esteban Montejo attacks his overseer, *Changó* takes the theme of rebellion to the next level by depicting it as mandated by the African orishas and ancestors.

The legitimization of rebellion within the novel's Afro-centric worldview has consequences that ripple from Part One onward throughout the novel. The third section of "Los orígenes" represents a break in *Changó*'s continuity with representations of the slave ship in previous slave narratives. In "La alargada huella entre dos mundos," the Muntu stage a rebellion against their captors. *Changó* therefore illustrates two advantages of the neo-slave narrative over firsthand accounts of slavery dictated or written by former slaves. On the level of discourse, the limitations of antislavery discourse during the nineteenth century precluded representations of violent rebellion. As William Luis argues in *Literary Bondage*, writing against one's condition of slavery was already in and of itself a rebellious act during the nineteenth century. While Juan Francisco Manzano legal escapes from slavery in *Autobiografía*, Esteban Montejo's mode of escape in *Biografía de un cimarrón*, by attacking the overseer with a rock, is not seen within the likes of previous slave narratives. On a much more practical standpoint, slave ship rebellions are generally absent from first person memoirs because they would have probably entailed the death

of the ship's passengers. In "La alargada huella entre dos mundos," only Nagó and Sosa Illamba escape the "Nova India" alive.³²⁸

Beyond the common thread of the orishas and their ancestors, the novel's five parts all protagonize rebellion at different stages of black history across the Americas. Although Manuel Zapata Olivella describes the African orishas and ancestors as the only common thread unifying each of the novel's parts,³²⁹ we might also observe a common thread of rebellion throughout *Changó*. Part One narrates a slave ship rebellion. Part Two, "El Muntu americano," narrates African leader Benkos Biohó's defense of the free black community of San Basilio de Palenque against authorities of Cartagena de Indias (present-day Colombia) during the sixteenth century. Part Three, "La rebelión de los Vodus" literally carries rebellion in its name. Just as *El reino de este mundo* retells the history of Saint Domingue through the lens of African religious beliefs,³³⁰ so too does *Changó* in "La rebelión de los Vodus." However, Zapata Olivella's novel goes further than Carpentier's through its extreme narrative fragmentation through multiple narrators and overall representation of Haitian history as a battleground of the orishas and the ancestors. Famous historical figures from across Latin America (Simón Bolívar, José Prudencio Padilla, El

³²⁸ See Luis, "Changó, Exile, and the Journey Home": "In Zapata Olivella's version of the slave trade, the slaves conspire and rebel against their captors, and all but a few perish with the burning ship. Nagó and Sosa Illamba survive in Yemayá's waters and make their way to land. In some respects, they represent the first rebellious slaves on the continent. Nagó and Sosa Illamba's child will carry his father's name and continue the fight for liberation. The child, whose father is also rumored to be unknown, is the first Black slave to be born in the New World, thus rewriting the Christian idea of a singular birth and origin. In Zapata Olivella's novel, death is not a finite point of everlasting peace, but another stage of the cycle of life, which can also be repeated. In death, Olugbala, Kanuri 'Mai,' Ngafúa, Nagó, and Sosa Illamba will join the group of the ever-present ancestors, and they will play a crucial role in the unfolding of the other parts of the novel; they interact with the other characters, and continue to guide their descendants throughout the narration" (Luis, "Changó, Exile, and the Journey Home xx-xxi).

³²⁹ "Estás nadando en una saga, esto es, en mares distintos, en cinco novelas diferentes –'Los orígenes', 'El Muntu americano', 'La rebelión de los vodús', 'Las sangres encontradas' y 'Los Ancestros combatientes'. Todas ellas con unidad, protagonistas, estilo y lenguaje propios. Su única ligazón son los Orichas africanos y los difuntos padres nacidos o muertos en América que no reconocen los límites de los siglos, ni de las geografías o de la muerte" (57).

³³⁰ Manifestations of *lo real maravilloso* occur throughout *El reino de este mundo*. For example, in "El gran vuelo," Mackandal uses his skills in magic to survive his execution. Later in the novel, Ti Noel masters the art of converting himself into animals as well to escape the continued oppression of Black people in Post-Revolutionary Haiti.

Aleijadinho, and José María Morelos) carry Changó's spirit of rebellion within them through their African ancestry in Part Four, "Las sangres encontradas; and Part Five, "Los ancestros combatientes" represents the theme of rebellion through a composite character, Agne Brown, a black female professor of Anthropology at Columbia University. Her conversations with the ancestors, including *abuelo* Frederick, further convince her to take a militant approach to combating white supremacy in the United States. In rejecting strict codes of non-violent resistance, she thereby joins the ranks of the ancestor cult and her ancestral combatants.

In representing Frederick Douglass as a voice of caution against rebelling against slavery and racism, *Changó, el gran putas* distinguishes itself from its slave narrative literary ancestors. nineteenth-century narratives of slavery such as *Autobiografía*, by Juan Francisco Manzano, tend to represent their black subjects as docile. These representations aimed to produce sympathy in target white readers to promote the cause of political reform through legal means. As William Luis argues in *Literary Bondage*, representing black people as sympathetic was in and of itself a radical act for the nineteenth century because it dared to censure the dominant economic system.³³¹ Over a century later, *Changó* vindicates the role of violent rebellion in black history across the Americas, starting with the first slave ship revolt. *Biografía de un cimarrón* also expands antislavery discourse in the twentieth century by depicting Esteban Montejo's attack on an overseer, but *Changó* takes rebellion to the next level by representing it as a divine mandate that has played out throughout the centuries. In the theme of rebellion, *Changó* draws upon the resources of the postmodern novel and the epic to expand the discourse of the narrative of slavery. Whereas the nineteenth-century slave narratives paradoxically exemplify rebelliousness

³³¹ As a testament to this, the Del Monte *tertulia* operated underground. The manuscripts of Manzano's *Autobiografía* and novels such as *Francisco*, by Anselmo Suárez y Romero, circulated within the *círculo delmontino* but were not published until decades later.

by representing black docility, *Changó* exemplifies rebellion by depicting it explicitly. In not only narrating slave revolts throughout history but also representing them as Changó's will, the postmodern epic novel participates in the slave narrative tradition at the same time as it breaks down the barriers of slave narrative and testimonial discourse.

Afro-Poststructuralism: Representing Africa through Postmodern Literary Technique

We might note further similarities and differences between the slave narrative and *Changó, el gran putas* when we compare not just their content but also their form. Like many slave narratives, the novel contains a preface by the author, entitled "Al compañero de viaje." This preface immediately establishes slavery as an overarching motif of the novel in its first sentence: "Sube a bordo de esta novela como uno de los tantos millones de africanos prisioneros en las naos negreras; y siéntete libre aunque te aten las cadenas" (Zapata Olivella 56). The preface therefore suggests that, like the slave narrative, the novel will depict slavery from the perspectives of the enslaved Africans who experienced it. At the same time as the preface suggests common ground with the slave narrative, it also suggests a fundamental difference in the role that the reader will play. The same first sentence that establishes slavery as an overarching motif of the novel also puts the reader—and not a narrating subject—at the center of the experience. Just as the enslaved Africans aboard the slave ships did not necessarily understand the language of their European colonizers, the reader might not understand the novel's language because of its narrative fragmentation. Zapata Olivella therefore instructs readers to abandon their Western knowledge ("¡Desnúdate!") and make their own sense of the novel (Zapata Olivella 56). *Changó, el gran putas* thus embraces the poststructuralist notion of

the reader as the author of the text.³³² However, the origins of this literary theory do not come from Europe but rather from Sub-Saharan West Africa. In the slave narrative, the reader is constructed as playing a role that is receptive to the narrating subject's experiences, but “Al compañero de viaje” literally invites the reader to play an active role in interpreting the work, with the orisha Elegba as their guide.

Part one of *Changó* (“Los orígenes”) opens with a representation of Africa. Many other slave narratives also contain descriptions of Africa. The first six chapters (approximately the first half) of *Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua* explore aspects of life and culture in “Zoogoo” (Djogou) through the filters of Baquaqua’s oral narration and Moore’s writing. *Reyita, sencillamente* also contains a brief description of the economic activities and tranquil way of life of the Cabindas before the arrival of white men. Like Moore, Rubiera converts an oral depiction of Africa into a Western written narrative. We might therefore describe both Moore and Rubiera’s writing as representing the externality of Western writing when it comes to depicting Africa. Whereas *Changó, el gran putas* is also written primarily in a Western language (Spanish), it closer approximates an internal perspective of Africa. In the first section of “Los orígenes,” Africa is “La tierra de los ancestros.” This section does not describe Africa so much as it replicates an African system of interpreting history in Western language and writing. William Luis that “La tierra de los ancestros” corresponds “more to the oral than to the written tradition” (“*Changó, Exile, and the Journey Home*” xix). Just by being written in verse rather than narrative, “La tierra de los ancestros” corresponds more closely to Africa than to the Western literary tradition of written narrative. Rather than merely describe African traditions and customs, “La tierra de los ancestros” imitates those same traditions and customs in its form. As

³³² For examples of French poststructural thought, see “The Death of the Author” (1967), by Roland Barthes, and “What Is an Author?” (1969), by Michel Foucault.

Luis observes, “This other ‘Genesis’ conveys the creation of the African world in which the orishas are intimately involved. Both author and speaker must first invoke the ancestors, to seek their help and inspiration, to tell or sing (with the kora) the story of the creation, of the divine Odumare Nzame, Olofi, and Baba Nkwash, all manifestations of the same supreme ruler” (“*Changó, Exile, and the Journey Home*” xix). Indeed, before Ngafúa “sings” of the orishas’ birth and the Muntus’ exile, he first gives tribute to them in “Invocación a los grandes Orichas. In doing so, the poetic voice does not describe African traditions and customs to the non-oriented reader, as *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* and *Reyita, sencillamente* do, but instead performs those traditions and customs in the space of written verse.

Despite being written in verse, “La tierra de los ancestros” illustrates similarities with slave narratives. Both contain descriptions of the horrors of slavery on the slave ships. However, “La tierra de los ancestros” breaks with the slave narratives in its narrative technique. Slave narratives from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries like *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* and even *Biografía de un cimarrón* structure their representations of slavery chronologically, but “La tierra de los ancestros” uses poetic fragmentation to produce an effect of disorientation in the reader. This disorientation shocks readers out of a Western mindset and constructs an African system of historical interpretation through which to look again at the history of slavery with new eyes. In “La tierra de los ancestros,” Ngafúa describes Changó’s sentence of his people to exile in the Americas: “Fue después, hoy, momentos no muertos / de la divina venganza / cuando a sus súbditos / sus ekobios / sus hijos / sus hermanos / condenó al destierro en país lejano” (Zapata Olivella 80-81). This description of Changó’s divine vengeance represents the true origins of slavery from an African interpretation of history. Immediately after, the following verses represent a series of images that evoke slavery’s swift destruction of the

Muntu's peace. Whereas the first three verses depict symbols of freedom (laughter, children, birds, dreams, wisdom), the last three evoke the violence of slavery through jarring and disjointed images of raw body parts, screams, and chains: "La risa de los niños / los pájaros sueños de los jóvenes / la heredada sabiduría de los Modimos / los huesos / los músculos / los gritos por los siglos de encadenados" (Zapata Olivella 81). The first two verses of the following stanza represent a continuation of these images of slavery with a reflection that suggests miscegenation through slave rape in the Americas: "En ajenos brazos vendidas las mujeres, bastarda la sangre de su cría" (Zapata Olivella 80-81). "La tierra de los ancestros" therefore reflects damning descriptions of slavery that are essential to the slave narrative, but it does so in verses that also evoke the violent rupture between freedom and slavery for the Muntu.

"La trata" continues describing the horrors of slavery. The setting is the holding fortress where the cursed Muntu await the slave ships that will transport them to the Americas, the exile continent of Changó. As the second section of "Los orígenes," located in between "La tierra de los ancestros" and "La alargada huella entre dos mundos," "La trata" represents a liminal space or figurative "Middle Passage" between Africa, the land of the ancestors, and the journey across Atlantic. With regards to form, "La trata" registers a shift in scope through a sudden shift from poetry to prose. The god's eye view of the orishas and of Changó's curse, rhapsodized in epic verse in "La tierra de los ancestros," plunges down to earth to describe graphic details of the holding fort's wretched conditions in "La trata." The shift from poetry to prose from the end of "La tierra de los ancestros" to the beginning of "La trata" suggests that there is nothing "poetic" about slavery. Furthermore, by being mostly narrated in prose from "La trata" onward, *Changó, el gran putas* even more closely resembles its literary ancestor, the slave narrative. Like

Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua, "La trata" describes not only the arduous journey across

the Atlantic but also the perilous conditions that captured Africans faced even before stepping foot onto the slave ships. Amidst the long anticipation of the slave ships' arrival, the narrator observes the shame (Zapata Olivella 101),³³³ disease, and festering wounds of Changó's cursed people (Zapata Olivella 126).³³⁴ The beatings, starvation, and overall physical violence of slavery are part and parcel of the epistemic violence of defining diverse groups of people (including elderly women and men, as well as Ibos, Oyos, Yagbas, Ashantis, and many more ethnic groups) under the sole category of “esclavos” (Zapata Olivella 101).³³⁵ These conditions of the holding fort are but a preamble to life on the actual slave ships. Later in “La trata,” as the Muntu finally load onto the White Wolves’ vessels, the narrator foreshadows the rape of black women by white men on board.³³⁶ The descent from the land of the ancestors in “Los orígenes” to the boughs of the slave ships in “La trata” reflects the hero’s descent into hell that has been told and retold in Western literature from the Bible to Dante’s *Inferno*, Borges’s “El Aleph,” and Juan Preciado’s descent to Comala in Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo*.³³⁷ *Changó, el gran putas* reframes this classic literary trope to reflect the hellish Middle Passage.

³³³ “Las almas enfermas, los cuerpos sin sombras, los malditos de Changó se mueven silenciosos en torno a los muros. Arrastran la mirada temerosos de encontrarse con el rostro agraviado de sus Ancestros. Persistían en sobrevivir alimentando los gusanos de la pierna ya separada de la sangre, el ojo lleno de visiones con los hijos y mujeres abandonados en la aldea incendiada” (Zapata Olivella 101).

³³⁴ “Lentamente nos sumamos a la pestilencia de la carne hacinada, al hedor de las úlceras, al rancio salitre de los orines dejados en las bodegas por nuestros hermanos en la última travesía. Nadie habla, solo el aullante silencio del terror” (Zapata Olivella 126)

³³⁵ “La trata” describes that even those who were not sent to the Americas were enslaved in the holding fort: “Son los desechos del tráfico negrero que atizan el fogón de la factoría. Las ancianas descascadoras de coco, los cultivadores de ñame y plátano, los semihombres solo útiles para el cargue y descargue de las naos negreras... menciono a los Ibos, oyos y yagbas prisioneros en Nembe, la villa de los muertos en las bocas del Niger” (Zapata Olivella 101). When the ashantis refuse to eat the manioc flour that the White Wolves oblige them to eat, their reaction is to beat them: “¡Garrote con ellos!” (Zapata Olivella 103).

³³⁶ “A las mujeres se les separaba de nosotros los varones porque la Loba de pelo rojo piensa desde ahora en sus noches en celo” (Zapata Olivella 126).

³³⁷ *Pedro Páramo* (1955) describes Preciado’s descent to Comala in the following dialogue: “—Hace calor aquí —dije. —Sí, y esto no es nada —me contestó el otro—. Cálmese. Yo lo sentiré más fuerte cuando lleguemos a Comala. Aquello está sobre las brasas de la tierra, en la mera boca del infierno. (Rulfo 68).

“La trata” thus adapts tropes from slave narratives and Western literature to create a literary experience that is familiar at the same time as it is so experimental. It draws from the sequence of slave narratives but uses literary fiction to narrate the Middle Passage from the perspectives of the enslaved in both its content and form. The novel not only enters the spaces of the holding fort and the slave ship like many slave narratives but rather invites the participation of the living, the dead, the orishas, and the ancestors throughout time and across national boundaries. The orishas and the ancestors made up the worldviews of enslaved Africans who disembarked in the Americas, but they are typically excluded from slave narratives. Where the slave narratives thus fall short of constructing an “African” worldview, *Changó, el gran putas* fills this gap through language. As I discussed in Chapter 1, pathos is a typical strategy that slave narratives used to stir white readers’ sympathies for enslaved black people and move them emotionally to supporting antislavery political efforts. While language in slave narratives like *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* sometimes reinforce white supremacy by casting white people as saviors and black people as wanting for enlightenment, *Changó, el gran putas* embraces non-Western terminology to reflect an Afrocentric worldview. The enslaved and their descendants are not “blacks” but *ekobios*, “Sinónimo de cofrade entre los Nañigos de Cuba” (Zapata Olivella 517). Their captors are not whites but “La Loba Blanca.”³³⁸ The White Wolf is not at the helm of history’s ship, so to speak, but merely an actor in a drama primarily concerning the Changó and his people, the *muntu*, or “hombre.” However, the concept expresses a philosophy of not only “man” but humankind’s relationship with its environment:

El concepto implícito en esta palabra transciende la connotación de hombre, ya que incluye a los vivos y difuntos, así como a los animales, vegetales, minerales y cosas que

³³⁸ According to William Luis, “the White Wolf, the European colonizer, is but an instrument of the curse” (“Changó, Exile, and the Journey Home” xix-xx).

le sirven. Más que ente o personas, materiales o físicos, alude a la fuerza que une en un solo nudo al hombre con su ascendencia y descendencia inmersos en el universo presente, pasado y futuro. (Zapata Olivella 514)

Zapata Olivella indicates that the term refers specifically to a linguistic family that extends across Sub-Saharan Africa,³³⁹ but in the novel it refers to a philosophy of interconnectedness that is reflected in *Changó*'s narration style, wherein past and present, orishas and ancestors, and the living and the dead coexist side by side. Slavery is ever-present in the novel beyond "La trata," even in Part Five, "Los ancestros combatientes," which takes place primarily in the twentieth century United States. In *Challenging the Black Atlantic*, John Maddox argues that the *Nuevo Muntu* represents a model for humanity in the Americas (2-3). *Changó*'s use of language thus distinguishes the novel from slave narratives and reframes Western models of understanding time, place, and history. It deconstructs not only the Eurocentric ideology of racism that "justified" slavery but also the "black-and-white" language that fed such ideology in the first place.

In addition to deconstructing language, the novel further approximates Africans' multiple perspectives by deconstructing the slave narrative's single talking voice. In autobiographies, such as Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía*, there is usually only one narrator: that of the writer. There is usually only one narrator even in collaboratively authored texts, such as *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua*, *Biografía de un cimarrón*, and *Reyita, sencillamente*. All these works represent the collective voice of the enslaved in Latin America, but they also reflect the interests of editors and collaborators (Domingo del Monte, Samuel Moore, Miguel Barnet, and Daisy Rubiera, respectively). Nevertheless, except for *Biography of Mahommah G.*

³³⁹ He defines *Bantú* as the "Término genérico para aludir a la familia lingüística del mismo nombre y que se extiende en toda el África austral, por debajo del río Níger" (Zapata Olivella 514).

Baquauqa, they tend to have just one narrator each (Juan Francisco Manzano, Esteban Montejo, and María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno, respectively). *Changó, el gran putas*, on the other hand, has multiple narrators. “La trata” is narrated from Ngafúa’s perspective in continuation with “La tierra de los ancestros.” Ngafúa’s awesome power is illustrated by his role as a third-person omniscient narrator. No one is outside his gaze, from the *Muntu* and the orishas to the dialogues amongst the (in this case) Portuguese colonizers. Ngafúa continues to speak in “La alargada huella entre dos mundos,” the third and final section of Part One; but it also contains many more narrators. One of those narrators is Rivaldo Loanda, the captain of the “Nova India” bound for the Isle of São Thomé (off the coast of West Africa) and ultimately to the Americas. While the section opens with Loanda’s “Libro de bitácora” (which turns into the “Libro de derrota” amidst the mutiny of the captives on board), “La alargada huella entre dos mundos” is most significantly narrated by the captives themselves.³⁴⁰ Capitán Ruy Rivaldo Loanda’s narration is written in italics and in the first-person singular point of view (“yo”), but the captives’ narration is written in both the first-person singular and the first-person plural (“nosotros”). The captives thereby represent a collective voice, in dialogue with the orishas and their messengers, throughout the rebellion.³⁴¹ They not only give witness to the terrible conditions of the slave ships as other slave narratives but also their victory against the White Wolf and against Changó’s curse.

Changó, el gran putas continues to use the device of literary fragmentation to present multiple narrators throughout the novel. Such narrators include, in Part Two, “El Muntu

³⁴⁰ ‘The Elongated Footprint between Two Worlds’ juxtaposes the entries of the Ship’s Book of Navigation, which later becomes the Book of Defeat, and provides two perspectives on the uprising, the ‘official’ and rebel slaves’ accounts” (Luis, “*Changó, exile, and the Journey Home*” xx).

³⁴¹ According to William Luis, this section “narrates the Middle Passage, with all the horrors known to historians; in the novel, the reader witnesses the account directly. The central characters include Olugbala, intelligence and prudence; Kanuri ‘Mai,’ cultural talent; ‘Ngafúa,’ ancestral memory; Nagó, leader of the battles for emancipation and freedom; and Sosa Illamba, Yemayá’s representative, the mother of all combatant ants” (“*Changó, exile, and the Journey Home*” xx-xxi).

americano”: Pupo Moncholo, Sacabuche, and Benkos Biojo; in Part Three, “La rebelión de los vodus”: Mackandal, King Henri Cristophe, Boukman, Marie-Jeanne; in Part Four, “Las sangres encontradas”: Simón Bolívar, José Prudencio Padilla, el Aleijadinho, and José María Morelos; and in the novel’s grand finale Part Five, “Los ancestros combatientes”: Agne Brown, Malcolm X, Dorothy Wright (Malcolm X’s mother), Marcus Garvey, Nat Turner, John Brown, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, and, el abuelo (Frederick) Douglass. By honoring Douglass with the nickname “abuelo” in “Los ancestros combatientes,” *Changó, el gran putas* pays homage to one of its own literary ancestors, the slave narrative. In his introduction to Johnathan Tittler’s introduction, William Luis also observes the key similarities between the novel and the slave narrative through the example of Juan Francisco Manzano’s *Autobiografía*:

As in the case of Juan Francisco Manzano’s slave autobiography, in Zapata Olivella’s *Changó*, the black characters speak in the first person; they narrate their own personal experiences. As they do so, the reader understands their lives, not through meditation or from a distance, as defined by an omniscient narrator, but from the perspective of the characters. The stories detach themselves from writing and become personal and creditable accounts; the characters come to life and offer another perspective on their experiences, one that had been erased or silenced by many dominant Western texts. (Luis, “*Changó, Exile, and the Journey Home*” xv)

In this way, the novel performs a similar function as the first-person antislavery narratives like Manzano’s: to narrate slavery from the perspectives of those who had experienced it firsthand. While each slave narrative account tends to represent just one narrator, *Changó* represents

several throughout its five chapters which, as the author himself mentions in his preface, may each be read as separate novels in and of themselves.

While the nineteenth-century slave narratives and even twentieth century texts such as *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Reyita, sencillamente* exemplify realism to present their narrations as credible to readers, *Changó, el gran putas* shatters realist discourse and the Western ideals of science and reason along with it. The novel represents the voice of not just one narrating subject but many: and not just enslaved Africans and their descendants but also their orishas and ancestors. Whereas narrative fragmentation and the application of Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* are literary device common among many of the Latin American “boom” novels of the 1960s and 1970s, in Manuel Zapata Olivella's 1983 novel it serves the purpose of giving voice, in writing, to the more than twelve million enslaved Africans that were forcibly brought to the Americas but did not have the chance to write their own stories. In this way, *Changó, el gran putas* puts postmodern literary techniques to the task of writing for the silenced in an epic novel whose enormous length is fitting for its five-century, Trans-Atlantic, and Inter-American scope.

III. The “Lost Autobiography” of Luísa Mahin: *Um defeito de cor*

Like *Changó*, Ana Maria Gonçalves's *Um defeito de cor* (2006) also exemplifies the neo-slave narrative genre by narrating history from the vantage point of fiction (Maddox, “The Black Atlantic Revisited” 155).³⁴² In the novel's prologue, Gonçalves writes that the text represents her loose transcription of an autobiographical manuscript that she had serendipitously encountered while traveling in Bahia. This manuscript, Gonçalves explains, had belonged to “uma escrava muito especial,” Luísa Mahin. Luísa is briefly in the autobiographical letter “Carta a Lúcio de

³⁴² “Defeito is the Brazilian equivalent of a neo-slave narrative” (Maddox, “The Black Atlantic Revisited 55).

Mendonça” (1880), by abolitionist poet-lawyer Luís Gama. Whereas Gama describes his mother Luísa in just a few short paragraphs, *Um defeito de cor* does so in 951. The novel is narrated by Kehinde—Luísa’s African name in the novel—from her capture to her enslavement in Bahia, return to Africa, and re-return to Brazil. In between, she expresses personal contradictions, desires, and rich interior life omitted from her son’s sketch of her, since he had never had the chance to know her.

The text is not simply the fictionalized story of Kehinde / Luísa Gama “in her own words.” Like *Fe en disfraz*, published one year after *Um defeito de cor*, it is a *meta-testimonio* that involves multiple layers of narration by fictional and fictionalized narrators. Kehinde is not the writer of her manuscripts but the *informante*. Ifegênia, nicknamed Geginha, is introduced in on Kehinde’s return voyage from Bahia back to Uidá. Geninha is just as a baby when she is introduced in “Capítulo nove,” but she grows up to play an essential role in the realization of the narration within the novel’s fiction (Gonçalves 731). She plays the role of the *gestor* by writing down Kehinde’s memoirs:

Geninha is the one who is writing these letters down, since Kehinde is old and blind.

João runs away to the farm, but Kehinde reconciles with him. Kehinde sends Maria Clara to study in Paris with the help of Father Borghero in 1895... In 1899, she is already on the *Aliança*, headed across the Atlantic for Salvador with Geninha, who is writing constantly, by her side, and her twins are in Paris studying. (Maddox, *Challenging the Black Atlantic* 50).³⁴³

³⁴³ Despite the novel’s staggering length, Geninha/Kehinde even writes that she has more to say than time left to live: “Se eu tivesse mais tempo e mais forças, gostaria de continuar contando tudo o que nos aconteceu enquanto as crianças cresciam, enquanto eu esperava a morte chegar e era cuidada pela Geninha com uma dedicação de filha, que é como a considero também, com o endosso da Maria Clara. Andei muito doente nos últimos três anos, e só não morri porque o encontro já estava marcado para daqui a pouco, assim que eu terminar esse meu pedido de desculpas” (Gonçalves 945).

Um defeito de cor is thus not only narrated by a fictionalized version of Luísa Gama but also “written” by a fictional character.³⁴⁴ The novel even fictionalizes the author Ana Maria Gonçalves herself. In her prologue, Gonçalves writes that she had taken liberties to divide the text into chapters, add punctuation where needed, and even write entire sections where pages were illegible or missing from the original manuscripts (Gonçalves 17). *Um defeito de cor* is therefore not only a historical novel, postmodern epic, and neo-slave narrative like *Changó, el gran putas* but also a *meta-testimonio* about the multi-layered process of representing the memories of the enslaved through writing. As part of the novel’s fiction, the prologue establishes a relationship with slave narratives before it. William Luis argues that Anselmo Suárez y Romero had rewritten Juan Francisco Manzano’s *Autobiografía* to place greater emphasis on slavery,³⁴⁵ and Esteban Montejo’s oral narrative is transcribed and organized through Miguel Barnet’s writing. Similarly, “Ana Maria Gonçalves” (the metafictional character) organizes and rewrites Kehinde’s lost and crumbling manuscripts into a legible form for contemporary readers. These manuscripts were not written by Kehinde herself but rather by Geninha. The novel is thus a reflection on the complexity of authorship in addition to its diverse themes like displacement, enslavement, liberation, motherhood, revolution, death, love, and loss.

Through Manuel Zapata Olivella’s and Ana Maria Gonçalves’s power of imagination, their novels bring the perspectives, experiences, cultures of the enslaved in Latin America to life. They also expand the neo-slave narrative genre by further introducing elements of postmodern narration. *Changó, el gran putas* and *Um defeito de cor* not only populate Latin American literature with the silenced voices, perspectives, and experiences of the enslaved but also

³⁴⁴ Through Geninha’s writing, Kehinde tells her son that it is Geninha who is writing her memoirs: “Veja agora você, é com a mão esquerda, que deve estar mais do que cansada, que ela está escrevendo tudo isso. (Gonçalves 940).

³⁴⁵ See William Luis’s *Literary Bondage: Slavery in Cuban Narrative* (1990).

contribute Afro-Latin American voices to the neo-slave narrative genre. Moreover, *Um defeito de cor* fills the genre's blind spot regarding black women's subjectivity under slavery in Brazil, the nation with the largest Afrodescendant population outside of Africa (Gates, *Black in Brazil* 15).³⁴⁶ As I mention previously in this chapter, the works of Carolina Maria de Jesus and Conceição Evaristo construct the subjectivity of enslaved black men and women in Brazil, and *Changó, el gran putas* dedicates an entire section of Part Four is dedicated to "El Aleijadinho," the Afro-Brazilian baroque sculptor.³⁴⁷ The novel is a neo-slave narrative in a truer sense of the term than Carolina's and Conceição's work since it focuses entirely on portraying the subjectivity of an enslaved character (who ultimately frees herself and returns to Africa). Whereas Benedito José da Silva, Vô Vicêncio, and o Aleijadinho have a voice in Carolina's published manuscripts, *Ponciá Vicêncio*, and *Changó, el gran putas*, respectively, Kehinde is at the center of her own story throughout the entirety of *Um defeito de cor*. What even further sets *Um defeito de cor* apart is that Kehinde's voice is the construction of her oral narration, Geninha's writing, and the fictionalized Ana Maria Gonçalves's editing. The novel of course is ultimately the product of the "real" Ana Maria Gonçalves's imagination, but the novel contains multiple voices through the extensive research that she had done to write the book.

³⁴⁶ "Because about 43 percent of all slaves brought to the Americas ended up in Brazil, today over 97 million Brazilians in a total population of 190 million people have a significant amount of African genetic ancestry, self-identifying as either Brown (*parda*) or Black (*preta*) in the federal census (among five categories, including White (*branca*), Yellow (*amarela*), and Indigenous, Brown, and Black). This makes Brazil in effect the second-largest Black country in the world, after Nigeria, if we use definitions of Blackness employed in the United States" (Gates, *Black in Latin America* 15).

³⁴⁷ "Aleijadinho, 'The Little Injured One,' a nickname given to Antonio Ferancisco Lisboa, the great Brazilian sculptor and architect (1730-1814). A mulatto, the son of a Portuguese man and a slave woman, he suffered from leprosy, which caused the amputation of his fingers, hands, and feet. Nonetheless, overcoming his illness, he managed to complete vigorous stone and wooden carvings so expressive of America that he is considered the greatest Latin American sculptor of all time" (Tittler 447).

One of the most important voices within *Um defeito de cor* is Luís Gama. His “Carta a Lúcio de Mendonça,” dated July 2, 1880,³⁴⁸ is an autobiography of the antislavery, antimonarchy poet-lawyer in miniature. John Maddox argues that “Gama’s poetry and letters constitute the closest equivalent Brazil has to an original slave narrative in Portuguese” (“The Black Atlantic Revisited” 158). It details the conditions of his being sold into slavery as a child by his own father, a Portuguese nobleman who had lost his fortune on gambling.³⁴⁹ In the letter’s first paragraph Gama writes that he was born in São Salvador, capital of Bahia on June 21, 1830, and baptized in the Sacramento church in the city of Itaparica. Immediately following this brief description of his birth and baptism, Gama describes his mother, Luísa Mahin, her African heritage, her rejection of Christian doctrine, her appearance and personality, and her activity in commerce and her arrest after being suspected for participation in slave insurrection efforts:

Sou filho natural de uma negra, africana livre, da Costa Mina, (Nagô de Nação) de nome Luíza Mahin, pagã, que sempre recusou o batismo e a doutrina cristã. Minha mãe era baixa de estatura, magra, bonita, a cor era de um preto retinto e sem lustro, tinha os dentes alvíssimos como a neve, era muito alta, geniosa, insofrida e vingativa. Dava-se ao comércio - era quitandeira, muito laboriosa, e mais de uma vez, na Bahia, foi presa como suspeita de envolver-se em planos de insurreições de escravos, que não tiveram efeito. (qtd in Ferreira 304-305)

³⁴⁸ See the original Carta at the Biblioteca Nacional in Rio de Janeiro.

³⁴⁹ “Meu pai, não ouso afirmar que fosse branco, porque tais afirmativas, neste país, constituem grave perigo perante a verdade, no que concerne à melindrosa presunção das cores humanas: era fidalgo e pertencia a uma das principais famílias da Bahia de origem portuguesa. Devo poupar à sua infeliz memória uma injúria dolorosa, e o faço ocultando o seu nome. Ele foi rico; e nesse tempo, muito extremoso para mim: criou-me em seus braços. Foi revolucionário em 1837. Era apaixonado pela diversão da pesca e da caça; muito apreciador de bons cavalos; jogava bem as armas, e muito melhor de baralho, amava as súcias e os divertimentos: esbanjou uma boa herança, obtida de uma tia em 1836; e reduzido à pobreza extrema, a 10 de novembro de 1840, em companhia de Luiz Cândido Quintela, seu amigo inseparável e hospedeiro, que vivia dos proveitos de uma casa de tavolagem, na cidade da Bahia, estabelecida em um sobrado de quina, ao largo da praça, vendeu-me, como seu escravo, a bordo do patacho ‘Saraiva’” (qtd. in Ferreira 305).

Gama further describes Luísa's activity in the following paragraph. After the “Revolução do Dr. Sabino,” or “Sabinada” (another failed revolution whose mission it was to not only abolish slavery but also declare Bahia a Republic), she went to Rio de Janeiro and never returned.³⁵⁰ Luís writes that he had searched for her in 1847, 1856, and 1861, he was never able to find her—although he did meet other “pretos minas” who had known her and had alleged that she was imprisoned before disappearing, perhaps being expelled by a fearful Portuguese Imperial government that mistrusted free Africans like Luísa (Ferreira 305).³⁵¹ In sum, Luís Gama’s autobiographical letter demonstrates continuity between himself and his mother. In describing Luísa’s restlessness and revolutionary spirit, Luís (whose very name reflects Luísa) was also in large part describing himself.

Even though what little he knows about her comes from hearsay, he dedicates the first several paragraphs of his autobiography to her perhaps as a way of suggesting that the apple does not fall far from the tree. Maddox reads *Um defeito de cor* as a continuation of Gama’s letter:

In the novel, after learning to read, Gama gains his freedom through escape, making his social ascension seem less diplomatic and more heroic, like the slave narratives of old, and he heads from rural Campinas to São Paulo... Entering the world of letters is what allows him to eventually become a lawyer and advocated for slaves, and Gonçalves’s novel can be seen as a continuation of this emancipation project today. (Maddox, “The Black Atlantic Revisited” 165-166)

³⁵⁰ “Era dotada de atividade. Em 1837, depois da Revolução do Dr. Sabino, na Bahia, veio ela ao Rio de Janeiro, e nunca mais voltou” (qtd. in Ferreira 305).

³⁵¹ “Procurei-a em 1847, em 1856, em 1861, na Corte, sem que a pudesse encontrar. Em 1862, soube, por uns pretos minas, que conheciam-na e que deram-me sinais certos que ela, acompanhada com malungos desordeiros, em uma “casa de dar fortuna”, em 1838, fora posta em prisão; e que tanto ela como os seus companheiros desapareceram. Em opinião dos meus informantes que esses “amotinados” fossem mandados para fora pelo governo, que, nesse tempo, tratava rigorosamente os africanos livres, tidos como provocadores” (qtd. in Ferreira 305).

Whereas Luísa Gama is spoken for in “Carta a Lúcio de Mendonça” (perhaps in part as a narrative device to reflect Gama’s own radical politics), Luísa speaks for herself in *Um defeito de cor*. Maddox contrasts Gonçalves’s novel’s “lachrymose tone, that of a mother who has lost her son” with Gama’s “satirical and humorous” poetry in *Primeiras trovas burlescas de Getulino* (1859), but *Um defeito de cor* preserves heroic aspects of the “slave narratives of old” like her successful plot to liberate herself and her first son Banjokô from their captor Ana Felipa (Maddox, “The Black Atlantic Revisited 165). Nineteenth century slave narratives like *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* also featured acts of heroism by black women. Harriet Ann Jacobs’s hid in her grandmother’s attic, “that little dismal hole, almost deprived of light and air,” for nearly seven years in hopes for a future with her children (560). Gonçalves’s twenty-first century narrative is thus both an allusion to and a revision of nineteenth-century antislavery discourse. Like *Changó, el gran putas*, rebellion against hegemonic European colonial culture in the “New World” (in this case the Portuguese Empire in Brazil and then, after 1822, the independent Empire of Brazil) is a constant theme throughout the novel. Kehinde does not represent herself as a model Christian in her narration, but rather remains faithful to her African name, identity, and deities. She also narrates her involvement in the Malê Revolt, a rebellion organized by enslaved Muslim Hauças and other African ethnic groups. Just as *Changó, el gran putas* represents violent rebellion favorably as a necessary step toward black liberation, *Um defeito de cor* represents Kehinde’s bravery in joining the uprising. Unlike *Changó, el gran putas*, *Um defeito de cor* goes into great depth to explore black women’s subjectivity under slavery. Kehinde describes her sexual desires (and un-desires) as well as ambivalent reflections on motherhood and freedom that would have been repressed within of nineteenth-century antislavery discourse’s patriarchal side. To again borrow words by Toni Morrison, *Um defeito de cor* thus looks to find and expose a

truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it, and thereby fills in the blanks that the slave narratives left—in this case regarding black women in colonial Portuguese and independent Imperial Brazil.

To revise these aspects of slave narrative discourse, *Um defeito de cor* gestures toward narrative patterns the genre by reproducing many of its key themes within a determined order. Just as *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua, Reyita, sencillamente*, and even *Changó, el gran putas* open with descriptions of Africa, so does *Um defeito de cor* through her descriptions of her childhood in Savalu (in present-day Benin). The novel also describes her capture by white traders in coastal Uidá, her Trans-Atlantic journey to Bahia, and her arduous life under Sinhô José Carlos and Sinhá Ana Felipa. In short, the novel resembles a slave narrative by depicting the abuses of slavery from the first-person perspective of an enslaved narrating subject, Kehinde. Furthermore, the novel's autobiographical form comes with a metafictional twist that even closer approximates it with the slave narrative tradition. In an author's preface, entitled "Serendipidades!", Ana Maria Gonçalves writes that *Um defeito de cor* is in fact her personal transcription of manuscripts that she had found serendipitously in Bahia while working on an unrelated project. While this, of course, is part of the novel's fiction, it nevertheless changes the way that we read Kehinde's narration. Just as Esteban Montejo's oral narration passes through the filter of Miguel Barnet's writing, and just as Carolina Maria de Jesus's writing passes through the filter of editors such as Audálio Dantas and Anne Marie Métailié, Kehinde's original "writing" passes through the filter of Anna Maria Gonçalves's "editing." Just as Miguel de Cervantes writes himself as a character in *Don Quijote* through his "Prólogo" to Volume 1, so does Gonçalves in *Um defeito de cor* through her prologue (Cervantes Saavedra 7). Toward the end of the novel the reader discovers that the manuscripts were not written by Kehinde but by

Geninha. *Um defeito de cor* thus participates in not only the slave narrative tradition but also the tradition of metafiction. Kehinde's narration is a product of not only her own writing but also Gonçalves's fictional editing of Geninha's fictional transcription of Kehinde's fictional oral narration.

Despite these layers of fiction operating within *Um defeito de cor*, describing the novel as "fiction" and leaving it at that would not do it complete justice. The novel fleshes out Luísa Gama's personhood in a way that its "Carta a Lúcio de Mendonça," its original source material, does not. Fiction is thus a way of arriving closer to the truth of history through its exploration of black women's subjectivity. *Um defeito de cor* is based on not only Gama's letter but many more works of history. It contains a "Bibliografia" of historical references that also inform the text, such as João José Reis's eminent study on the Malê Revolt, *Rebelião Escrava no Brasil: A Historia do Levante dos Malês em 1835* (2003). As she herself writes in the bibliography's note, "Esta é uma obra que mistura ficção e realidade" (Gonçalves 949). *Um defeito de cor* is therefore a historical novel that draws from Ana Maria Gonçalves's creative license to fill in history's missing pieces. Through the eyes of its central character and hero, Kehinde, *Um defeito de cor* spans over one hundred years of Trans-Atlantic history from Africa to Brazil, and from Africa back to Brazil. Kehinde's narration thus gives a voice to not only Luísa Mahin but also to the millions of African and Afrodescendant women who were also enslaved in Brazil. As Maddox concludes in "The Black Atlantic Revisited," "Her neo-slave narrative places the largest slave-based nation in the Americas at the center of African Diaspora literature" (171) Within the novel's fiction, Kehinde, Geninha, and Ana Maria Gonçalves write on behalf of those women who, unlike Kehinde, could not or did not write about their own experiences under slavery in Brazil. *Um defeito de cor* thus resembles *Reyita, sencillamente* because both represent the

process of intergenerational dialogue among black women in Latin America to produce slave testimony. Along with *Changó, el gran putas*, *Um defeito de cor* represents another postmodern epic novel that fills the important gap of Latin America in the neo-slave narrative genre.

***Um defeito de cor* and the Slave Narrative Tradition**

Um defeito de cor reflects the slave narrative tradition throughout the text, beginning with the author's preface, "Serendipidades!" In the preface, Ana Maria Gonçalves imitates What Robert Stepto calls the "authenticating function" of the slave narrative preface (3). Whereas Stepto points to the example of William Lloyd Garrison as one such "other voice" present in *Narrative in the Life of Frederick Douglass*, we might also refer to the example of Domingo Del Monte as the voice "from behind the veil" in Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía*. Furthermore, Samuel Moore's preface to *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* serves to legitimate the subject's firsthand oral account of slavery. From the nineteenth century to the twentieth, editors' prefaces have continued performing the function of authenticating black people's accounts of slavery and its legacy, as Audálio Dantas demonstrates in *Quarto de despejo*, and as Miguel Barnet also demonstrates in *Biografía de un cimarrón*. By writing an author's preface to the main text of *Um defeito de cor*, Ana Maria Gonçalves authenticates Kehinde's narrative and thus participates in the slave narrative tradition.

It is significant that Ana Maria Gonçalves, who is an Afro-Brazilian woman,³⁵² plays the role as the text's authenticator. At the same time as she participates in the slave narrative tradition in "Serendipidades!", Ana Maria Gonçalves simultaneously revises the tradition of

³⁵² Quoting his interview with Gonçalves, Maddox writes that she "found a black female identity in the United States in a moment of solidarity with African American women who called her 'sistah' at an Irma Thomas concert" ("The Black Atlantic Revisited" 157).

white men vouching for the authenticity of black men's firsthand oral or written accounts of slavery. Like Daisy Rubiera's preface to *Reyita, sencillamente*, Gonçalves's preface to *Um defeito de cor* represents black women validating black women's accounts of slavery and its legacy in Latin America. However, "Serendipidades!" is different because it is a part of the novel's fiction. Gonçalves's preface prevents us from reading the novel simply as Kehinde's manuscripts. Just as *Autobiografía* contains Domingo del Monte's voice, *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua* contains Samuel Moore's voice, and *Quarto de despejo* contains Audálio Dantas's voice, the main text of *Um defeito de cor* contains Ana Maria Gonçalves's voice. It also contains Geninha's voice as Kehinde's transcriber. "Ana Maria Gonçalves," the fictionalized character of "Serendipidades!", should not be confused with Ana Maria Gonçalves, the author of *Um defeito de cor*.³⁵³ In "Serendipidades!", Ana Maria Gonçalves's fictionalized self describes the changes that she had made to Kehinde's manuscripts in the process of editing them. The changes include filling in information for missing and illegible pages, adding footnotes for words in the Yoruba language, and adding punctuation and chapters organized by theme (Gonçalves 17).³⁵⁴ In describing Gonçalves's alterations to the fictional manuscripts, the novel invites readers to ask a series of questions that they might ask themselves while reading other slave narratives: What might Gonçalves (the character) have added to Kehinde's manuscripts? What might she have left out, suppressed, or "silenced" at the same time as

³⁵³ Ana Maria Gonçalves's fictionalization of herself is like Jorge Luis Borges's in "El Aleph." Borges the narrator and Borges the author are not the same. Rather, the former is a fictionalization of the latter (and, within postmodern thought, the latter a construction of the former). See also the short story "Borges y yo" for another example of metafiction.

³⁵⁴ "Nunca é demais lembrar que tinham desaparecido ou estavam ilegíveis várias folhas do original, e que nem sempre me foi possível entender tudo que estava escrito. Optei por deixar algumas palavras ou expressões em iorubá, língua que acabou sendo falada por muitos escravos, mesmo não sendo a língua nativa deles. Nestes casos, coloquei a tradução ou a explicação no rodapé. O texto original também é bastante corrido, escrito por quem desejava acompanhar a velocidade do pensamento, sem pontuação e quebra de linhas ou parágrafos. Para facilitar a leitura, tomei a liberdade de pontuá-lo, dividi-lo em capítulos e, dentro de cada capítulo, em assuntos" (Gonçalves 17).

bringing Kehinde's writing to light? What is the overall effect of Gonçalves's presence within Kehinde's narration on the reader? To what degree did Geninha leave her own imprint on her transcription of Kehinde's oral narration? While we might take several different approaches to responding to such questions, they nonetheless illustrate overlap between the novel and the slave narrative genre. Just as we cannot read *Biografía de un cimarrón* as simply representing Esteban Montejo's narration, or *Reyita, sencillamente* as simply representing Reyita's "voices," neither can we read *Um defeito de cor* as simply representing the pure unfiltered voice of Kehinde.

The novel establishes further similarities with the slave narrative genre throughout the odyssey of Kehinde's life. Just as many US slave narratives, such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* begin with the famous phrase "I was born...", Kehinde begins her narration with "Eu nasci em Savalu, reino de Daomé, África, no ano de um mil oitocentos e dez" (Gonçalves 19). The similarities continue throughout the novel beyond its first sentence, of course. Just like *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua, Reyita, sencillamente*, and even *Changó, el gran putas*, Chapter One begins with a description of Africa. It is not the idyllic Cabinda of *Reyita, sencillamente*, but rather a Daomé scarred by war. After being attacked by warriors of the king Adandozan, Kehinde, her sister Taiwo, and her grandmother flee to the larger coastal city of Uidá. There, Kehinde and Taiwo face more tragedy when they are captured by white traders and taken aboard a slave ship bound for Brazil. Unable to rescue her grandchildren from capture, Kehinde's grandmother decides instead to join them on the perilous journey across the Atlantic. Due to the miserable conditions on board, neither Taiwo nor Kehinde's grandmother survive. Both die and are thrown overboard, leaving Kehinde alone to face slavery on a foreign continent, accompanied only by her Orixás and memory of home and family. In these ways, Kehinde's description of the Middle Passage establishes similarity with

other slave narratives using imagery. Like Olaudah Equiano and Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua, Kehinde fears that she will be cooked and devoured upon arrival to her destination across the Atlantic (Gonçalves 34).³⁵⁵ She also observes the practice of separating families that is common to these narratives as well as *Reyita, sencillamente*.³⁵⁶ Like all these texts, *Um defeito de cor* describes the discomfort, hunger, disease, desperation, and death that inevitably accompanied the Trans-Atlantic journeys across the Middle Passage.³⁵⁷ As the longest of the texts mentioned, *Um defeito de cor* describes the conditions of the ships with the greatest detail. Kehinde soberly observes the most sensationnally grotesque details (such as a fulani christened “João,” who had fallen and whose injury had left his leg bone exposed) to the struggles of living one’s daily life in a dark space crammed full of strangers (the Muslims had quit praying to Alá since, after several days in the hull, they no longer knew which way Mecca faced).³⁵⁸ The emotionlessness of Kehinde’s tone resembles Esteban Montejo’s more closely than other slave narratives’ tone of righteous anger and sorrow. Even when her sister and grandmother are thrown overboard, she writes that she did not know if she felt sad, happy to be alive, or afraid (Gonçalves 61). Rather than describing the misery of slavery to sympathetic reader, like Mãe Susana in *Úrsula*, or Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua in his biography, what most concerns Kehinde is giving a complete account of her life to her son. The speed at which Kehinde wrote her narration is explicitly emphasized in “Serendipidades,” in which Ana Maria Gonçalves notes that she had added

³⁵⁵ See *Um defeito de cor*: “Akin confirmou que, de algum modo que não sabia como, os pretos que iam para o estrangeiro se transformavam em carneiros sim, e eram assados e comidos como carneiros, carne que os brancos muito apreciavam” (Gonçalves 34).

³⁵⁶ “Quando entraram os primeiros homens, a tranquilidade foi quebrada pelas vozes das mulheres que queriam saber se os seus parentes ou conhecidos estavam entre eles. Chamavam os nomes e ficavam à espera de uma voz responder que sim ou de o silêncio responder que não” (Gonçalves 46).

³⁵⁷ “Mas ao fim de três dias, nem os muçurumins reclamavam mais, e até a altura das vozes que diziam as rezas foi diminuindo, pois estávamos muito cansados. Pela viagem, pelos enjoos, pela dificuldade de dormir, pela falta de comida, pelo ar que descia apodrecendo a garganta, pela sede” (Gonçalves 49).

³⁵⁸ “Fechados dentro do porão do tumbeiro, sem nenhuma referência da direção que estávamos seguindo, não tinham como saber para que lado ficava Meca” (Gonçalves 49).

punctuation and chapter divisions in her “transcription” of Kehinde’s original manuscripts. The length and detail of her narrative reflect her urgency to connect with her estranged son.

The novel’s greatest tragedy is that her efforts to tell her son everything do not reach him, but through “Ana Maria Gonçalves’s” editing and publication of the manuscripts they can at least reach the contemporary reader. Within her stream of consciousness are not only descriptions of captives’ suffering in the slave ship’s hull but also observations of the many cultures and languages present amongst her,³⁵⁹ as well as the importance of her own iorubá language and religion. Her account is rich with words in Yoruba (*iorubá*) that are sometimes explained in footnotes per Ana Maria Gonçalves’s addition, not unlike like the “Caderno de Bitácora” (Book of Navigation) at the end of *Changó, el gran putas* or glossaries at the end of *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Reyita, sencillamente*. Although told within a realist style, Kehinde’s narration is like *Changó, el gran putas* in narrating the Middle Passage from a distinctly Yoruba perspective. Like Ngafúa in *Changó*, Kehinde remarks on the presence of the Orixás, “Iemanjá, Oxum, Exu, Odum, Ogum, Xangô,” and many ancestors amongst them (Gonçalves 48). *Um defeito de cor* demonstrates clear continuity with slave narratives by narrating the arduous Middle Passage from an African (and more specifically Yoruba) perspective: Kehinde’s. Throughout Chapters Two through Five, Kehinde continues to dedicate her entirely first-person narration to her trajectory from slavery to freedom in Brazil. Kehinde’s identity as a girl and then as a young woman has an important impact on the narration. Like “Linda Brent” (Harriet Jacobs) in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Kehinde recalls the

³⁵⁹ Including, “jejes, fons, hauçás, igbos, fulanis, mais, popos, tapas, achantis, e egbás,” amongst many others (Gonçalves 48).

harassment she receives from her captor, Sinhô José Carlos, as well as the jealousy that it provokes in her mistress, Sinhá Ana Felipa, thereby resulting in increased punishment.

Furthermore, the process in which Kehinde learns to not only speak and understand but also speak and read Portuguese, the language of the colonizer, represents a point of contact between *Um defeito de cor* and other slave narratives that were written by formerly enslaved authors, such as *Autobiografía*, by Juan Francisco Manzano, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Chapter Five culminates in Kehinde's liberation, just like the narratives of Manzano, Douglass, Baquaqua, Jacobs, Montejo, and many more. In other words, the narrative of slavery (Kehinde's included) is also characteristically a liberation narrative. Beyond the author's preface, these themes only further reinforce the relationship between *Um defeito de cor* and the slave narrative tradition. Although the novel is ultimately just that, a novel, it reflects themes repeated time and time again within the slave narrative genre. Kehinde's narration expresses truth about the lives of not only Luísa Gama, whom Kehinde is meant to represent in the novel, but also millions of enslaved African women kidnapped and forcibly brought to the Americas. *Um defeito de cor* is therefore an essential Brazilian narrative of slavery, along with the "Carta" that helped to inspire it.

Ripping Up the Slave Narratives' Veil in Brazil

In addition to the many similarities between *Um defeito de cor* and other slave narratives, it also demonstrates similarities with the neo-slave genre. This is not only because it is "new" (published in 2006) but also because, like *Changó, el gran putas*, it challenges the limitations of nineteenth-century antislavery discourse. As Toni Morrison observes in "The Site of Memory," writers such as Olaudah Equiano (and we might add Juan Francisco Manzano here, too) tended

to “pull the narrative up short with a phrase such as, ‘But let us drop a veil over these proceedings too terrible to relate’” (110). In Chapter 2 I write about how *Fe en disfraz* and *las Negras* “rip that veil drawn over ‘proceedings too terrible to relate,’” thereby not only exploring the interior lives of the enslaved but also exposing conditions of their lives that were, during the nineteenth century, unspeakable (110).³⁶⁰ While Toni Morrison accomplishes this task in novels such as *Beloved*, Kehinde’s narration in *Um defeito de cor* also rips the veil “drawn over ‘proceedings too terrible to relate.’”

Of course, this is not to say that other slave narratives do not also describe the horrors of slavery, such as the arbitrary beatings that Manzano recalls in *Autobiografía*, but the difference is that *Um defeito de cor* recounts scenes of violence head-on and unblinkingly, with no veil to shield the reader from the horrors of slavery. The example of “João’s” leg injury from “Capítulo Um” is just one example. Another prominent example from “Capítulo dois” is when, out of jealous rage, Sinhá Ana Felipa removes Verencia’s eyes for bearing José Carlos’s child.³⁶¹ Verencia is thus a victim of not only Ana Felipa but also José Carlos, who had impregnated her in the first place because of rape. The novel continues to outdo itself in “Capítulo três,” in which José Carlos rapes not only Kehinde but also Lourenço, Kehinde’s love interest, in front of her

³⁶⁰ Morrison writes that slave narrative authors “were silent about many things” in order “to make [the experience] palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it” (110). She mentions that one exception to this rule is *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, in which Harriet Jacobs does dare to expose the sexual harassment that she faced from her captor under slavery. See Chapter 2 for analysis on how Afro-Puerto Rican literature revises slave narrative discourse.

³⁶¹ “A sinhá disse que sabia que a criança não tinha culpa e que apenas comentara que a mãe nunca veria o filho, e era isso que ia acontecer. Mandou que os homens segurassem a Verencia com toda a força, arrancou o lenço da cabeça dela, agarrou firme nos cabelos e enfiou a faca perto de um dos olhos. Enquanto o sangue espirrava longe, a sinhá dizia que olhos daquela cor, esverdeados, não combinavam com preto, e fazia a faca rasgar a carne até contornar por completo o olho, quando então enfiou os dedos por dentro do corte, agarrou a bola que formava o olho e puxou, deixando um buraco no lugar... Fez a mesma coisa com o outro olho, guardando os dois no bolso, quando então disse aos homens que podiam leva-la e que não a deixassem morrer de jeito nenhum, porque ela tinha que saber o que significava sentir um filho crescendo dentro da barriga e depois não poder vê-lo, e também porque queria saber se o senhor seu marido ainda ia querer se deitar com uma preta sem olhos” (106-107).

very eyes out of revenge for having attempted to save her.³⁶² The extreme, *tremendista* violence of the novel's descriptions has the effect of not only ripping up the slave narratives' curtain, cast over slavery's most violent scenes, but also the effect of refuting the myth of *mestiçagem* in the Brazilian national imaginary, which suggests that race relations are relatively benign in comparison with other former slaveholding nations, like the United States and South Africa.³⁶³ These descriptions might seem sensationalist on the novel's part, but that does not mean that similar or even worse atrocities did not occur under slavery. Their omission from nineteenth-century slave narratives may not be because they never happened but rather because daring to name them in writing was not possible in nineteenth-century antislavery discourse, requiring a curtain or a veil to be drawn over it instead.

Just as the novel describes scenes of violence in graphic detail, it also describes sex and sexuality that would have never passed in nineteenth-century antislavery discourse. Two examples that have already been mentioned are the first time that Kehinde is raped, by a soldier of King Adandozan in Chapter One, and when she is raped by Sinhô José Carlos in Chapter Three; but Kehinde is not only a victim of rape, a passive object upon which for men to act, but rather an agent of her own sexuality. While still enslaved on José Carlos's plantation, Kehinde expresses her first attraction toward Lourenço, whom she describes as "bonito" (handsome), and whom she notices looking at her on several occasions (153). On one such occasion, José Carlos had ordered her to undress so that he could inspect her. Kehinde describes her feelings of simultaneous revulsion toward José Carlos and pleasure at being looked at with admiration,

³⁶² See the chapter "A posse" (Gonçalves 168-172).

³⁶³ See *Becoming Brazilians: Race and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (2017), by Marshall Eakin.

especially by Lourenço.³⁶⁴ She begins to dream of running away with him to a Quilombo but abandons her dream after he is castrated by José Carlos. Whereas José Carlos exercises his control over enslaved women and men's sexualities, poetic justice is served when he dies a gruesome death of venereal disease. After giving birth to Banjokô, her first son, Kehinde consents to sex with Francisco, an enslaved African to whom she is attracted. This sexual encounter is healing because Kehinde exercises agency and personhood in choosing it. However, Kehinde ultimately prioritizes purchasing her and her son's freedom from Sinhá Ana Felipa overstaying with Francisco. With her freedom, Kehinde also consents to living with Alberto, the father of Omotunde (Luís Gama's name in the novel), but she also distances herself from him once he becomes increasingly depressive, alcoholic, and abusive to her. Through Kehinde's graphic depictions of sex, her reflections on sexuality, and her agency within relationships with both black and white men, her narration explores the subject of black women's sexuality that was always behind the veil of the slave narrative, even if black women did not write about it due to the discursive limitations of nineteenth-century antislavery discourse.

Um defeito de cor continues to rip up the proverbial veil of the slave narrative by exploring Kehinde's internal life, secret thoughts, and contradictions—ones that would have not reflected antislavery advocates' efforts to defend the case of abolition. As William Luis demonstrates in *Literary Bondage*, Richard Robert Madden's translation *Autobiografía* omits Juan Francisco Manzano's reflections on his undying love for the Marquesa del Prado Ameno, despite the abuse that he suffered from her.³⁶⁵ In addition to strong representations of violence

³⁶⁴ “O Lourenço era um homem bonito, com pouco mais de vinte anos, e também me achou bonita, pois estava sempre me olhando de canto de olho. No dia em que me pegou com os peitos de fora, enquanto o sinhô José Carlos deixava a sala, não consegui disfarçar. Nem piscou, enquanto eu gostando de ser olhada” (Gonçalves 153).

³⁶⁵ “The English omits Manzano's defense of his mistress, whom, in spite of her punishments, he loved very much... Manzano's kindness toward his mistress has been deleted from Madden's translation” (Luis, *Literary Bondage* 94).

and sexuality, *Um defeito de cor* contains reflections that, like Manzano's love for the Marquesa, fall outside of the norms of antislavery discourse. Some of Kehinde's reflections involve sexuality, such as her thoughts on receiving pleasure from being admired for her body by Lourenço and even by José Carlos.³⁶⁶ Other reflections regard Kehinde's internal conflict over whether she is doing the right thing by liberating herself and her son, Banjokô, from Sinhá Ana Felipa.³⁶⁷ After Banjokô is born, Ana Felipa claims him as her own, naming him José (after José Carlos) and treating him like the child that she herself was unable to have due miscarriage. At the same time as Ana Felipa increasingly excludes Kehinde from Banjokô's life, Kehinde earns more and more money as a wage slave by selling English-style cookies for the purpose of purchasing her and her son's freedom. However, Kehinde reflects that freedom for Banjokô would mean a loss of social status and material comfort. Even though legally Ana Felipa's property, Banjokô grows up white under her care, with all the privileges of being white in Imperial Brazilian society. Kehinde finally does wrest Banjokô from Ana Felipa's grip, but her uncertainty and guilt are infinitely multiplied when he dies from a tragic accident under her care.³⁶⁸ By wavering on her belief that freedom was what was best for her son, Kehinde's

³⁶⁶ When José Carlos forcibly lifts Kehinde's garment to look at her body, Kehinde expresses conflicting emotions between pride in her body and disgust: “Era uma sensação da qual eu gostava, mas não a ponto de deixar que ele percebesse, e senti raiva e nojo quando ele pediu que eu levantasse a cabeça e abrisse os olhos” (152).

³⁶⁷ Kehinde, “confesses” her fear of purchasing her liberty: “... confesso que sempre tive um pouco de medo da reação dele quando finalmente ficássemos juntos, sozinhos, pois ele gostava muito da sinhá, e com razão. Quanto mais demorasse para comprar nossas cartas de alforria, mais ele se apegaria a ela e às coisas que ela podia oferecer e eu ainda não.” She continues this thought by showing confidence that purchasing their freedom is the right thing to do: “Tinha certeza de que em breve eu e meu filho estariámos livres” (Gonçalves 259).

³⁶⁸ “O Banjokô e dois amigos estavam brincando na rua quando foram até a porta da padaria e começaram a mexer nos presentes que os muçurumins sempre da padaria e começaram a mexer nos presentes que os muçurumins sempre deixavam para o mala Abubakar, entre os quais havia uma faca. O Banjokô estava com ela na mão quando ouviram um barulho dentro da loja e saíram correndo, com medo de serem repreendidos, e alguns passos adiante meu filho tropeçou e caiu sobre a faca, que o atingiu bem no coração” (Gonçalves 468). Reflecting on this accident, Kehinde remarks on the coincidence that he had died falling on a knife meant for cutting lamb meat (Kehinde had feared she would be turned into a lamb upon arrival in Brazil), and the fear that she felt that Sinhá Ana Felipa would find out about the incident and blame her carelessness: “Mas também sentia um grande medo de que a sinhá ficasse sabendo do acontecido e me cobrasse pelo descaso com que tinha cuidado do meu filho, permitindo que morresse de maneira tão boba, justo ele, a quem ele pretendia dar futuro” (Gonçalves 468).

personal reflections fall outside of the line of what black authors could and could not write within the boundaries of nineteenth-century antislavery discourse. Kehinde's multifaceted personality reflect her humanity and challenge versions of an always-heroic Luísa Gama. Her doubts about liberation being the right choice do not detract from the novel's antislavery discourse but reveal that enslaved people were fully-fledged individuals with rich interior lives. She shows that it is possible for black people to be the heroes of their own stories without having to be always-heroic or always-strong, even in the historical context of slavery.

One of the greatest differences between *Um defeito de cor* and nineteenth-century slave narratives is through Kehinde's relationship with her Yoruba heritage and religion. The suppression of black women's sexualities in slave narratives is related to the Christian discourse of women's purity, but so is the suppression of African religion and spirituality. One of the ways in which the subjects of slave narratives gained respectability within nineteenth-century society was by performing Christianity in their oral narratives and writing. Juan Francisco Manzano recalls how he had memorized sermons as a child and compares himself to Jesus because of his suffering under slavery (Luis, *Autobiografía* 312). Furthermore, whether out of sincere conviction or to receive help from the Baptist Free Mission Society, Baquaqua attests to his conversion from Islam to Christianity in his biography and in his handwritten letters.³⁶⁹ However, more like the many narrators of *Changó, el gran putas*, Kehinde remains faithful to her African identity, ancestors, and deities throughout her long life. The orishas and the ancestors are present with Kehinde in the slave ship and in the many difficulties she faces in Brazil (48). Before her

³⁶⁹ For an appendix of Baquaqua's letters, see *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua*, edited by Robin Law and Paul E. Lovejoy (2001) (233-250).

death, Kehinde's grandmother tells her to never forget her heritage.³⁷⁰ She never does, even when staying true to her culture implies risk. Kehinde temporarily take Banjokô back from Sinhá Ana Felipa for him to be baptized by a Babalao. Even though Kehinde is punished with expulsion from the plantation and separated from Banjokô (until purchasing his freedom) Kehinde fulfills her duty to the orishas and her ancestors.

There are many more ways that *Um defeito de cor* goes beyond the discursive limitations of the slave narrative, its literary ancestor. Contrary to historical accounts,³⁷¹ Kehinde is present amidst the carnage of the disastrous Malê Slave Revolt. Many of her friends, including Fatumbi, the Muslim man who had taught her how to read, are killed in the revolt's brutal repression. Her participation in the Revolt and her association with its organizers are far beyond the pale of nineteenth-century antislavery discourse, which ultimately aimed to stymy revolts (such as the one in Saint Domingue in 1791). Associating black people with revolution went against the slave narratives' aim to represent black people favorably to white readers, who could have advocated for change through legal abolition or reform. And herein lies the most decisive difference between the slave narratives and *Um defeito de cor*: the implied reader. Toward the middle Kehinde's narration, she reveals that her implied reader is none other than Omotunde, the name that she gives Luís Gama in the novel.³⁷² The underlying motive of her narration, therefore, is not to appeal to white benefactors, like in many nineteenth-century slave narratives; but rather, to tell her story to her son, to explain how they had become separated, and to show that she had never

³⁷⁰ Referring to the final wishes of Kehinde's grandmother: "... ela disse para eu nunca me esquecer da nossa África, da nossa mãe, de Nanã, de Xangô, dos Ibéjis, de Oxum, do poder dos pássaros e das plantas, da obediência e respeito aos mais velhos, dos cultos que agradecemos" (61).

³⁷¹ See "O Caso Luiza Mahin" in *Rebelião escrava no Brasil: A história do levante dos malês em 1835* (2003), by João José Reis (301-303).

³⁷² "Será que você ainda se lembra do seu irmão? O que terá acontecido a você durante todos esses anos? Por mais que o destino tenha sido bom comigo, tenha me dado mais filhos que sempre me orgulharam, nunca te esqueci. Estou carregando comigo todas as cartas trocadas, para que você saiba de tudo que fiz na esperança de te encontrar, meu pequeno Omotunde" (Gonçalves 406).

stopped seeking him. At the end of the text, Kehinde writes that the text represents an “grande *mea-culpa*” for her absence (Gonçalves 945). In her motive to teach Omotunde about herself, her heritage, and her beliefs, we might describe Kehinde’s motive for writing her autobiographical manuscripts as didactic. Within the novel’s fictional framework, this didactic function is also shared by “Ana Maria Gonçalves,” whose implicit audience is a twenty-first century reading public. This reading public may or may not be familiar with Candomblé, Umbanda, and other Afro-Brazilian religions that are the legacy of Africans having been forcibly brought to Brazil. As she explains in the preface, “Gonçalves” (character) adds footnotes to her transcription of Kehinde’s manuscripts to translate and explain terms written in the Yoruba language. The footnotes also contain explanations for words in other languages, nineteenth-century archaisms, and other historical terms. These footnotes play a similar role as the glossaries at the end of *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Changó, el gran putas*. They are footholds for the contemporary readers unaccustomed to Afro-Brazilian culture and history who embark on Kehinde’s journey.

Beyond Ana Maria Gonçalves’s “addition” of footnotes, the text itself extends the novel’s didactic function. Just as Esteban Montejó’s long life might be read within *Biografía de un cimarrón* as a narrative device to witness several stages throughout Cuba’s history (slavery, abolition, and the War of Independence), Kehinde bears witness to many more stages of African and Brazilian histories throughout her lifetime of over roughly eight decades (the reign of King Adandozan of Dahomey, Brazilian Independence in 1822, the 1835 Malê Revolt, and the 1837 “Sabinada” Revolt). Although it covers about a century of Trans-Atlantic history as opposed to the five centuries covered in *Changó, el gran putas*, *Um defeito de cor* is a historical tour-de-force related from the perspective of an African woman who lived through the times and events that she describes. Unrestrained by pressure to conform to the norms of nineteenth-century

antislavery discourse, Kehinde writes freely of her most intimate thoughts and feelings, her developing sexual desires and her agency to act or not act on them, and the horrors of slavery “from behind the veil” of what was deemed acceptable or not in literature during the time of her writing (approximately the last quarter of the nineteenth century). Through her epic text, Kehinde transforms from Luísa Mahin, the object of Luís Gama’s writing, into the subject of her own writing and the hero of her own story.

To return to the preface, “Serendipidades!” opens the question: how much of Kehinde’s narration is her own and how much is invention on the part of Ana Maria Gonçalves’s character? Did she merely add footnotes, chapter breaks, and information in which pages of the manuscripts were illegible, as she claims, or did she largely embellish Kehinde’s account? Just as we might ask when reading slave narratives or *testimonios*, whose text is *Um defeito de cor*? Ultimately, the text belongs to neither Kehinde nor Ana Maria Gonçalves’s character within the novel but, outside of the novel’s framework, to Ana Maria Gonçalves, who wrote the novel, and to the readers, who must address these questions for themselves. In writing herself as the constant voice behind Kehinde’s narration in *Um defeito de cor*, the novel introduces a postmodern element to what, without “Serendipidades！”, would have otherwise been a straightforward account of Kehinde’s life and times “in her own words.” Because of this postmodern “twist” to Kehinde’s odyssey, I add *Um defeito de cor* as a postmodern epic alongside *Changó, el gran putas*. Both represent continuity with the slave narrative genre, but they also draw from postmodern literary techniques to elevate the notion of narrating slavery from the perspectives of those who lived through it. The novels therefore distinguish themselves from their literary ancestors while continuing the tradition of writing for those who could not or did not write for themselves under slavery.

For this reason, *Changó, el gran putas* and *Um defeito de cor* expand the contemporary “neo-slave narrative” genre to include Latin American literature. This is significant because, of the approximately twelve million Africans brought to the Americas, approximately over one million were brought to the Spanish colonies and nearly six million were brought to Brazil (Eltis and Richardson). Most of their lives, experiences, and perspectives are unknown, despite exceptional documents such as *Autobiografía*, by Juan Francisco Manzano, and *Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua*. To this list of documents, we might add many more in which enslaved or formerly enslaved subjects represent their own experiences in writing, such as Esperança Garcia’s letter to the Provincial Governor of Piauí, written by herself in 1770, and Luís Gama’s autobiographical letter to Lúcio de Mendonça. These scattered documents and others like them are invaluable to the history of slavery in Latin America. They reveal rare glimpses into the lives of the enslaved in their own words. Precisely due to their scarcity, they also reveal the vast silence of the enslaved on their condition in writing. Perhaps one of the reasons that *Changó, el gran putas* and *Um defeito de cor* are so long, ambitious, and epic in scope is that they attempt to make up for the vastness of that silence. Perhaps yet another reason is because even these rare documents are limited in what they could write by the discursive norms of their times. Both Toni Morrison and Robert Stepto analyze the “veil” is drawn over their most horrific experiences and interior lives, but like the neo-slave narratives in the United States, *Changó, el gran putas* and *Um defeito de cor* tear back the veil of nineteenth-century antislavery discourse to reveal not only the horrors of slavery but the vast diversity of black cultures, experiences, and perspectives during the first four centuries of Africans’ presence in the Americas.

Postmodern Epics Beyond *Changó, el gran putas* and *Um defeito de cor*

Changó, el gran putas and *Um defeito de cor* are not Latin America's only postmodern epic neo-slave narratives. We might also add Marcelo D'Salete's *Angola Janga* (2017), a graphic novel. The omniscient gaze captures the words and actions of multiple characters, like the camera in a film. While Zumbi is one of the graphic novel's most important characters, *Angola Janga*'s main character might better be described as "Angola Janga" itself, this phrase meaning "Little Angola," and referring to the Quilombo dos Palmares. Nevertheless, *Angola Janga* approximates the neo-slave narrative through some aspects of its story. Even though it is not "narrated" by an enslaved subject, its protagonists are the enslaved and the liberated. Slavery is represented not to give captives a Christian education, but rather to generate profit. Those who attempt to resist are severely punished, and others are punished for no reason at all. *Angola Janga* thereby gives the moral high ground to the captives and justifies their flight to freedom. Their Christian captors, on the other hand, are portrayed as savages. These elements are as fundamental to *Angola Janga* as they are to slave narratives like *Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua*. Zumbi dos Palmares is depicted as dying a martyr's death. In the penultimate chapter, entitled "O Abraço," or "The Embrace," Soares and Andala (two of Zumbi's warriors) are captured by the Portuguese (D'Salete 329). Soares later reveals Zumbi's location to his captors in exchange for a promise to be freed. He finds Zumbi and embraces him with his captors in attendance (D'Salete 360). Soares's betraying embrace gestures toward Judas's betrayal of Jesus Christ with a kiss in the Bible.

Antislavery discourse before abolition tend to portray black subjects as Christ-like figures in the face of persecution. Prominent examples of this include not only North American novels like

Uncle Tom's Cabin, but also Latin American texts like Maria Firmina dos Reis's novel *Úrsula*, published in 1859, and Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía*. The strategy of these antislavery narratives was to elicit sympathy from target white readers. Zumbi's martyrdom illustrates continuity between the slave narrative and *Angola Janga*. However, the graphic novel is not restrained by the discursive limitations of the pre-abolition slave narrative, and it does not end with the defeat of Zumbi dos Palmares. After Zumbi is killed, Soares sacrifices himself to help Andala escape (D'Salete 366). In the last panel of the penultimate chapter, Soares says he hears drums playing in the distance, suggesting that the Quilombo dos Palmares survived beyond its leader's death (D'Salete 386). The final chapter opens with an epigraph, written by Domingos Jorge Velho, the bandeirante who led Pernambuco's campaign to destroy the Quilombo dos Palmares (D'Salete 388).³⁷³ Domingos writes that he fears that Zumbi's death did not put an end to the *mocambos*. Indeed, the following panels illustrate a connection between Palmares and the present. The first panel of the last chapter, seen here, features a wide shot of Latin America that zooms into a Brazilian metropolis:

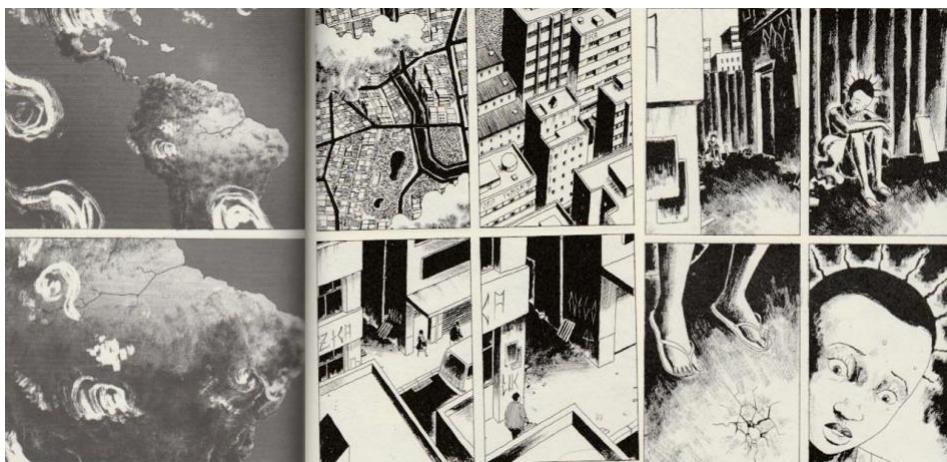


Figure 1. 10 panels from *Angola Janga* (D'Salete 390-392).

³⁷³ "... de resto dos ditos negros difusos e espalhados em vários mocambinhos (que ainda, que há que se lisonjeia, de que tais negros não chegam a trinta, entretanto serão trinta vezes trinta pelo menos). Domingo Jorge Velho, *Pernambuco, 1698*" (qtd. in D'Salete 388).

The style of the buildings, and the pixação on them, suggest that the scene is set during the present day. The shot concludes with a close-up of Dara, a young member of the conquered Quilombo. Dara is a gesture to Dandara, another legendary figure of the Quilombo dos Palmares. The dream sequence here ends to find Dara back in slavery. At the end of the last chapter, Dara is freed by Andala and other surviving *mocambos*, suggesting that black resistance to white hegemony in Brazil continued beyond Palmares, and lives on to today.

All these works fill in the blanks left by the slave narrative in not only one way, but in at least two. Like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and other neo-slave narratives in the United States, they blend history and fiction to reconstruct the exterior and interior lives of the enslaved. By doing so, they also represent African life in pre-abolition Latin America excluded by nineteenth-century slave narratives in Latin America such as *Autobiografía*, by Juan Francisco Manzano, and *The Biography of Mahommah Baquaqua*. While this task is accomplished by *testimonios* such as *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Reyita, sencillamente*, as well as works blending memory and literary creation by Carolina Maria de Jesus and Conceição Evaristo, *Changó, el gran putas* and *Um defeito de cor* come closer to approximating the neo-slave narrative genre. The first is mostly narrated by enslaved Africans and their descendants (as well as their orishas and ancestors), and the second is entirely narrated by Kehinde, a formerly enslaved African (albeit through the filters of Geninha's transcription and Ana Maria Gonçalves's "editing" within the novel's fictional framework). Together, these works show that neo-slave narratives are not only the domain of black authors in the United States during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but also of *autores afro-hispánicos* and *afro-brasileiros*.

CONCLUSIONS

SILENCE'S ECHOES: THE ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE IN THE PRESENT

Por eso digo que no quiero morirme, para echar todas las batallas que vengan.
-Miguel Barnet and Esteban Montejo³⁷⁴

From the Caribbean to South America, and from the nineteenth century through the twenty-first, slavery in Afro-Latin American literary narrative reflects not only the past but also its legacy of racism and black people's ongoing struggle for freedom and justice in the present. The scholarly observation that there are relatively few slave narratives in Latin America obscures the fact that Afro-Latin Americans have long denounced slavery in literary narrative. The focus here is on works from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil, and Colombia because of their prominent status in the world of Afro-Latin American literature. It is also because the works selected center the lives, experiences, and viewpoints of the enslaved. Together they provide ample evidence for my argument that it is problematic to regard slave narratives in Latin America in terms of deficit when slavery is an abundant theme in Afro-Latin American literary narrative. This is especially true when one looks at not only the nineteenth century but also the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. However, this dissertation's broad approach to the topic of slavery in Afro-Latin American literature inevitably creates silences of its own. Afro-Central American narrative, Afro-Latin American poetry, Afro-Latino or Afro-Latinx literature in the United States, visual narrative forms, and social media are not within the main scope of this dissertation, but they reinforce the role of slavery and its aftermath as a central preoccupation in Afro-Latin American literature, arts, and culture.

³⁷⁴ Biografía de un cimarrón, 182.

Slavery in Afro-Central American Narrative

Geographically, the scope of this dissertation includes the Caribbean and South America, but slavery is a major theme in Afro-Central American literary narrative as well. Mayra Santos Febres's *Fe en disfraz* addresses slavery in Costa Rica, but so do Afro-Costa Rican authors. The most famous Afro-Costa Rican author today is Dr. Quince Duncan (1980-). Like *Fe en disfraz*, Duncan's oeuvre crosses national borders in pursuit of the black experience. Dorothy Mosby, the leading scholar of Afro-Costa Rican literature, analyzes the concept of transnational blackness in Duncan's work:

Several texts by Afro-Costa Rica novelist Quince Duncan connect with a notion of transnational Blackness through multiple locations in the Diaspora. Duncan's first novel, *Hombres Curtidos* (1971) travels between the land of the Ashanti in Africa, the plantations of Jamaica, Panama, and Costa Rica; thus, displaying the multiple migrations and multiple diasporas of Afro-Costa Ricans: Africa to the Insular Caribbean; from the Caribbean to Central America. *La Paz del Pueblo* (1976), Duncan's third novel follows a similar flow pattern, however, journeys between Haiti, Jamaica, Costa Rica, and Panama. The novelist's latest text, *A Message for Rosa* (2007) is a collection of vignettes of the African Diaspora across space and time that touch the major sites of cultural resistance in the "black Atlantic"—Africa, Western Europe, and points in the Americas such as the U.S., Jamaica, Brazil, Cuba, and Haiti. (Mosby 16)³⁷⁵

Duncan's literary project is diasporic in scope in not only his novels but also his short stories that minutely portray contemporary Afro-Costa Rican life. In "Una canción en la madrugada" (1970),

³⁷⁵ Mosby includes Brazil, Cuba, and Haiti in the black Atlantic, but Maddox challenges Paul Gilroy's exclusion of Afro-Latin America from his work in *Challenging the Black Atlantic*.

transnational blackness is reflected in musical eclecticism. The protagonists, Juan y Mayra, are at a Sunday *baile* after church in which there are *calipso*s, *boleros*, and the blues. The blues originate from the Mississippi delta in the United States but are defined in a footnote as “Canción nostálgica propia de las culturas negras” (Duncan 19). The blues thus belong to black culture transnationally, and they are preferred by the protagonists Juan and Mayra because “en su cadenciosa tristeza se expresa con más fidelidad la alegría de vivir sobrepuerta al dolor de siglos del negro” (Duncan 19). In other words, the blues is like the black experience itself in that it speaks to the multiple “routes” of black diasporic identity (here the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United States), as well as the social memory of slavery that make up the “roots” of black history (Mosby 5-6).³⁷⁶ “Una canción en la madrugada” is different from the works at the center of this study because it does not center the experiences and perspectives of the enslaved, but slavery is never absent contextually from stories that center Afrodescendant people and culture.

This is also true for the works of US-based Afro-Panamanian novelist Carlos Guillermo “Cubena” Wilson (1941-). Sonja Stephenson Watson³⁷⁷ observes that “blacks in Panama are divided into two cultural groups who migrated to the nation during different time periods: one group during the colonial period (fifteenth to eighteenth centuries) and the other during the constructions of the Trans-Isthmian Railroad (1850– 1855) and the French (1880– 1890) and North-American Canals (1904– 1914)” (*Los nietos de Felicidad Dolores* 31). The first group identifies as Afro-Hispanics and the second as Afro-Caribbeans. Despite the historical, linguistic, and cultural tensions between the Afro-Caribbeans and Afro-Hispanics in Panama, both groups

³⁷⁶ See “Roots and Routes: Transnational Blackness in Afro-Costa Rican Literature,” from *Critical Perspectives on Afro-Latin American Literature* (2011), edited by Antonio D. Tillis.

³⁷⁷ See “*Los nietos de Felicidad Dolores* (*The Grandchildren of Felicidad Dolores*) and the Contemporary Afro-Hispanic Historical Novel: A Postcolonial Reading,” from *Critical Perspectives on Afro-Latin American Literature* (2011), edited by Antonio D. Tillis.

share a history of social exclusion based on race and trace their origins to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The author's transnational black identity and connection with Afro-Latin America is expressed in his signature shield featured in his books:

At the beginning of each of his literary works, the shield, *Escudo Cubena* ("Cubena's Shield") appears containing a seven-link chain, seven stars, a bee on top of a turtle, and a book, all followed by an explanation of their significance. Wilson explains that the seven-link chain represents the African cultures that were enslaved in the Americas; the seven stars typify regions where the most Africans were enslaved, including Brazil, Cuba and Puerto Rico, Jamaica and Martinique, Panama, Peru and Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and Venezuela and Colombia; the bee embodies the chains, lashings, injustices, and insults that Afro-descended populations have suffered since 1492; the turtle symbolizes the type of character that Africans have developed during their odyssey throughout the Americas; and the book is a symbol of the principal tool used to combat mental slavery: education. (Watson, *Los nietos de Felicidad Dolores* 33)

Slavery is a recurring theme throughout his novels. In *Chombo* and *Los nietos de Felicidad Dolores* (1991), the narrator compares West Indians' journey to Panama to the Middle Passage (Watson 36). What unifies rival groups of Afro-Hispanics and Afro-Caribbeans in Panama are their shared connection to Africa:

For their pilgrimage, the families board a plane, and the narrator reminisces about Africa and reconstructs the arrival of Blacks to Spain and the New World. Ironically, these Africans in Spain are related to the same West Indian 'diggers' who constructed the Panama Canal, and thus, they bring into question the extent to which West Indians are

culturally different from Afro-Hispanics in Panama (Watson, *Los nietos de Felicidad Dolores* 37).

The author himself inserts himself into the text and “relates that Afro-Latin Americans are now “united” and, in fact, have always been since they share a common African origin” (Watson, *Los nietos de Felicidad Dolores* 37). *Chombo* and *Los nietos de Felicidad Dolores* thus do not center the enslaved but are concerned with slavery insofar as it represents a common origin that unites African diasporic people:

The Grandchildren is concerned with restoring Panama’s African heritage and the non-linear timeframe reflects this objective. As Luisa Howell suggests: “the lack of uniformity and / or structure, is a metaphor for slavery and the black experience” (41). Similar to slavery, the organization of the novel is chaotic and moves non-linearly from one era to another. In addition to the main characters previously cited, there are numerous others that color the novel. However, Cubena illustrates that similar to the numerous slaves scattered throughout the Diaspora, these characters are related not only through familial ties but also through Diasporic ones because they share a common African heritage. Thus, despite the chaos present in the novel, Cubena illustrates that there is unity among these Afro-descendants. (Watson, *Los nietos de Felicidad Dolores* 38)

Afro-Hispanic and Afro-Caribbean unity is meaningful in the context of Panama where these two groups have primarily defined themselves in opposition to one another.

Poetic Justice: Slavery in Afro-Latin American Poetry

This dissertation focuses on literary narrative, but Afro-Latin Americans also have long denounced slavery through the medium of poetry as well. Chapter 1 explores how Juan

Francisco Manzano is not only a founding figure of antislavery narrative but also antislavery poetry in Latin America. William Luis's *Autobiografía del esclavo poeta y otros escritos* shows that Manzano's poetry deals with a rich variety of themes that includes slavery. Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989) and Nancy Morejón (1944-) follow Manzano, not only in the sense that they are also Afro-Cuban poets, but also in the sense that they expand the Afro-Cuban antislavery poetic tradition to include the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. Guillén's "Balada de los dos abuelos," from *West Indies, Ltd.* (1934) tells of how Europeans enslaved Africans by deceiving them with trinkets: "¡Oh, costas de cuello virgen / engañadas de abalorios...!" (Guillén 61). Barnet and Montejo echo this origin story of the history of slavery in *Biografía de un cimarrón*: "Para mí que todo empezó cuando los pañuelos punzó... Espantaron por muchos años a los blancos que intentaban meterse en África. Pero el punzó los hundió a todos. Y los reyes y todos los demás, se entregaron facilito" (63). In Barnet and Montejo's version it is red bandanas that whites used to deceive Africans, but the similarity between "Balada de los dos abuelos" and *Biografía de un cimarrón* illustrates a common thread uniting Afro-Cuban antislavery poetry and narrative.

Both narrative and poetry preserve the memory of slavery in literature and represent a voice for millions of Africans and their descendants in Latin America who had been silenced by slavery. The contrast between the white grandfather's refrain "¡Me cансo!" and the black grandfather's "¡Me muero!" expresses the difference of experience between blacks and whites in Cuba (Guillén 60). The poem echoes nineteenth-century antislavery literature in its emphatic tone as well as the trajectory that it follows from the slave ships to the fields and sugar mills where black people in Cuba were held captive:

¡Qué de barcos, qué de barcos!

¡Qué de negros, qué de negros!

¡Qué largo fulgor de cañas!

¡Qué látigo el del negrero!

Piedra de llanto y de sangre,

venas y ojos entreabiertos,

y madrugadas vacías,

y atardeceres de ingenio,

y una gran voz, fuerte voz,

despedazando el silencio.

¡Qué de barcos, qué de barcos,

qué de negros! (Guillén 61)

The “great voice” ultimately belongs neither to Don Federico (el abuelo blanco) nor Taita Facundo (el abuelo blanco) but rather to the poetic voice itself for “breaking the silence” in Cuban poetry on the topic of slavery.

Nancy Morejón further breaks this silence in Cuban poetry. Her most famous poem, “Mujer negra,” follows the trajectory of black women in Cuba from enslavement through the Cuban Revolution. Morejón’s construction of a collective voice for black women in Cuba reveals the blind spots in antislavery works by men like *Biografía de un cimarrón*. “Mujer negra” was published decades before *Reyita, sencillamente, Fe en disfraz*, and *las Negras*. As part of centering the experiences and perspectives of black women during slavery, it attests to rape as a part of black women’s experience during slavery in Latin America. The poetic voice says to her enslaver, “Bordé la casaca de Su Merced y un hijo macho le parí. Mi hijo no tuvo nombre” (Morejón 649). Through the dry humor of her enslaver’s death at the hands of an “impeccable”

English lord,³⁷⁸ the poetic voice gains power over her experiences as a part of her liberation. “Mujer negra” deals with not only black women’s black women’s oppression but also their resistance. Like Esteban Montejo, the poetic voice in “Mujer negra” rebels against slavery and fights for Cuban independence alongside the legendary Afro-Cuban general Antonio Maceo: “Me fui al monte. / Mi real independencia fue el palenque / y cabalgué entre las tropas de Maceo” (Morejón 41). Like Barnet and Montejo, Morejón vindicates Maceo’s status as a national hero, but Morejón also centers Afro-Cuban women’s importance to achieving independence from Spain. “Mujer negra” is thus a corrective to the ways in which black women have been written out of Cuban history. Karen Kornweibel observes that “the tradition of texts placing the Afro-Cuban at the center of definitions of national identity begins much earlier and includes a number of non-fiction life histories” like *Reyita, sencillamente* (67).³⁷⁹ Within the greater category of Afro-Cuban literature, there is considerable overlap between antislavery poetry and narrative.

Slavery is a major theme in Afro-Latin American poetry beyond Cuba, Guillén, and Morejón. Excellent examples can be found in the Dominican Republic. James Davis, the leading scholar of Afro-Dominican poetry in the United States, argues that Afro-Hispanic poetry is like Afro-Hispanic poetry in its protest of racism, but it is different in portraying blackness as separate from Dominican national identity.³⁸⁰ Blacks in Dominican poetry and Dominican culture

³⁷⁸ “Y Su Merced, murió a manos de un impecable lord inglés” (Morejón 40).

³⁷⁹ See “Daisy Rubiera Castillo’s *Reyita*: Mujer Negra” From Objectified Symbol to Empowered Subject.

³⁸⁰ See Davis’s “On Black Poetry in the Dominican Republic” (1982): “Upon investigating Afro-Dominican poetry, one can see the obvious parallelism with the other Afro-Hispanic poetry written throughout Latin America. Afro-Hispanic poetry is mainly a poetry of social protest with the current themes of the denigration of Blacks by the dominant classes, man’s exploitation of man, and the omnipresent human suffering being some of the more important. Also, the theme of the psychological and racial conflicts of the mulatto appears frequently in Afro-Hispanic poetry. Some Negrist poets, in the Dominican Republic as well as in other Latin American countries, affirm their identification with the Black race while others are evasive or ambivalent. What is unique about Afro-Dominican poetry is that many poets have concentrated on those Blacks who are clearly not Dominican and have not allocated comparative attention to, nor demonstrated an appreciation of the autochthonous” (30).

at large tend to refer to Haitians and West Indians.³⁸¹ Nevertheless, slavery is a recurring theme in Afro-Dominican poetry. There are two examples in Davis's article. The first is "Azúcar blanco," by Francisco Domínguez Charro (1910-1943):

In "Azúcar blanco," Domínguez Charro comments specifically on the exploitation of Blacks in the sugar cane industry, for centuries the base of the Dominican economic structure. The poet skillfully portrays sugar as the almighty product that has kept men in chains. He sees sugar as a contradiction: it is sweet, but it is also bitter because it causes many hardships for Blacks. "Qué dulce es el azúcar blanco — perla y lucero — ... Qué amarga," writes the poet. Also significant to the meaning of the poem is the oxymoronic "¡Ay! el azúcar blanco, ¡qué espléndida maravilla degradante!" The poem is a fervid protest for the Black man who toils long hours under the hot sun for meager wages. "Los cauces endulzados del recuerdo están llenos de negros de rostro manso," writes Domínguez Charro. (Davis 28)

The second example is "Los inmigrantes," by Norberto James (1945-2021). His poem "Los inmigrantes" compares West Indians' journey to the Dominican Republic with the Middle Passage:

The poet parallels the migration of his ancestors to the Dominican Republic with the forced migration of African slaves to the island some four centuries ago. He uses this parallel to reiterate his reasons for suggesting that the time has come for absolute equality. "Aseguramos / la posibilidad del canto / para todos" proclaims James in the concluding verses of "Los inmigrantes." (Davis 29)

³⁸¹ "It is important to emphasize here that the term 'negro' in the Dominican Republic is very often used to refer to non-Dominican Blacks, especially the Haitians and Cocolos, the name given to descendants of Black immigrants from the English-speaking Caribbean" (Davis 27).

Novelists like Quince Duncan and Carlos Guillermo “Cubena” Wilson are therefore like James in calling for Afrodescendant unity in their respective countries. West Indians and their descendants have faced discrimination from Afro-Hispanics in the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Panama, but West Indians and Afro-Hispanics alike share a history of enslavement and common ancestral ties to Africa.

In Brazil, the most visible and widely canonized antislavery poet is Antônio de Castro Alves. His poems “Vozes D’África” and “O navio negreiro” set the tone of the third phase of Brazilian Romanticism known as the “Geração condoreira” or “Condoreirismo,” which expresses the Romantics’ love for freedom through a fierce condemnation of slavery.³⁸² However, centering Castro Alves’s contributions to antislavery literature in Brazil de-centers how Afro-Brazilian women have long denounced slavery in literature both before and after him. In addition to *Úrsula*, which I discuss in Chapter 1, Maria Firmina dos Reis also wrote an antislavery short story, “A escrava” (1887),³⁸³ and antislavery verses, including a musical composition and lyrics entitled “Hino à liberdade dos escravos” (1888) published in *Fragmentos de uma vida*:

Salve Pátria do Progresso!

Salve! Salve Deus a Igualdade!

Salve! Salve o sol que raiou hoje,

Difundindo a Liberdade!

³⁸² It has been suggested that Castro Alves is of African descent. Of “O navio negreiro, Cristina Pinto-Bailey writes in the introduction to her translation of *Úrsula* that “the book-length poem was published in 1880, eight years before the abolition of slavery was signed into law but more than twenty years after *Úrsula* was published. Brazilian critic Heloísa Toller Gomes suggests that Castro Alves’s sympathetic view of slaves, which differed so much from the view shared by most Brazilian Romantic writers, had its roots in the poet’s African descent, which afforded him a unique viewpoint. If Castro Alves was of African descent, his biographers have generally omitted that fact, but it explains to a certain extent his passion for the abolitionist cause and sympathetic portrayal of slaves, different from the literary images of Blacks usually found at that time” (xviii).

³⁸³ See “‘The Slave Woman’: An Introduction” (2013) by Cristina Ferreira Pinto-Bailey.

Quebrou-se enfim a cadeia
Da nefanda Escravidão!

Aquelas que antes oprimias,
Hoje terás como irmão! (qtd. in Moraes Filho)

The musical composition celebrates the abolition of slavery May 13, 1888, but the word choice of “Aquelas” and “terás” establishes distance between the poetic voice and the emancipated. It could be argued that Maria Firmina dos Reis thus expresses not solidarity but sympathy with the enslaved, but “Hino à Liberdade dos Escravos” further shows that antislavery discourse is an integral part of her broader body of work beyond her landmark novel *Úrsula*.

Slavery continues to be a central theme in poetry by Afro-Brazilian women poets during the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. In Chapter 3, I discuss Carolina Maria de Jesus’s poem “Meu avô” in which Carolina (re)constructs the voice of her maternal grandfather and gives witness to the slavery-like conditions in which he continued to live during Carolina’s childhood. John Maddox shows that Miriam Alves and Alzira Rufino write poems in homage of Luísa Mahin. Conceição Evaristo addresses slavery in not only her prose but also her poetry. “Vozes-Mulheres” (originally published in 1990 in *Cadernos negros 13*) follows an intergenerational trajectory from the poetic voice’s great grandmother, grandmother, mother, self, and daughter. Echoes run throughout the poem, first with the echoes of her great grandmother as a child in a slave ship:

A voz da minha bisavó
ecoou criança
nos porões do navio.

Ecoou lamentos de uma infância perdida. (Evaristo, “Vozes-Mulheres” 32)

Her great grandmother’s voice echoes through her grandmother’s obedience to whites, who still maintained power as “donos-de-tudo” in Brazilian society; but there is a shift in her mother’s voice, which echoes “baixinha revolta / no fundo das cozinhas alheias” (Evaristo, “Vozes-Mulheres” 32). The poetic voice herself echoes “versos perplexos / com rimas de sangue / e / fome,” suggesting the struggle of find a poetic voice in the context of cycles of oppression rooted in slavery (Evaristo, “Vozes-Mulheres” 33). Hope is found in the figure of the daughter, whose voice speaks for her ancestors who could not speak for themselves, or rather, who were silenced by conditions of violence and oppression during and after slavery:

A voz da minha filha
recolhe todas as nossas vozes
recolhe em si
as vozes mudas caladas
engasgadas nas gargantas. (Evaristo, “Vozes-Mulheres” 33)

The poem begins with slavery, but there is also another beginning through the daughter’s voice in which “se fará ouvir a ressonância / o eco da vida-liberdade” (Evaristo, “Vozes-Mulheres” 32-33). The repetition of echoes in the poem has the effect of illustrating not only the continuity of oppression throughout the five generations of black women but also change for future generations. This change comes from not only the words but also the political action of present generations of black women (“A voz da minha filha / recolhe em si / a fala e o ato”). Even though previous generations of black women’s voices were silenced, they survived and resisted in the ways that they could so that they would be heard through the voices of current generations in the present (“O ontem ~ o hoje ~ o agora” (Evaristo, “Vozes-Mulheres” 33). “Vozes

Mulheres" constructs the figure of the daughter as a symbol of hope for the ways in which future generations of black women will vindicate previous generations of black women in Brazil, but it is ultimately Evaristo's own poetic voice that does this. In "Vozes-Mulheres," freedom does not come from white benevolence through official abolition. It is likely that the poetic voice's grandmother lived through 1888, but her voice still echoes obedience. Freedom in "Vozes-Mulheres" comes but from the freedom-life that future generations of black women will declare.

In the poem "Não vou mais lavar os pratos" (2016), by Cristiane Sobral (1974-), the poetic voice also declares her own freedom and thus has the effect of reifying Evaristo's hope in future black women's voices. Self-authored liberation for Sobral's poetic voice comes from autodidactism. Beginning to read is what awakens her consciousness and compels her to reject the domestic spaces to which black women have historically been assigned under slavery, patriarchy, and racism:

Não vou mais lavar os pratos
Nem vou limpar a poeira dos móveis
Sinto muito
Comecei a ler. (Sobral 23)

"Não vou mais lavar os pratos" is rich with metaphors for a historical process of black women's self-determination and ascent from a long history of oppression. The poetic voice's hands become softer,³⁸⁴ and she burns the beans because they always take too long to get ready,³⁸⁵ not unlike the wait for the promise of freedom to be realized. The humor, ambiguity, and playfulness of these metaphors in Sobral's tone is textured by the stark seriousness of what they stand for and her declaration that the times have changed: "Considere que os tempos agora são outros"

³⁸⁴ "Olho minhas mãos quando mudam a página dos livros / Mão bem macias que antes" (Sobral 23).

³⁸⁵ "E deixei o feijão queimar... / Olha que o feijão sempre demora a ficar pronto" (Sobral 24)

(Sobral 24). Her declaration that she will no longer “lavar as coisas e encobrir a verdadeira sujeira” works on a literal level that she will no longer do the cleaning and opens figurative interpretations for what the “true filth” could mean. In the context of Brazil’s dominant political narrative of “racial democracy,” it plausibly could mean that she will no longer “cover up” the truth of racism in Brazil. This reading through the lens of Brazil’s racial history is strengthened by her declaration that she will no longer wash the dishes represents her own self-abolition:

Não lavo mais pratos.

Li a assinatura da minha lei áurea escrita em negro maiúsculo

Em letras tamanho 18, espaço duplo

Aboli

Não lavo mais os pratos

Quero travessas de prata

Cozinhas de luxo

E jóias de ouro

Legítimas

Está decretada a Lei Áurea. (Sobral 26)

The concept of freedom in “Não vou mais lavar os pratos” thus necessarily includes material wealth. The most famous historical example of a black woman who achieved wealth before abolition is Xica da Silva, but she was only able to do so through her relationship with her own enslaver. The poetic voice’s desire for material wealth is bound to the proclamation of her own emancipation. Her “lei áurea” is different from the “Lei Áurea” in that it does not merely refer to freedom from slavery but her freedom to determine her own destiny on her own terms.

Both Evaristo's and Sobral's poems are like Morejón's "Mujer negra" in their trajectory from black women's oppression to resistance and self-liberation. This course from slavery to freedom is reflected in not only the poetic voices but also the authors' poetic expression. Writing is itself a declaration of freedom for those who have historically been denied the means to tell their own stories and determine their own destinies. It is appropriate to discuss slavery in Afro-Latin American poetry because it is a theme in not only Afro-Cuban but also Afro-Dominican poetry, as James Davis shows us, and not only Afro-Brazilian literature but also Afro-Uruguayan poetry through the work of Cristina Rodríguez Cabral. Nevertheless, the poetry itself demonstrates overlap amongst these national literary categories. As I mention in Chapter 3, the allusions to Brazilian culture in Rodríguez Cabral's work reflects a conception of blackness that is transnational in scope. In her 2016 interview with Silvia Valero, she says that she was influenced by the Quilomboje literary group in São Paulo and read authors published in *Cadernos negros* (153-154). She read Morejón's "Mujer negra" after writing "Memoria y resistencia," and she recalls that Morejón remarked that the coincidences between their poems come from their shared perspectives and experiences as black women.³⁸⁶ Rodríguez Cabral's poem "Cimarrones" has been falsely attributed to Morejón³⁸⁷ but comes from *Memoria y resistencia* (2004). Part of the poem reads:

Cuando miro hacia atrás
y veo tantos negros,
cuando miro hacia arriba

³⁸⁶ Humorously, Rodríguez Cabral Bueno recalls her feelings when she read "Mujer negra" for the first time: "Bueno, la cuestión es que leo 'Mujer negra' y me quería morir. Le dije que parecía que le había hecho un plagio pero ella me dijo que el punto es que las experiencias son similares porque somos mujeres negras, entonces percibimos las dos lo que ha sido nuestra historia y nuestra vida" (Valero 160).

³⁸⁷ See Morejón, "Cimarrones." *Poeticous*. The website misattributes the poem to Morejón, but it is by Rodríguez Cabral.

o hacia abajo
y son negros los que veo,
qué alegría vernos tantos
cuántos;
sin embargo, por ahí
nos llaman minorías,
mientras yo nos sigo viendo.
En universidades y favelas,
en subterráneos y rascacielos,
entre giros y mutaciones
barriendo mierda
pariendo versos. (10)

“Cimarrones” is primarily a celebration of black people’s ubiquity in all strata of society, but its title suggests that Afrodescendants’ accomplishments must be understood within the long history of resistance that began with enslavement and continues to this day. Early black writing in Latin America like Juan Francisco Manzano’s autobiography show that *cimarrones* are some of the founding authors of Afro-Latin American literature. “Cimarrones” connects its contemporary portrait of blackness with the tradition of antislavery writing in Latin America. In her 2016 interview, Rodríguez Cabral herself says that “Cimarrones” was inspired by a conversation that she had with Afro-Dominican poet Blas Jiménez (1949-2009) (Valero 161). Her poem “Candombe de resistencia” shows that Rodríguez Cabral’s work is engaged with Afro-Uruguayan culture, but it is best to discuss Rodríguez Cabral’s life and work in a transnational

context than a strictly national one. The poem's ambiguous urban setting also suggests the cosmopolitan character of her work. Moreover, the fact that Rodríguez Cabral lives in the United States further expands how we might think of Afro-Latin American literature. Afro-Latin American literature encompasses the United States through the work of Afro-Latino and Afro-Latina authors.

Slavery in US Afro-Latinx Literature

There are many important and visible Afro-Latinx poets in the United States who claim their Afrodescendant heritage. Newyoricán poet Jesús Abraham “Tato” Laviera (1950-2013) is best known for his poetry on Latino identity in the United States, but he also addresses Afro-Latin American identity in poems like “Tesis de negreza,” as William Luis shows in his introduction to *Mixturao and Other Poems* (2008):

Race, tangentially present in “Callejerismos,” with African Americans and Dominican bachata and merengue, has been a constant and necessary metaphor for Laviera’s poetry. Though not perceptible in the poem, Laviera’s vision of race speak to its presence in both Hispanic and U.S. societies. It may not be coincidental that these societies, separated by language, geography, and culture, share the same or similar positions regarding blacks and the place they occupy in their respective societies. “Tesis de Negreza,” a poem written in Spanish and inspired by Víctor Manuel Vega’s doctorate dissertation, takes issue with Bobby Capó’s popular song, “Negro bembón...”

... As with “Español” and Sylvia Rexach’s “Olas de arenas,” Laviera’s “Tesis de Negreza” reproduces at the beginning of each stanza a line of “Negro bembón,” followed by a response or commentary, which gains in intensity as the song and poem unfold. If

the song describes the killing of the Thick Lipped Black, as a translation of the title suggests, the investigative officer questions why the culprit killed the dearly beloved black man. The culturally acceptable and humorous, but here offensive and shocking, answer pertains to his labial characteristics: “yo lo mate por ser tan BEMBÓN” (24). The officer, who himself is black, rolls up his lip and hides his racial marker, perhaps fearing not so much a similar outcome, because the killer is under custody, but because of social and racial condemnation. Laviera takes issue with the response; in his poem, the officer is not evasive and uncovers the racism behind the remarks:

“el guardia escondió la lengua y le dijo”
soy *niche* para insultarte cuando me insultes
para confrontarte cuando tu ignorancia
desigualdad escupe estereotipos
soy *lobo* voy a sacar la bamba patriótica
colectiva humana cuando me respetes
amistosamente. (Luis xviii)

The officer in Laviera’s “Tesis de Negreza,” unlike the one in Capó’s “Negro bembón,” is proud of his African Ancestry, which he shares with others throughout the continents of the Americas. He embraces all of the derogatory colonial classifications whites attribute to non whites: “grifo,” “mestizo,” “moreno,” “morisco,” “moyeto,” “negro pardo,” “quinterón,” “retino,” “saltoatrás,” “tente en el aire,” “torno atrás,” “zambo,” and others. In addition, he turns societal values upside down and shows himself, who according to society is racially inferior, to be more dignified than the white perpetrator. Not only does the officer reveal that blacks are an inherent component of the nation and

the national, but he leaves the door open for possible reconciliation and friendship with his adversary. He now displays his lips with pride and sense of identity. (Luis, “Tato Laviera” xix)

“Tesis de negreza” is thus also like Guillén’s poem of the same title from *Motivos de son* (1930), in which the poetic voice vindicates blackness by calling black lips “la boca santa” (Guillén 27). By reclaiming the “negro bembón” as an antiracist symbol, Guillén and Laviera together demonstrate the fluid borders between Afro-Latin American literature and US-based Afro-Latinx literature.

Tato Laviera embraces the many sides of his identity, including his blackness. In his 1992 interview with William Luis, he describes an incident from his childhood that shaped his racial consciousness as an Afro-Puerto Rican in the United States: “I thought the U.S. was all white, and I was scared I’d be the only Black person going there. I was totally terrified when the plane was landing” (Luis, “From New York to the World” 1023). Laveira’s “Negrito” is based on an experience he had in which his aunt told him, “No te juntes con los prietos, negrito” (Luis, “From New York to the World” 1024). The autobiographical poem, and the experience it is based on, reflect the reality (and the irony) of Latin Americans’ discrimination of African Americans in the United States, even if they themselves are also of African descent. Like all the Afro-Latin American authors discussed here, Laviera is also concerned with racism’s roots in slavery. His play *King of Cans* is based on his 1988 poem “latero story” and was published in the Spring 2012 edition of the *Afro-Hispanic Review*. It was inspired by a connection that Laviera made between the past and the present:

A potent allegory struck Laviera after he encountered a can-picker at Avenue B and 6th Street on the Lower East Side. “He bends over, and he comes up with a piece of cotton;

then he bent over again, and he took out a can—so it was reminiscent of the way slaves bend over to pick up cotton. Right there, my mind saw it: There was no difference between picking cotton and picking cans.” (Bernas)

The *latero* main character’s delusions of making it rich by picking up cans in the play underscores the tragedy of his social immobility and is part of the play’s critique that slavery still operates in the United States under modern-day capitalism. Nevertheless, the play simultaneously vindicates the *latero* as “A natural leader” and “A visionary” caught in a ruthless system. *The King of Cans* thus reflects elements of antislavery narratives through its social critique, the connection it draws between past and present, and the vindication of its protagonist.

Discrimination among Afrodescendant groups is also a dominant theme in the works of Junot Díaz (1968-). In his short story “Nilda,” he writes of Dominican immigrants in the United States that ‘None of us wanted to be niggers. Not for nothing’ (39).³⁸⁸ Díaz’s Pulitzer-Prize winning novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) suggests racism’s connection to slavery from its very outset. The *fukú americanus* (the curse that afflicts the De León family throughout the novel’s three-generation saga) is thought to originate from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: “They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved” (Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life* 1). Just as slavery is framed as the origin of racism in Cuba at the beginning of *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Reyita, sencillamente*, it is also the origin of the intergenerational curse that the De Leóns carry from the Dominican Republic to the United States. Conflict among the diverse racial and ethnic groups in Washington Heights are a motif throughout Díaz’s works. Recalling how Oscar De León was tortured at school for his fatness and interest in comics, the narrator Yunior reflects that there is “No one, alas, more oppressive

³⁸⁸ “Nilda” is reprinted in *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012).

than the oppressed" (*The Brief Wondrous Life* 22). However, Afro-Caribbeans in the United States are united by not only shared experiences of racial and ethnic discrimination but also a shared ancestral connection to the African diaspora.

In her spoken word poetry, Elizabeth Acevedo rejects anti-black racism in Dominican communities and embraces her own simultaneously Afrodescendant and mixed-heritage roots. In "Afro-Latina," she writes,

So remind me,
remind me
that I come from
the Taínos of the río
the Aztec,
the Mayan,
Los incas,
los españoles
con sus fincas
buscando oro,
and the Yoruba Africanos
que con sus manos
built a mundo
nunca imaginado.

I know I come
from stolen gold.

From cocoa,

from sugarcane,

the children

of slaves

and slave masters.

A beautifully tragic mixture,

a sancocho

of a race history. (Acevedo, “Afro-Latina”)

In these lines, Acevedo claims Hispanic, black, and indigenous heritage but acknowledges the history of exploitation behind the harmonious myth of *mestizaje*. Like Daisy Rubiera Castillo, Nancy Morejón, Mayra Santos-Febres, Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro, and Ana Maria Gonçalves, she does not shy away from the history of rape at the root of racial mixture in Latin America. She also acknowledges that Latin America was built on Africans’ forced labor. Slavery continues to be an important theme in her poem “Hair,” which vindicates Afro hair:

My mother tells me to fix my hair.

And by “fix,” she means straighten.

She means whiten.

But how do you fix this shipwrecked history of hair? (Acevedo, “Hair”)

The poem’s imagery from the Middle Passage connects her mother’s discrimination of her hair to the history of slavery and colonialism that oppressed their shared African ancestors. She continues,

The true meaning of stranded,

when trusses held tight like African cousins in ship bellies,

did they imagine that their great grandchildren would look like us,

and would hate them how we do?

Trying to find ways to erase them out of our skin,

iron them out of our hair,

this wild tangle of hair that strangles air.

You call them wild curls. I call them breathing.

Ancestors spiraling.

Can't you see them in this wet hair that waves like hello? (Acevedo, "Hair")

Acevedo thus not only acknowledges but demonstrates pride in her Afro-Dominican-ness. This is significant in the context of James Davis's argument that blackness is typically othered as Haitian or West Indian in the context of Dominican poetry. The United States thus represents a space in which Acevedo, distanced from the Dominican way of conceiving blackness as otherness, can acknowledge and appreciate her curly hair as "a reclamation" of her Afro-Dominican ancestry. Slavery is a part of that ancestry's history, as the poem's imagery illustrates, and the request that Acevedo "fix" her hair reflects the history of colonialism at the root of anti-blackness in the Dominican Republic, but the poet breaks her own chains in the poignant final couplet of the poem, "My mother tells me to fix my hair, and so many words remain unspoken. / Because all I can reply is, "You can't fix what was never broken" (Acevedo, "Hair"). Like in many of the works discussed in this dissertation so far, the present struggles against racism reflect the past struggles against slavery in Acevedo's poetry.

Slavery in Afro-Latin American Visual Narrative and Social Media

The power of literature is that it invites us to reflect on the persistence of the past in the present, but forms of visual narrative and digital media accomplish this as well. Acevedo's

spoken word poems are publicly available on YouTube. As I show in Chapter 3, Marcelo D'Salete's *Angola Janga* tells the story of the Quilombo dos Palmares in graphic novel form and connects the fight against slavery in the past to the fight against racism in the present day. In Chapter 2, I discuss Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro's *las Negras*, but black women's resistance to slavery is also a theme in Arroyo Pizarro's children's books like *Pelo bueno* (2018), whose title flips the anti-black stereotype of "pelo malo" in Latin America (also seen in Acevedo's "Hair"). In the children's book, a grandmother shows her granddaughter how to value and take care of her hair and the rich cultural legacy that it represents. She tells her that making braids used to be a way of drawing escape maps when their ancestors were enslaved and forms her hair into the form of a crown.

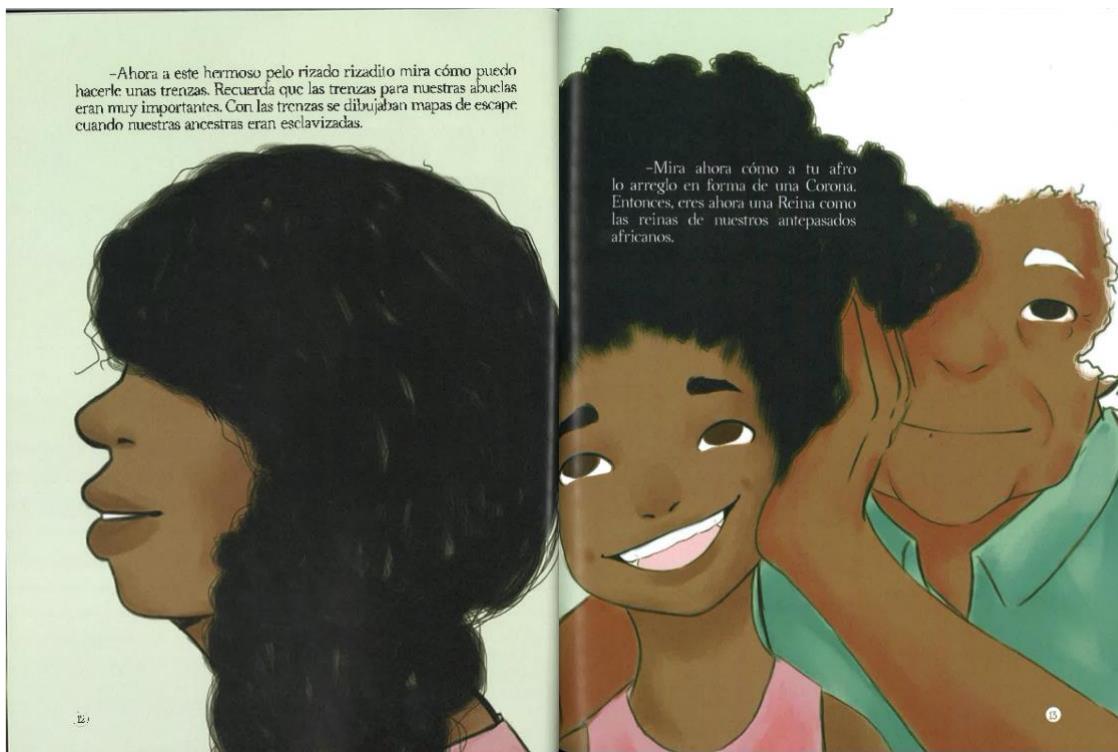


Figure 2. Arroyo Pizarro, *Pelo bueno* 12-13.

Hair is thus a way of telling black history and cultivating a positive self-image in young black girls.

Slavery is also a theme in not only Afro-Latin American literature but film. The film *Raíces de mi corazón* (2001), directed by Afro-Cuban director Gloria Rolando (1953-), is about the 1912 massacre of thousands of black people by the US-backed Cuban government, known misleadingly as the “Guerrita de los negros.”³⁸⁹ The story is told from the perspective of Mercedes, a young black journalist in the present-day whose investigation leads her to discover that her great-grandfather was killed in the massacre. The secrets of her past are revealed to her in a dream, where she also encounters Madre de los Sueños and Espiritu de la Noche. The latter, “an elderly black man who represents Cuba’s African ancestry” (Watson, “Teaching Afro-Latin American Culture through Film” 76), is none other than the son of *cimarrones* who ran away from slavery to the monte. He speaks to Mercedes and deconstructs the myth of racial harmony in Cuba: “La apariencia no es la verdad... Hasta salía en los periódicos que el negro en Cuba no tenía problemas, porque el sol de la democracia brillaba para todos los cubanos, sea blanco o sea negro” (Rolando). Espiritu de la Noche’s voice and presence in the film suggest that Mercedes’s quest for the truth is deeply rooted in black Cubans’ struggle for justice dating back not only to the 1912 massacre but to slavery itself. To this point, Sonja Watson observes that “The transmission of stories, histories, and narratives by women formed a part of filmmaker Gloria Rolando’s own background; she was motivated as a young child by her grandmother’s accounts of slavery” (“Teaching Afro-Latin American Culture through Film” 76). Just as *Reyita*, *sencillamente* reflects the oral tradition of passing down stories of slavery from generation to generation of black women in writing, *Raíces de mi corazón* does the same through film.

³⁸⁹ For an in-depth analysis, see Sonja Watson’s, “Teaching Afro-Latin American Culture through Film: *Raíces de mi corazón* and Cuba’s *Guerrita de los negros* (2013).

In the twenty-first century, social media plays an important and ever-growing role in promoting consciousness of anti-blackness in Latin America and its roots in slavery. Activists in Brazil used massive protests after the police murder and disappearance of Amarildo de Souza in 2013³⁹⁰ and the assassination of Marielle Franco in 2018 (Phillips). The hashtags #cadeamarildo and #mariellefranco went viral around the world and brought global attention to racism and police violence in Brazil. Social media also helped bring global attention to protests in Cuba against the government's repression of civil liberties amidst the economic crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. Afro-Cuban activists on social media accounts challenged Black Lives Matter's support of the Cuban government by arguing that police repression of protests targeted black Cubans: "Ustedes surgieron de una protesta y ahora han decidido alinearse al poder que dió la orden de violentar brutalmente a todas las personas que salieron a las calles el pasado domingo 11 de julio. Personas que en su mayoría son negras" (Soublett López). The statement is scathing, but it is ultimately a call to action to "Listen to the voice of Black Cubans."



Figure 3. Instagram post by soublettraulin (Soublett López).

³⁹⁰ See director Dan Jackson's documentary *In the Shadow of the Hill* (2016).

Also on Instagram, the account Radio Caña Negra promotes consciousness of black Latin American experiences “With the sharpness of a machete” and “the sweetness of sugar cane” to an audience of over 7,000 followers. Their posts humanize the enslaved through a shift in language and connect Afrodescendant people of diverse nationalities to a shared history of slavery and resistance. One post on November 18, 2021, reads “I am not the descendant of slaves, I am descended from human beings who were enslaved” (Caña Negra). Another post quotes Dr. Marta Moreno Vega, founder of the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute:

The diaspora is immense
If you go to Ecuador, you see African descendants,
If you go to Peru, you see African descendants,
If you go to Puerto Rico,
If you go to East Harlem, West Harlem,
you see our people,
and what is absolutely clear
and what is absolutely definitive for me
is that we are all connected...
because either the colonial experience,
or the post-colonial experience,
the legacy of our people have remained
in the memory of who we are... (Caña Negra)

The presentation of Moreno Vega’s quotation in verse illustrates overlap between activism, scholarship, social media, and poetry. Social media is therefore not a threat to literature but

reifies its important role in capturing an audience and raising awareness of the African diaspora's presence throughout the Americas. The discussion of slavery in Latin America reaches far beyond literary narrative and has "gone online," so to speak. It is not despite but because of this that Afro-Latin American literature is as important now as ever in the age of social media.

The Battles Yet to Come

It is easy for us who work in the field of Afro-Latin American studies to take for granted that the history of slavery in Latin America is "common sense," but it is not necessarily so for either the educated public or even scholars of the African diaspora. William Luis makes this observation in an editor's note of the Fall 2016 edition of the *Afro-Hispanic Review*:

Paul Gilroy's groundbreaking *The Black Atlantic* (1993) focused on the northern experience while ignoring slavery in other parts of the Americas. By contrast, Henry Lewis Gates [sic] recent series *Blacks in Latin America* [sic] (2011) has publicized, to the surprise of many, a rich black experience beyond US borders. Still, for those of us who work with topics related to this journal's mission to promote Afro-Hispanic literature and culture, it is common knowledge that the overwhelming majority of the more than twelve million slaves robbed from their lands, from the inception of the slave trade to its conclusion in the second-half of the nineteenth century, were taken to Brazil and the Caribbean, while less than half a million were transported to the United States. (Luis, "Editor's Note" 6)

The importance of Afro-Latin American literature is that it represents the enormous impact that slavery had on Latin America, both the level of each individual story and collectively. As I mention in Chapter 1, Louis Gates writes in the introduction to *The Classic Slave Narratives* that

“In the process of imitation, revision, and repetition, the black slave’s narrative came to be a communal utterance, a collective tale, rather than merely an individual’s biography” (xiii). However, this dissertation’s broad scope shows that limiting the “classic” slave narratives to autobiographical ones has the effect of excluding Afro-Latin American voices. It is important to include not only autobiography but also testimonial and imaginative narrative literature in our concept of narrative authenticity. Doing so allows us to observe Afro-Latin American authors’ expansive participation in the process of rewriting the stories of the enslaved throughout the centuries. The “communal utterance” of the enslaved is not only in English but also Spanish and Portuguese. To recognize this fact is to better understand the history of slavery in the Americas.

The stakes of this argument have implications outside as well as inside of academic studies. John Maddox calls attention to readers’ role in effecting the social justice that literature imagines and calls for in *Challenging the Black Atlantic*. His reading of *Changó, el gran putas* and *Um defeito de cor* propose a “revised view of the Americas from the margins allows the contemporary reader the awareness of slavery’s injustices so that he or she can create the truly *Nuevo Muntu*, a new, just world for all” (Maddox 3). His book is an example of how scholarship has the potential to not only dialogue with and revise previous scholarship (in his case Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*) but also engage with an educated public in a way that makes literary texts that may otherwise seem intimidating as instead exciting and accessible. Maddox writes “for a diverse audience” “in the hopes of drawing in new readers for great works” (Zapata Olivella and Gonzalves’s) that includes students in undergraduate and graduate literature and Spanish courses, nonspecialists, Latin Americanists in literature, African American and diaspora studies, scholars of women and gender studies, historians, anthropologists, folklorists, and sociologists who specialize in the African diaspora and Latin America. The wide applicability of

Maddox's research reflects not only his reading of the works but the broad interest that the works themselves could potentially represent to multiple academic fields beyond literature. Maddox's comment on the interdisciplinarity of his research thus represents a broader statement on the usefulness of literary narrative toward the study of the history of slavery. Historians are the primary interpreters of diverse sources such as church and state records (Landers); the press (Castilho, *Slave Emancipation and Transformations in Brazilian Political Citizenship*); and radio, television, and film (Eakin). Afro-Latin American literature is itself an archive of black literary history and a counter-archive to the "official history" of slavery in Latin America. I share Maddox's concern for the history of slavery told from the perspectives of the enslaved, but the most obvious difference between our work is the broad survey of slavery in Afro-Latin American literature from the nineteenth century through the present. I have been as inclusive as possible in my selection of primary texts because no one culture, country, author, or concept alone speaks for the black experience. The juxtaposition of so many works under the category of Afro-Latin American literary narrative does not flatten them but reveals repeating patterns or echoes among them. Twentieth and twenty-first century antislavery narratives reflect and revise elements of their nineteenth-century predecessors within and across diverse transnational contexts. Their depictions of the horrors of slavery combat myths of racial harmony throughout Latin America. It could be argued that comparing antislavery texts from Latin America to English-language slave narratives represents a US or Anglo-centric perspective, but the transnational dialogue between "Latin" and "Anglo" America shaped black writing in both contexts. Afro-Latin American literary narrative influenced and was influenced by antislavery networks that have crossed the language barriers of the English, Spanish, and Portuguese-speaking worlds.

There are many works of Afro-Latin American literary narrative that would appropriately fit within this study's wide scope, but it is impossible to include them all. Their exclusion is not intentional but reflects the ever-present need for further study. Literary presses will continue to publish many more works of Afro-Latin American literary narrative that address slavery and its echoes in the present. It is urgent that these stories be included in graduate reading lists, anthologies, and ongoing discussions of "the canon" of African diasporic, Latin American, and universal literature. Maddox mentions that his summaries of *Changó, el gran putas* and *Um defeito de cor* can be used by students in undergraduate and graduate literature and Spanish courses, but works of Afro-Latin American literary narrative like Zapata Olivella's and Ana Maria Gonçalves's must be assigned as required reading to in the first place (*Challenging the Black Atlantic* 7). Maddox and I share a common goal of "challenging" the exclusion of Afro-Latin American people, culture, and history from academic spaces. Students and the reading public alike want narratives that reflect the diversity of Latin America and its true racial history behind the optimistic myths. The works discussed here are a start. Storytelling is not frivolous but is as essential to the human experience as it is to Afro-Latin Americans' real-life struggle for justice. Historians will unearth the voices of enslaved Afrodescendants in Latin America who were not only silenced by slavery but continue to be silenced by obscurity in the archives. Literary research is enriched by this historical research, but we must also recognize the stories yet to be told by the *griots* of our times. We must arm ourselves with these stories like a machete. We must be ready to fight all the battles yet to come.

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