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Counterpublics and Aesthetics: Afro-Hispanic and Belizean Women Writers.

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

COUNTERPUBLICS AND AESTHETICS: AFRO-HISPANIC AND BELIZEAN
WOMEN WRITERS

By

Melva Marguerite Persico

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2011

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COUNTERPUBLICS AND AESTHETICS: AFRO-HISPANIC AND BELIZEAN
WOMEN WRITERS

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Counterpublics and Aesthetics:
Afro-Hispanic and Belizean Women Writers

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My project explores ways in which legitimacy is granted within the literary field. This is done through an analysis of literary anthologies, university course syllabi, publishing trends, literary prizes, and levels and sources of critical attention. The project seeks to determine the extent to which the works of Afro-descendant Spanish American and Belizean writers are reflected in the hegemonic Spanish American and Anglophone Caribbean literary canons. I examine the works of Cristina Rodríguez Cabral (Uruguay), Shirley Campbell Barr, and Delia McDonald Woolery (Costa Rica), and Zee Edgell, and Zoila Ellis (Belize). The project records the varying degrees of legitimation these writers have received and the factors that have had an impact on their recognition. It also shows that literary interculturality is possible in Spanish America and the Anglophone Caribbean through the aesthetics some writers employ and the activities of legitimizing agencies. Further I propose a plurality of canons based on the concept of plural public spheres/counterpublics as outlined by Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner. My analysis of Belizean works emphasizes ways in which a national literary canon can be considered a counterpublic within a regional literary corpus. The concept of counterpublics I use to present the works analyzed is a model other scholars can employ in their examination of other minority literatures.

DEDICATORIO

To the memory of my parents: Robert Montgomery Archer (1931-2004) and
Melva Yvonne Ferrier-Archer (1927-2003). You would have been proud...

To my loving, supportive family: Alan, Dacia, Mandisa. I could not have done this
without you.

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They say it takes a village...

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Introduction: Counterpublics and Plural Aesthetics in Spanish America and the Anglophone Caribbean: Some Initial Concerns

Afro-descendant writing in Spanish American literature has been an accepted reality since the nineteenth century. The two better known writers of that era were both Cubans, Juan Francisco Manzano, (1797-1854), and Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (Plácido), (1809-1844). Whereas the works of both of these writers have been described as imitative of the European standard, some critics point to the aesthetic ambiguities in Plácido's work, while others comment on its revolutionary content and subversive techniques.¹ In more recent times the non-literary works of the Afro-Uruguayan, Jacinto Ventura de Molina (c.1766-1837) have come to light. The first half of the twentieth century saw an increase in Afro-descendant writing in the region with the *negrista*, and negritude writing of Nicolás Guillén, Adalberto Ortiz, Jorge Artel, Virginia Brindis de Salas, Nicomedes Santa Cruz, Juan Zapata Olivella, Manuel Zapata Olivella, and many others.

During the last three decades or so increased legitimation has been granted to the literary works of Afro-Hispanics, especially in academic circles in North America, the Caribbean, and the United Kingdom. Despite this, the works of only a few Afro-Hispanics seem to receive a considerable degree of attention in Latin America and the

¹Jerome Branche points out that Manzano as a mulatto presents himself as distinct from the enslaved blacks. He describes his avoidance of blackness as a deliberate attempt on his part to subscribe to ideological whitening in *Colonialism and Race in Luso-Hispanic Literature* (2006): 134-136). For commentary on Plácido's poetry see: (i) Sibylle Fischer "Beyond National Culture: The Abject. The Case of Plácido." *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. (2004):77-106; and (ii) Jackie Vernon Willey *Writing and Rebellion in Plácido's Poetry* (2010).

Caribbean. Among these writers are Nicolás Guillén, Manuel Zapata Olivella, Nelsón Estupiñán Bass, Carlos Guillermo Wilson (Cubena), Blas Jiménez, Quince Duncan, Eulalia Bernard, Aida Cartagena Portalatín, Nancy Morejón, and Mayra Santos-Febres. However, even with the documented growth of interest in Afro-Hispanic literature, it would appear that in a general sense there has been limited recognition of the body of Afro-descendant writing in Spanish America since most scholarship tends to focus on the Hispanic Caribbean as opposed to South and Central America. A case in point is the literature of Uruguayan and Central American women writers of African descent, like Cristina Rodríguez Cabral, Shirley Campbell Barr, and Delia McDonald Woolery. The initial questions that arise have to do with (i) the ways in which contemporary Afro-descendant writers in Spanish America are affected by legitimizing agencies, and (ii) if the actions of these legitimizing agencies and/these writers' aesthetics show that interculturality is possible in the literary field. My pursuit of answers to these questions has made me examine factors and institutions that influence the recognition of literary works, thereby granting them legitimation. These canon-endowing agents include academic institutions and their curricula, scholarly research, and inclusion in anthologies. The publishing industry, especially agents and other mediators, and literary prizes are also among the legitimators in the literary field. The afore-mentioned issues affect writers from other regions as well, including Belize. This is partly one reason why I have chosen to study writers from this country also.

In chapter 2, I show how in the colonial period, and the immediate post-independence era, elite society devalued the popular cultural production of ethnic minorities like Blacks and Amerindians. A distinction was made between the oral and

folkloric traditions of these groups and the written literary traditions of the cultured elite. In more recent times, however, popular culture is very often presented as representative of the nation. Some reasons for this are highlighted in Néstor García Canclini's *Hybrid Cultures* (1995) and Toby Miller and George Yúdice's *Cultural Policy* (2002). Yúdice (2003) argues that the economic restructuring, neoliberalism and globalization that have taken place since the 1970s have had an impact on culture so that it is no longer deployed as an ideological tool for inculcating "civilized" norms. Culture, in contemporary society, functions as a resource that promotes economic growth and seeks to find resolutions to sociopolitical issues. As a result of this new framework in which culture operates, formerly denigrated minority cultural production now play an important role in the overall well-being of society. UNESCO has therefore promoted cultural diversity as an asset, one that is a part of peoples' intangible heritage. What is expected of non-Western, minority peoples is a performance of their cultural attributes. It is in these areas of performance that minorities receive recognition. Individuals from these groups who seek recognition through other cultural forms, those that have been considered elite, find it difficult to be taken seriously. In the case of young Afro-descendants today, traditional and fusion Afro-diasporic music, like Calypso, Reggae, and Hip Hop among others receive legitimation over and above high literary forms like poetry (the exception to this would be spoken word genres). Yúdice goes on to record how this point was emphasized by an Afro-Colombian writer from Palenque. The writer explained to Yúdice that he was told by the cultural ministry that he could easily get support for recording *champeta* music than for publishing poetry or novels (9-39). This latter observation finds support in García Canclini's position that despite growing interactions between popular traditions

and those that have traditionally been considered as “high” culture, there is very often centripetal pressure exercised by:

those who hold power based on rhetoric and specific forms of dramatizing prestige [who] assume that their strength depends on preserving differences [T]he struggle for control of the cultured and the popular continues to be waged, in part, through efforts to defend specific symbolic capitals and mark the distinction between themselves and others. (271)

It is important to bear the above points in mind as we proceed with the discussion on the quest for legitimation by Afro-descendant writers.

I have chosen to examine the works of Afro-descendant women writers from three different countries: Uruguay, Costa Rica, and Belize. Whereas Afro-descendants are in the minority in the former two nations, their majority status no longer exists in Belize, but they still account for a sizeable part of the population. In Uruguay’s 2006 population census 279,429 individuals (9.1%) self-identified as Afro-descendants and 115,158 (3.8%) as indigenous. Costa Rica’s 2000 census lists its Afro-descendant population at 72,784 (1.9 %), and its indigenous at 63,876 (1.6%). In Belize emigration of Afro-descendants (Creoles) and immigration of Hispanic Central Americans have resulted in a demographic shift in favor of *Mestizos*. Whereas the 1980 census gave the number of Creoles as 40% and *Mestizos* as 33%, the 2000 census records 25% Creoles and 48% *Mestizos* (Thomson 184). The issue of plural cultures though present in Belize for some time, is now emerging in Uruguay and Costa Rica.² These recent discussions on plurality make it necessary to address whether interculturality is possible in the literary field in these countries. Even though they belong to two distinct geographic regions, Uruguay and Costa Rica have both pursued exclusionary nationalist projects that fore-grounded

² See: Felipe Arocena and Sebastian Aguiar eds. *Multiculturalismo en el Uruguay* (2007), and Kathleen Sawyers and Franklin Perry “Costa Rica” *No Longer Invisible: Afro-Latin Americans Today*. Eds. Minority Rights Group (1995).

whiteness. During the nineteenth century, Uruguayan and Costa Rican thinkers, like their counterparts in other Latin American countries subscribed to Euro-centric philosophies of White superiority like positivism. María Inés de Torres writes that with independence in Uruguay peripheral discourses were silenced. This was with the aim of constructing a national identity based on the cultured and intellectual subject as nation-builder (134). This conceptualization of the national identity continued in the twentieth century. For example, the regime of José Batlle y Ordóñez advanced a project of uruguayanness (*uruguayidad*). This universalizing project constructed a Uruguayan identity that promoted cosmopolitanism. It placed emphasis on European migrants and received support from the intellectuals in Montevidean society (González Laurino 33, 34). Carolina González Laurino (2001), states that in contemporary Uruguay, even though social plurality is recognized and pursued, the Batllist concept of Uruguayanness continues to exert some amount of pressure (39). Whether all the multiple cultural identities that are becoming more visible in Uruguayan society are seen as a part of that country's literary identity is a matter this study will address.

In terms of race and ethnicity, Costa Rica has presented a view of itself as different from its Central American neighbors. Whereas those countries were seen as *Mestizo*, Costa Rica saw itself as a White nation. An 1895 presentation, aimed at attracting North American migrants and tourists to Costa Rica, describes its population as: “principally the descendants of the early Spanish settlers and conquerors ... [T]hey are somewhat above their neighboring nations in the arts of civilization” (Villafranca 28). The work goes on to state that when compared to South and Central America, Costa Rica is quite unique as its indigenous population is small and the tribes are “completely

separated from the civilized race” (Villafranca 30). A work written in 1982 lists six ethnic groups but still describes Costa Ricans as “physically and culturally homogenous” (Biesanz et al 8).³ The West Indians of African descent, who migrated as laborers to Costa Rica’s Atlantic coast at the turn of the twentieth century, were regionally marginalized. They were confined to the Atlantic coast. Laws were passed that prohibited their migration to the highland regions. All this was in an attempt to preserve the nation’s “whiteness.” Russell L. Sharman (2001) points out that it was only in 1948 that the post-Revolutionary government of José Figueres passed a law that granted citizenship to Afro-Costa Ricans of West Indian descent. This did not mean, however, that Blacks and Whites were on equal footing or that racism had ended. Sharman says of this period: “[the] new era of social democracy provided a convenient opportunity to side-step the issue of racism in Costa Rica. By emphasizing an ideology of total social incorporation Figueres set in place a system that precluded any explanation of disadvantage or exclusion based on race” (47).⁴ Blacks were now free to move throughout the country. However, Sharman claims that even when these Afro-Costa Ricans acquire aspects of the dominant culture, their phenotype still bars them from total acceptance (Sharman 52-53). Hólmfríaur Gardarsdóttir, in a 2005 article in *El Caribe centroamericano*, states that it was through the efforts of individuals from the Black population of the Atlantic coast, and not through legislation, that racial integration was achieved between the Black inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast with the Whites of the central plateau (139). According to this researcher, Afro-Costa Rican writer Quince Duncan records among the historical

³ The writers state that when they refer to Costa Ricans (Ticos) they generally have in mind “the dominant Spanish-American majority” (8).

⁴ Beginning in the 1950s, official recording of ethnic identities ceased (Sawyers and Perry 1995: 220). Recent censuses indicate that the country has resumed keeping an official record of ethnicity.

moments reflected in Afro-descendant writing in that country (beginning in the latter half of the twentieth century), elements of transculturation and transmutation which have come about through education, daily interaction, and confrontations between Afro-Costans and inhabitants of the Central Plateau (144). Gardarsdóttir emphasizes the elements of transculturation in Duncan's writing. One factor worth considering is the extent to which the women writers whose works I analyze demonstrate a similar transculturation or if they pursue an aesthetic of difference and how their writing impacts on the possibility of interculturality in the literary field in Costa Rica.

Belize finds itself in a unique position. It is located in Central America, and is part of the English-speaking Caribbean. It is the most multi-ethnic and multilingual Caribbean nation. This small country has a population of fewer than 350,000.⁵ Belize as a relatively young nation, which gained its independence in 1981, has been attempting to consolidate its identity over the past several years. As a result, one finds different views with regard to its nationalist project. O. Nigel Bolland (1986) for instance states that “[t]he model of Belizean nationalism appears, rather to be one of cultural pluralism, a model that acknowledges the value of diverse cultural heritages that constitute Belize and provide its unique national identity” (49). On the other hand, Assad Shoman (2010) states that Belize as a new nation “imagined itself as Creole: people that spoke English, were anglicized in other cultural ways, and practiced a unique ‘Belizean way of life,’ which could be interpreted best by the Creole elite” (17). Shoman points to the growing numbers of Spanish-speaking peoples from other Central American nations who have immigrated to Belize, especially since the 1980s. This, he says, has been perceived by some as a threat

⁵ The 2009 mid-year population estimate published by that country's Statistical Institute is 333,200. The CIA World Factbook for 2010 gives as its July 2009 estimate a lower figure: 307,899.

to the Creole identity. He warns against any attempts at integrationist policies, and reminds the reader that a wide variety of peoples of various races and ethnicities have lived in Belize for centuries. He also comments on ways in which the interactions among these various groups have resulted in cultural “borrowings” (51). The Creole versus “Others” debates have led me to consider whether the literary aesthetics of the Afro-descendant Belizean writers whose works I analyze, fosters a pluralist project that favors interculturality.

So far the work of only one Belizean writer has been granted legitimation by a variety of canon-endowing agents. Such recognition is based on academic scholarship, inclusion in anthologies, and in academic syllabi, literary prizes, and works that were published by a recognized, international publishing house. This writer is Zee Edgell. Why has Edgell achieved so much recognition? Why has legitimation eluded other Belizean writers? Additionally, when one considers Belize’s racial and ethnic diversity and recent immigration trends in that country, one is faced with a manifestation of cultural plurality that is above and beyond that of any other Anglophone Caribbean nation. This fact gives rise to another question: Is the cause of the limited legitimation granted to Belizean writing in the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean related to its having a literary aesthetic that is different from what exists in that region? These are some of the questions that surface when one confronts the current state of Belizean literature.

Although the discourse on diversity in this project goes beyond the racial, ethnic, and cultural, it is important to highlight the pluralism that exists within much of Spanish America. As I discuss in chapter 2, recent discourses on race and ethnicity in countries

like Uruguay have shed light on that nation's multicultural reality. In other nations of the region like Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, constitutional reform has allowed for the official recognition of formerly marginalized peoples and their cultures. Increased recognition of the plurality of peoples and cultures that comprise Spanish America leads one to repeat the question asked above regarding the limited legitimation of the works of Afro-descendant writers in the region and whether this lack of recognition is in any way related to the aesthetics that Afro-descendants adopt in their writing.

The concept of counterpublics that guides my discussion focuses on a plurality of aesthetics. Counterpublics that dialogue and interact in accordance with the principles of interculturality are described as intersecting counterpublics. In chapter 1, my detailed exploration of the concept of counterpublics as put forward by Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner focuses on (i) the contrast between dominant publics (hegemonic canons) and counterpublics (minor canons), (ii) the importance of dialogue among the various literary traditions of a nation and/or region, (iii) the fact that even though addressees of a discourse may be imaginary, they still belong to the particular counterpublic, and (iv) the reality that individuals can be members of more than one counterpublic.⁶ In the context of this project therefore, Afro-descendant literature is seen as one of the many counterpublics, or literary discourses that exist in Spanish America. Similarly, Belizean literature is a national counterpublic that currently contributes to the Caribbean literary corpus. Plurality is the key focus of my discussions on the aesthetics in both cases. I also

⁶ See (i): Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: Contributions to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Ed. Craig Calhoun (1992):109-142; and (ii) Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (2005).

examine whether the aesthetics that inform these writers' works demonstrate the possibility of intersection of counterpublics /interculturality.

In *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (1995), Arthur Danto stresses the pluralism that marks contemporary art. This pluralism seeks to foster a spirit of "total tolerance" in which "nothing is ruled out" (xiv). The issue of pluralism in contemporary art corresponds to the plurality of aesthetics that exist in contemporary Spanish American literature. For instance, Stephen Hart asserts that by the 1980s in Latin America "it became difficult to talk of a single canon. New canons, such as women's writing, Afro-Hispanic writing, Latino and Brazuca literature, gay literature and *testimonio*, to give a few examples, began to emerge and claim space exclusively for themselves" (250). Further, Hart comments on the difficulty in characterizing the twenty-first century Latin American novel because of the multifaceted nature of its aesthetics (279). Indeed, contemporary Spanish American narrative includes *inter alia* historical fiction, science fiction, eco-narratives, works that address socio-political realities, others that treat everyday life and popular culture, those that foreground feminist and women's concerns, works that explore various treatments of gender and sexuality, and testimonial writing. Moreover, Danto points out that although contemporary art does not depend on the past for its definition(s) it is not a rejection of what went before. It can and does make use of past models and styles. However, it does so on its own terms and not necessarily "in the spirit" in which past art was made (Danto 5). In similar fashion, works of Afro-Spanish American and Belizean writers demonstrate their indebtedness to earlier writers from the hegemonic as well as the minority literary traditions. Many of these writers, though, seek to develop their aesthetic along lines that, while showing this indebtedness

to the past, break away to create a difference that is often reflected in their language and subject matter. This is particularly evident in Cristina Rodríguez Cabral's writing.

Sometimes the difference is a rebellion against a particular aesthetic that is so distinct it may cause a total disconnect with the audience. A case in point is Delia McDonald Woolery's *La cofradía cimarrona*. Danto refers to such cases in his example of artists whose works an audience may consider disgusting: "It would be of no value to such artists if a taste for the disgusting were to be normalized. It is essential to their aims that the disgusting remain disgusting, not that audiences learn to take pleasure in it, or find it somehow beautiful"(53). With the above in mind, one accepts the fact that works that belong to the Afro-Hispanic counterpublic, for instance, may not be accepted as aesthetically pleasing, or of value to some readers whose aesthetic values have been differently sensitized. Nevertheless, the fact that they exist as literary works and have an audience, is reason enough for them to be acknowledged as part of the literary corpus of a nation or region. My analyses demonstrate that in Spanish America for instance, the Afro-descendant counterpublic does overlap and intersect with other counterpublics and even with the hegemonic public in certain areas like Third-World feminisms, issues related to social justice, and historical revisionism. These areas of overlap create opportunities for dialogue with other minority literatures in the region, and with the hegemonic canon. Even in cases where issues that are treated may seem to speak solely to an Afro-descendant audience, such as works that treat Afro-descendant enslavement, or aspects of spirituality rooted in African religions, there is still room for dialogue, and even contestation.

In addition to traditional library research, my project entailed conducting interviews with writers, academics, and publishers. I also analyzed the contents of literary anthologies, and of course syllabi for courses in Costa Rican, Uruguayan, and Latin American literatures from institutions in Costa Rica and Uruguay. Additionally, I analyzed the responses to a questionnaire I administered to professors of Caribbean literature from the University of the West Indies and the University of Guyana.

Dissertation Outline

In chapter 1, I look at the history of the concept of canonicity and ways in which this concept continues to exert agency within contemporary society. I discuss some of the key arguments put forward in the canon debates of the twentieth century. This leads me to propose the concept of plural canons, or counterpublics, based on the theories articulated by Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner. I also examine the emergence of the African American literary canon citing it as an example of multiculturalism. The various measures that allowed this canon to emerge are discussed as a way of throwing light on whether or not multiculturalism, or better still, interculturality is possible in Spanish America and the Anglophone Caribbean.

Chapter 2 discusses the historical factors inherent in colonialism within Spanish America and their impact on the evolution of the literary history of the region. It examines how colonialist values regarding taste affected the creation of canons within the nations of the region. I treat contemporary discourses regarding multiculturalism and canonicity in Spanish America in this chapter before going into an analysis of general anthologies of Spanish American poetry, as well as anthologies specific to Uruguay and

Costa Rica.⁷ I also analyze some university course syllabi for literature courses from Uruguay and Costa Rica. These analyses allow me to determine to what extent the literary works of Afro-descendants have been legitimized in these societies. I conclude this chapter with a consideration of the literary and non-literary factors that have resulted in the legitimation of Nancy Morejón, one of the better known contemporary Afro-descendant women writers.

I begin chapter 3 with an overview of the evolution of Afro-descendant writing in Spanish America. I focus particularly on the negritude movement and discuss aspects of contemporary Afro-descendant writing that correspond to post-negritude thinking. I then outline the aesthetic criteria I have observed in contemporary Afro-descendant literature in Spanish America. I conclude the chapter with analyses of poems from *Memoria y Resistencia* (2004) by Cristina Rodríguez Cabral, *Naciendo* (1988), and *Rotundamente negra* (1994) by Shirley Campbell Barr, and by Delia McDonald Woolery, *...la lluvia es una piel...* (1999). I also analyze certain aspects of McDonald's still-to-be-published novel *La cofradía cimarrona*. My analyses highlight the tradition within which these writers operate. The plurality of the Afro-descendant counterpublic is brought to the fore in my consideration of works that show an affinity to earlier negritude writings and others that are more post-negritude in their focus.

Chapter 4 considers the literature of the Caribbean and Belize's efforts to find a place within that body of literature. The evolution of issues regarding Caribbean canons receives attention in this chapter where I seek to demonstrate the role of a national literary canon as a counterpublic in relation to a hegemonic regional canon. I then move

⁷ In the absence of access to 20 anthologies of Costa Rican poetry, I analyzed 5 anthologies of Central American literature/poetry, 1 of poetry from Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and 14 of Costa Rican poetry.

on to analyze two of Zee Edgell's novels, *Beka Lamb* (1982), and *The Festival of San Joaquin* (1997), and Zoila Ellis' collection of short stories *On Heroes, Lizards and Passion* (1988). These texts provide insight into the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity of Belizean society. They also demonstrate how that country's literary aesthetics both correspond to, and diverge from, the aesthetics of the English-speaking Caribbean. In this chapter I also compare issues regarding publication and mediation that have affected the differences in the levels of recognition enjoyed by Edgell and Ellis. I conclude chapter 4 with a discussion of the ways in which mediation, access to publication, and promotion affect the recognition of contemporary Belizean writers.

Chapter One: Legitimation, Canonicity and Peripherality: The Case of Minority Literatures

1.1 CANONS: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The link between legitimation and canons is one that has survived for centuries. In the field of literature canonical works have traditionally occupied a central position. These are mainly works that are legitimized through inclusion in anthologies, and that form part of the academic curriculum. Given their position of centrality they are considered to be the norm. Often, works that are on the peripheries are those that are outside of the canonical center. In Spanish America the vast majority of minority writers have found themselves in a position of peripherality in opposition to the works of the hegemonic canon. By presenting the work of the dominant canon as the norm, minority discourses are very often silenced. To address issues of canonicity with regard to minority literatures it is vital to begin with a brief overview of the origin of the canon as a concept.

George A. Kennedy states that this concept “originated with the scholars who worked in the Alexandrian library in the third and second centuries B.C. [...]”⁸ According to Kennedy, the word *kanon* in Greek means “a straight rod,” “a ruler,” and thus “a standard” (Kennedy, *Classics and Canons* 219). Rudolf Pfeiffer, however, argues against this view of the word’s origin claiming that the Greeks used the word canon in the field of ethics and it served to indicate the rules a writer should follow, or what was exemplary without referring to the complete list of these exemplary works. The latter usage, he states, was introduced by David Ruhnken in 1768 to describe selective

⁸ George A. Kennedy (1990): 217-225.

lists/indexes of the best works. He states further that it is more likely that it is through the biblical “tradition that the catachrestic use of canon was suggested to Ruhnken” (207). In addition, Pfeiffer states that Greeks used the expression ἐγκρίνειν for the process of “selecting authors and registering their names in the selective list [of the foremost writers and scholars] (206). These writers in turn were called ἐγκριθέντες. The Romans described them as “classici” meaning they were “writers of the *first* class” (207).⁹

Regardless of the origin of the term it is evident that its use in literature as a descriptor for a selection of works classified as authoritative, or as David H. Richter affirms: “secular texts believed to embody the highest standards of literary culture” has survived into the twenty-first century (1526). The idea of providing guidelines and selecting works brings to the fore the concept of legitimation. Those who determine the criteria or guidelines by which a work should be evaluated are engaged in the task of granting legitimation. In the second and third centuries B.C, Alexandrian scholars provided guidelines for students with respect to which texts they saw as “the best examples in each literary genre” (Kennedy, *Classics and Canons* 219). It is evident that these guidelines were more than suggestions or recommendations. In *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Kennedy describes the work of these scholars as “separating,” “discriminating,” “judging,” works and authors (1). This very critic makes the point that even though the Alexandrian scholars were known for their task of judging and selecting they were not the initiators of this practice, as it had been in place since “the Archaic period of Greece” through various competitions (1). The criteria used to judge works were based on the literary aesthetic of the era: “subtlety of diction and versification, elegance of ornament, consistency of characterization, and imaginative

⁹Italics in the original text.

power” (Kennedy, *Origin* 108). The reason these judgments and selections were made was so that they could create a group of texts “regarded as suitable for study in schools and for literary imitation in each of the poetic genres” (Kennedy, *Origin* 108). This view is still present in contemporary literary study. Harold Bloom, for instance, feels that teachers ought to teach “more selectively, searching for *the few* who have the capacity to become highly individual readers and writers” (17).¹⁰ Bloom also would like the idea of the canon to be extended to “the relation of an individual reader and writer to what has been preserved out of what has been written, [as] identical with the literary Art of Memory” (16). As is evident from the ancient concept of the canon and that which has survived into the twentieth-century, educational institutions play a key role in decisions regarding canonicity.

In *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), Pierre Bourdieu discusses the notion of the cultural field to reveal the ways in which legitimacy is bestowed within society. An important point he makes is that “the field of cultural production is the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to *delimit the population* of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer” (42).¹¹ Because it is the definition of hegemonic groups that is valued, he indicates that in the literary field, “dominant fractions of the dominant class and ... private tribunals, such as *salons*, or public, state-guaranteed ones, such as academies, which sanction the inseparably ethical and aesthetic (and therefore political) taste of the dominant” are the bodies that grant legitimacy according to “bourgeois” taste (51). Legitimation bestowed by this group could be seen as contrasting with that granted

¹⁰Italics are mine.

¹¹Italics are mine.

by the people (Bourdieu uses the term ‘popular’), the masses of consumers who use these products (51). Bourdieu reveals that there is no even playing field within the field of cultural production. As a result it is “the site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated” (78). He states further:

the field of cultural production is the area *par excellence* of clashes between the dominant fractions of the dominant class, who fight there sometimes in person but more often through producers oriented towards defending their ‘ideas’ and satisfying their ‘tastes’, and the dominated fractions who are totally involved in this struggle. (102)

In contemporary society, literary supplements, general literary anthologies, the academic curricula, academic critics, publishing houses, and literary prizes all constitute the canon-endowing institutions, since they legitimize works. Also, issues surrounding selection and preservation of a tradition, play a major role in the debates that continue to be waged over the concept of the canon.

1.2 THE CANON DEBATES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

As the references in the previous section no doubt indicate, Harold Bloom is one of the principal twentieth-century defenders of the canon as it is understood in the traditional sense. In his work *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages*, Bloom defines canonical writers as those who are “authoritative in our culture” (1). His criteria for canonization include originality, aesthetic value, and universalism (3, 25, 524). For him, a work has aesthetic value when it contains the following elements: “mastery of figurative language, originality, cognitive power, knowledge, exuberance of

diction” (29). As the Western Canon “is not a program for social salvation” (29), Bloom is extremely critical, vitriolic even, of those who are demanding an opening of the canon, particularly Feminists, Afrocentrists, Marxists, Foucault-inspired New Historicists, [and] Deconstructionists (20). He describes these as belonging to the “School of Resentment” (4, 20).

Bloom’s assertion that limits and standards of measurement are necessary will no doubt find support in perhaps literature classes in secondary schools where students are being introduced to literary genres and the fundamentals of literary criticism. However, outside of such contexts plural aesthetics should be emphasized. One wonders what would be the fate of much contemporary literature if Bloom’s concept of literary universalism and his rejection of literature with an overt social agenda were to be adopted. Bloom himself points to the ideological elements present in the works of some of his canonical writers like Dante, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky (29). He defends these writers’ works by stating that despite the subversive elements they contained, their “true use ... is to augment one’s own growing inner self” (30). He explains that this would in no way make the reader a better or worse person or affect the nature of the reader’s contribution to society for “[a]ll that the Western Canon can bring one is the proper use of one’s own solitude whose final form is one’s confrontation with one’s own mortality” (30). Bloom appears to be attributing a highly self-oriented approach to literature, something that is questionable given the nature of contemporary society. If as Bloom suggests it is the universal appeal of these works that results in the inner satisfaction readers experience when they engage these texts, he is saying that texts that do not give

readers such inner satisfaction are not universal and should therefore not be canonical.

This leads to a questioning of the concept of universality.

Randal Johnson describes the establishment of a universalizing hegemonic canon as “an act of symbolic violence in that it gains legitimacy, at least in part, by misrecognizing or concealing underlying power relations” (17). Johnson’s view on the canon resonates with that of Stephen Brown who describes canonical works as those that present the values of the dominant culture as “the norm over and against which the mores of the subculture are proffered as abnormal” (33).¹² According to Bloom then, works that may have an overtly social and/or political agenda, and that are different from those that dominant society defines as universal, naturally have no place in the hegemonic canon. Bloom’s views relate in some way to persons or groups Doris Sommer describes as monolinguals in her book *Bilingual Aesthetics*.¹³ Such individuals find the code-switching and other linguistic games of bilinguals irritating. This irritation, Sommer feels, should move them to acknowledge the heterogeneity of their environment and, “[w]ith some help to see the big picture, frustrated players may also appreciate their imperfectly comprehensible environment as the necessary basis for democracy in globalized, modern times” (36). With this in mind one must consider that works which find themselves outside hegemonic canons operate according to traditions that employ other systems of valuation which, even though different from the hegemonic, find an audience among those who are *au fait* with the world-view(s) expressed by these writers.

¹² See also Charles Larson’s “Heroic Ethnocentrism. The Idea of Universality in Literature” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (1995):77-79.

¹³ In *Bilingual Aesthetics* (2004) Sommers uses the disadvantages of monolinguals in their contacts with bilinguals to highlight the advantages of being inscribed in more than one discourse. She shows how the “bilingual” discourse interrupts that which is (monolingual) hegemonic. See also *Counternarratives. Cultural Studies and Critical Pedagogies in Postmodern Spaces* (1996) Henry Giroux *et al.*, and *The Hegemony of English*. (2004) Donald Macedo *et al.*

These readers can therefore better appreciate such works. Also, as Sommer suggests, readers from outside these traditions may need a little help in seeing where their value lies.

In reading contemporary literature one should also take into consideration the plurality of peoples, cultures and outlooks since such consideration would result in greater inclusivity and acceptance of literary expression that is counter-hegemonic. When critics consider that texts from non-hegemonic cultures may be written in accordance with different aesthetics and make attempts to understand these differences, they move in the direction of recognizing canons other than the hegemonic. Though Bloom does not admit to any such attempts at appreciating different aesthetics, he has sounded the death knell on a hegemonic canonicity. In the appendices to his work he lists the great books of the Ages (Theocratic, Aristocratic, Democratic and Chaotic). His classification of the contemporary age as Chaotic with the caveat that “[n]ot all of the works [listed] can prove to be canonical” (548), is further evidence of the slippery ground on which the traditional concept of canonicity stands. As I proceed I will show the limitations in seeking to impose or to invoke homogenizing criteria and values to the literary production of pluralistic societies like those in Spanish America.

As stated above, the reason some have challenged canons is because the very concept is considered by many to be elitist and exclusionary. It is felt that those engaged in the practice of canonization are not in tune with contemporary reality and values. Challenges to the canon in contemporary society have come from those who oppose the existence of a canon that purports to represent the literature of the nation or society but in reality contains works that in one way or the other promote the views of dominant

society. As stated earlier, for critics like Bloom, the “aesthetic strength” that results in universality is achieved through particular rhetorical features. Additionally, themes like death, love, the search for independence or liberation are among those generally held to be universal. Clearly, these characteristics and themes are not exclusive to works belonging to the hegemonic canon. Cristina Rodríguez Cabral’s prose poem “A mis muertos queridos” for example, treats the universal theme of death.¹⁴ It charts the different stages one goes through when facing the death of a loved one: pain and sadness, comfort in memories, and hope. The metaphor “[m]i corazón ... emite un aullido estruendoso” evokes emotions with which most readers from various cultures will identify. Also, the strong emotions are expressed using a literary genre that is “universal” for communicating such feelings. Despite its prose form, the poem’s contents in no way results in an experience of estrangement. This is not to say, however, that all of Rodríguez Cabral’s poetry fits this mold. In fact, many of her other poems even though they explore themes like love, motherhood and exile, do so with forms, language and images that are aesthetically different from the hegemonic norm.

In his focus on ways in which cultural differences may impact on one’s reaction to a particular literary work, Charles Larson challenges the concept of universality in literature (a term he sees as having been misused when applied to non-western cultures). He describes the term as “pejorative” and concludes that: “[w]hat we really mean when we talk about universal experiences in literature are cultural responses that have been shaped by our own Western tradition” (78, 79). I agree with Larson and affirm that many of the texts I consider, because they are African diasporic in nature, are written in accordance with different aesthetic values. Larson uses concrete examples from his

¹⁴ “A mis muertos queridos,” *Memoria y resistencia* (2004):33

experience teaching literature in Africa to prove that cultural responses to certain “universal” experiences differ (77-79). For instance he reveals that the isolated figure of the anti-hero, so prominent in contemporary Western literature was not present in African fiction as “it is the group-felt experience that is all important” (79). I proceed now to consider what the situation was like in the U.S regarding efforts to legitimate minority literary discourses.

In the 1970s university professors and students in the United States were in the forefront of the battle for the legitimation of the literary expression of ethnic and social minorities of the nation. Among these are critics like Lillian Robinson and David Palumbo-Liu who argue for a pluralistic, multicultural approach to the study and critique of literature.

Robinson’s *In the Canon’s Mouth* is a collection of papers, reviews, and lectures written between 1982 and 1996. It is an excellent contestation of Bloom’s arguments for a singular, universalizing canon, given its focus on issues regarding gender, race, and ethnicity and class in relation to the North American academy and curricula. Robinson rejects inclusion that is mere tokenism. She sees the works of previously excluded groups as conforming to a criterion that communicates “truth to the culture being represented, the whole culture” (10). She describes this as pluralist, and of serving the purpose of being truly representative of the culture but also of challenging previously accepted views of the literary tradition (11). Arguing for multiculturalism and against the homogenizing canon promoted by dominant cultures, Robinson argues that “[m]ulticulturalism is not about these voices speaking to themselves but about the complex interchange that makes

up the whole” (145).¹⁵ Robinson, it will be noted, does not negate the role class plays within the canon discourse. In fact, she sees class as an important element, one that is closely linked to gender and race (47 -48, 50). Her views on the necessity of having a plurality of discourses that pay serious attention to the intersections between race, gender, and class are important to this study and will be further developed as it progresses.

The idea of a plurality of canons is discussed also in *The Ethnic Canon* (1995). This collection of essays edited by David Palumbo-Liu, favors what he terms a “critical” multicultural approach to the valuing of ethnic literature (2). The essays in *The Ethnic Canon* range from those that treat Border Studies; to those that examine the role of anthologies in establishing a field of study and their effect on trends in publishing in the literatures they present (256, 257); to those that treat theoretical assumptions regarding the reading of minority literary works. The collection’s editor emphasizes the difference between a claim to pluralism that reduces “the ethnic text to a pretext for the pluralistic argument that all cultures share certain expressive values” thereby perpetuating normative mono-cultural aesthetic values (2, 15) and a “critical multiculturalism” that explores the fissures, tensions, and sometimes contradictory demands of multiple cultures, rather than (only) celebrating the plurality of cultures by passing through them appreciatively. It instead maps out the terrain of common interest while being attentive to the different angles of entry into this terrain (5).¹⁶

¹⁵ Robinson’s use of the term «multiculturalism» speaks more to interculturality.

¹⁶ Palumbo-Liu’s “critical multiculturalism” resembles Raúl Fornet Betancourt’s views on interculturality. Fornet on interculturality is discussed in detail in chapter 2.

As this study progresses it will become evident that critics with preset ways of reading works can, when sensitized to criteria in accordance with a different aesthetic, read and not become lost in the tensions and differences of a literary work that is not written according to the dominant style. In fact, the concept of critical multiculturalism calls to mind Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of ways in which parody was used in the Hellenic period thus creating a heteroglossic trend that enriched the literature and impacted on the development of the novel. According to Bakhtin:

. . . alongside the great and significant models of straightforward genres and direct discourses, discourses with no conditions attached, there was created in ancient times a rich world of the most varied forms and variations of parodic-travestying, indirect, conditional discourse. (59)

My analysis of the literary texts of Rodríguez Cabral, Campbell Barr, McDonald Woolery, Edgell and Ellis in subsequent chapters will reveal that some of them do embody the tension of multiple cultures. For instance, McDonald Woolery's novel *La Cofradía Cimarrona* brings into contact African, Indian, and Spanish experiences and religious traditions, in a style that combines chronicle, scripture and fiction. Rather than allowing these multiple discourses to alienate them, the readers who are bold enough to move beyond initial feelings of estrangement, encounters novel ways in which this narrative dialogues with and contests the hegemonic narrative of colonization in Latin America.

Returning to the essays in *The Ethnic Canon*, the one that resonates most with the issues I treat in this study is Paula Gunn Allen's "Border Studies: The Intersection of Gender and Color." Allen's essay looks at multiculturalism from the area of "Border Studies." It is her view that enough attention is not paid to "the essential experiences of non-Western modes of consciousness" in reading texts (35). Given that "mother" texts

vary from culture to culture and impact on the works produced by those of the community, literary criticism should not ignore this or try to behave as though there is one common universal root from which these works derive (36, 37). The type of criticism she proposes is one that focuses on the “actual texts being created, their source, their source texts, the texts to which they stand in relation, and the otherness that they both embody and delineate” (44). As my work will show, historical, cultural, social and economic issues all have a bearing on literary production and consumption and are important considerations in questions of canon formation. Additionally, I will argue for the importance of employing critical criteria when reading minority texts that take socio-historical and cultural factors into consideration.

The role of educational institutions, particularly the university, in the creation of canons is discussed by John Guillory in his work *Cultural Capital*. Guillory provides a post-Marxist critique of the revisionist views of liberal pluralists based on the concept of “cultural capital” developed by Pierre Bourdieu (6). In critiquing both sides of the arguments regarding the canon, Guillory sees the university as the locus of the struggles over the canon (5). According to him canonization takes place in the university and it is the place where cultural capital is transmitted (37). As Guillory states, “judgments with canonical force are institutionally located” (29). This being the case, specific values that works express are subordinated “to the social functions and institutional aims of the school itself” (269). He argues that the opening of the university curricula has allowed works by minority writers to be included in the syllabi. This in itself though does not constitute canonization (348). Guillory credits the political discourse of liberal pluralists with the opening up of the curriculum. However, he opposes their social agenda. He

feels that identity politics that focus on issues of class, gender, and race should not be used to explain canon formation (5, 10, 11, 18). Even though he says the above, he singles out class as a category that he feels has been systematically repressed in the liberal pluralist discourse on the canon (14). In Guillory's estimation, this is one aspect of the unfair criticism that is leveled against the canon. Another issue that critics of the canon fail to pursue is that:

By defining canonicity as determined by the social identity of the author, the critique of the canon both discovers, and misrepresents, the obvious fact that the older the literature, the less likely it will be that texts by socially defined minorities exist in sufficient numbers to produce a 'representative canon.'" (Guillory 15)

Despite Guillory's critique of identity politics, I see the above point as a confirmation of the issues surrounding class, for as Guillory himself later states, women who were not aristocrats or bourgeois were not generally literate and therefore could not produce works, much less be considered for canonization (15). Directly related to my study are Guillory's claims that the pluralist agenda is stuck between integrationist and separatist institutional strategies:

between the incorporation of non-canonical works into the curriculum on the grounds that such works ought to be canonical, and the establishment of separate or alternative curricula of works which continue to be presented as "non-canonical" in relation to the traditional curriculum." (9)

I do not see my proposition of plural canons for the literary works of the regions under consideration as being stuck between these two positions. Guillory's arguments presuppose the existence of either a mutable body of works that could expand to include previously excluded works, or a number of separate literary canons. By proposing various canons in constant dialogue, what I suggest is in no way separatist nor is it integrationist

in the sense that Guillory suggests. My proposition does not give preference to any one literary canon. Additionally, contrary to Guillory's critique of pluralists who reject aesthetics because they equate them with hegemonic values, my pluralist proposition will explore the plurality of aesthetic values. For example, the criteria for reading Afro-Latin American literature in chapter 3 will provide evidence of such varied aesthetics and demonstrate how canons overlap and dialogue with one another.

Guillory counters arguments for multiculturalism with the view that even though a multiplicity of sites of cultural production may exist, these are not the same as multiple cultures "as though every cultural work were only the organic expression of a discrete and autonomous culture" (44). As explained above, those who argue for multiculturalism like Palumbo-Liu and Robinson do not propose a view of multiple cultures that puts them as distinct entities totally divorced from dominant society. As my discussion will show, there are areas of overlap and dialogue or conflict among cultures and these are what I propose should be explored in the literatures of the regions under consideration.¹⁷

1.3 PLURAL CANONS: A PROPOSAL

To discuss my proposal for the legitimation of minority literatures, I will draw on the concept of plural spheres or (subaltern) counterpublics as put forward by Nancy Fraser in her response to Habermas,¹⁸ and Michael Warner in his work *Publics and Counterpublics* (2005). Warner describes publics as: "[e]ssentially intertextual frameworks for understanding texts against an organized background of the circulation of

¹⁷ See diagram on page 31.

¹⁸ Fraser's essay is a response to Habermas' work *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere* (1962).

other texts, all interwoven not just by citational references but by the incorporation of a reflexive circulatory field in the mode of address and consumption” (16). Even though it may be argued that Habermas’ arguments were framed for a different era, one must not lose sight of the previously mentioned fact that the term canon has a use that connotes elitism and exclusivity and this has extended to contemporary usage as evidenced by Bloom’s statements. This being the case, I equate the hegemonic canon to the bourgeois public sphere as discussed by Habermas in his work. This is a useful analogy because, as Craig Calhoun reveals, the bourgeois public spheres as products of a bourgeois society were elitist and only consisted of narrow segments of the population (7). As Warner points out, “[d]ominant publics are by definition those that can, take their discourse pragmatics and their lifeworlds for granted, misrecognizing the indefinite scope of their expansive address as universality or normalcy” (122). As has already been observed from arguments in the previous section, this is the elitist, universalist view that continues to hold sway in some segments of society. By presenting their discourse as legitimate, and therefore the norm, those in dominant society very often succeed in silencing minority discourses.

Fraser describes the public sphere (a dominant public) as “a group of ‘private persons’ assembled to discuss matters of ‘public concern’ or common interest” (112). As a counter to this public sphere, Fraser proposes a plurality of spheres and the establishment of what she terms “subaltern counter-publics” (123).¹⁹ These subaltern

¹⁹ The term subaltern has different conceptualizations. For Gayatri Spivak the subaltern is one who has been excluded from and thus silenced by the hegemonic narrative. Such an individual, even if s/he does speak, has no dialogue with those who hold power due to a lack of listeners. Other postcolonialists, like Homi Bhabha, use the term to refer in general to persons of the lower classes who are marginalized and hold no power. Nancy Fraser uses the term to refer to those outside the realms of power (women, for instance) who seek listening voices within their own group in order to agitate for recognition outside the group. Michael Warner points out, that identities in counterpublics are formed through participation. So

counterpublics are: “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (123). Warner’s view corresponds to Fraser’s. He elaborates by explaining that the discourse in which these groups engage would “in other contexts . . . be regarded with hostility or with a sense of indecorousness” (Warner 113,119).

I explore this concept, of (subaltern) counterpublics as a counter to the hegemonic literary canon and I propose a plurality of canons for the literatures of Spanish America and the Caribbean. Fraser proposes having multiple public spheres so that “those in subordinated groups [possess] areas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies” (123).

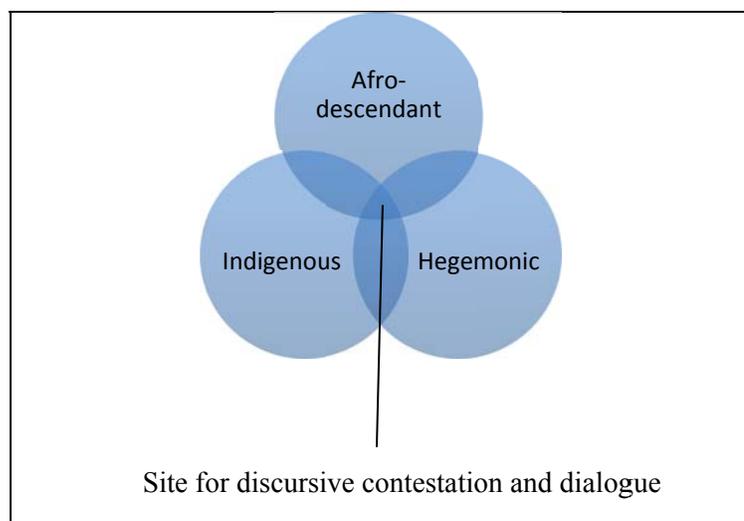
Subaltern groups in various Latin American nations are increasingly contesting the official discourse of cultural homogeneity.²⁰ The true multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature of these societies is becoming more evident. Their literary production is one medium they use to respond to official discourse and to give voice to their needs and concerns. I find two of Fraser’s responses to certain assumptions made in Habermas’ work particularly relevant to my project. In response to the assumption that a “single, comprehensive public sphere” over multiple competing spheres is more advantageous when the goal is democracy, Fraser rebuts that a single sphere deprived

one’s participation in a particular discourse may make one “subaltern,” even though for other reasons one belongs to a dominant group within the society. My use of the term refers to those who for historical, and social reasons that relate to their lack of, or limited access to sources of literary legitimation have been silenced or marginalized by the dominant discourses of their regions and are seeking to develop strategies for intra-group and inter-group dialogue.

²⁰ Numerous examples of this counter-hegemonic discourse exist. See for example : Alejandro De la Fuente, “Cuba’s Racial Democracy: What Now ?” (2005), George Reid Andrew, *Afro-Latin America* (2004), and Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (2005).

subaltern groups of “venues in which to undertake communicative processes that were not, as it were, under the supervision of dominant groups” (123). I feel though that in addition to intra-group discourse, there must also be inter-group discourse. Inter-group discourse allows for meaningful communication among subaltern groups and between subaltern spheres and those discourses generally considered as hegemonic (figure 1.1). Indeed, Fraser concludes that despite the disadvantage of intra-group politics that could lead to informal exclusions and marginalization even within some subaltern counterpublics, “[i]n principle, the proliferation of subaltern counterpublics means a widening of discursive contestation, and that is a good thing in stratified societies” (124). The role of mediators is crucial to this study as what is proposed is not just contestation but dialogue. Academics, critics, publishers and others are in the business of legitimizing works and bringing them to audiences. They therefore play a vital role in facilitating inter-group dialogue among the various canons in a society.

Figure 1.1 - A model for inter-group and intra-group discourse among the various canons within Spanish American societies.²¹



¹⁷ I recognize that there is no limit to the number of possible discourses. For example, women, rural inhabitants, gays are among those whose literary discourses are also a part of the model. Popular classes and the informal section are also included in the model.

In her response to Habermas' assumption that discussions in public spheres should be restricted to matters for the common good, and that private matters and interests not be part of such discourse, Fraser states that questions with respect to what constitute matters of common good are only arrived at through "discursive contestation" (129). She feels that there should be no restrictions on the topics that form a part of these discourses. She states further, that in reality the categories public and private are "cultural classifications and rhetorical labels, [and notions of the private] are vehicles through which gender and class disadvantages may continue to operate subtextually and informally, even after explicit, formal restrictions have been rescinded" (131-32). This point is particularly relevant to the question of minority discourse, which very often treats issues on the subjects of race, class, and gender. These could be regarded as private in societies that treat them as taboo since they contest the idealistic official discourse of unity and equality of opportunity. My study looks at how discourses that may previously have been deemed peculiar to a particular group and thus private can be included in the larger national discourse through the dialogues among the various canons within a society. This in no way suggests a "separate but equal" position for other canons within society. I am not advocating what Sommer describes as rating both hegemonic and minority culture "on the same scorecard and simply chang[ing] places from one match to another" (37). Like her, I recognize that this would obscure the differences inherent in minority cultures. She points out that minority cultures often prefer to maintain their differences since various cultures bestow value differently (50, 51). Her view that an equating of all aesthetics with beauty ratings would be harmful to defenders of aesthetics and that more than one criterion is necessary when bestowing value (65), corresponds to Danto's concept of

plural aesthetics discussed in the Introduction. My analysis of Afro-descendant women's texts in chapter 3 highlights how their literary aesthetic may be seen as different from the hegemonic. This difference, however, is no reason for the devaluation of this body of work. Should the mediators of the hegemonic literary field take Afro-descendant aesthetics into consideration when reading texts written by Afro-descendant writers, they will become aware of the different systems of legitimation that exist across canons and be more open to recognizing and appreciating different value systems. This is one possible way of overcoming prejudices regarding Afro-Hispanic literature and that of smaller/less-recognized groups in the English-speaking Caribbean.

A return to Warner's discussion on counterpublics is necessary as I would like to examine three points he makes that resonate directly with my project.

- (i) An infinite number of publics could exist "within the social totality" (67). As figure 1.1 reveals the various discourses within the society do not simply exist as separate spheres but are in constant dialogue with one another.
- (ii) Addressees (publics) in literary discourse are imaginary. This does not mean they are unreal. They do have a social basis (74).
- (iii) Even minimal or passive participation in the discourse makes one a member of a public (71). Even onlookers can be addressees of the discourse and in this way they too could come to belong to that particular public (90).

Minor literature is usually said to have collective value where the individual speaks for the group (Deleuze and Guattari 17). Of course one may want to challenge this

contention with the view that the majority of those who belong to these minority groups are not actively involved in these discourses for socio-economic, educational and other reasons. Nevertheless, their belonging to the social imaginary of addressees makes them a part of the discourse and thus a member of the particular counterpublic.

Before launching into my arguments for plural canons in Latin America, I would like to divert briefly to take a look at the African-American literary canon within the body of literatures of the United States of America.²² This diversion allows me to examine a previously peripheral body of work that has been legitimized to the point where it now has a place in the national literary landscape. It highlights the various factors (literary and non-literary) that have made this possible.

1.4 THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CANON: THE EMERGENCE OF AN ETHNIC CANON

In his comprehensive study of American literary history, Richard Gray not only deals with the written texts from the era of the first European settlers down to the twenty-first century, he also considers the oral traditions of the Native Americans, the inhabitants of the Hispanic South West, and the African Americans. Of interest in a discussion on canons and plurality of canons, is his admission that his work does not present a “totalizing vision” of a literary history, but what constitutes “the literary histories of America” (ix). He goes on to describe American literature as one “that is, and always has been multiple, conflicted” (x). A look at various early anthologies and literary histories,

²² In the remainder of my work I use the term “American literature” to refer to the writing of those who have inhabited and continue to inhabit the territory now known as the United States of America.

however, paint a picture of a largely homogeneous written tradition.²³ This would seem to belie Gray's position. Nevertheless, there are those who reveal that a degree of plurality was present in American literature as early as the seventeenth-century. George McMichael et al in the first volume of their *Anthology of American Literature* (2007) reveal that even though Puritanism was the dominant ideology among the early settlers and these sensibilities were extended to the written tradition of the era, there came a time when this tradition was challenged. As a result, social, religious, and political forces rose in opposition to Puritanism. According to McMichael et al, "[r]eligious and social unity steadily gave way to diversity. The American tradition of pluralism, of contending factions, rose as a tide, and Puritanism more and more came to resemble a small island sinking in a turbulent sea of change (9). Of course the pluralism referred to here was limited in that it was only plural in relation to religious and political ideas and matters regarding social organization. This ideological pluralism did not extend to those of other races like the Native Americans and the Blacks. It is important to note that in these formative years of the nation those who wrote were expected to "write their nation into being," so to speak. Their conceptualization of those who were responsible for nation-building and being full-fledged citizens did not extend to minority groups, some of which spoke different languages and were considered to be sub-human. This is not to say, however, that these groups were silent. In his literary history, Gray indicates that oral traditions existed among the Native Americans and the Hispanics in the Southwestern regions of the country and he documents tales from different tribes (Gray 4-18, 158-160).

²³ Literary histories like those by Heinrich Straumann (1965), John Herbert Nelson and Oscar Cargill (1949), and Arthur Quinn et al (1938) treat American's literary history without reference to works by minority groups. In William B. Cairns *A History of American Literature* (1930, 1969) the only African American writer mentioned is Phillis Wheatley. See also: Paul Lauter's *Canons and Contexts* (1991).

This work also documents the existence of spirituals and folk songs as part of the oral traditions of the enslaved Africans and their descendants in North America. In addition to these songs, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie McKay include in the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (1997) various folk tales that formed a part of the oral tradition of African Americans. Worthy of note also is the fact that as early as the middle of the eighteenth-century a written literary tradition started to emerge among African Americans in North America. These were the voices of those who for the most part were enslaved or had recently gained their freedom. As Gates and McKay state in their introduction to the anthology:

African American slaves remarkably sought to write themselves out of slavery by mastering the Anglo-American belletristic tradition. To say that they did so against the greatest odds does not begin to suggest the heroic proportions that the task of registering a black voice in printed letters entailed.” (xxviii)

The first known poem by an African American in America was “Bar Fights” by Lucy Terry. First composed in 1746, this work was preserved and passed on orally until its publication in 1855. Those African Americans of that period who succeeded in having their work published did so under the patronage of their White patrons or masters. This being the case, their writing was not independent and the restrictions under which they wrote impacted on their subject matter. It was evident that some, like Phillis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammon, wrote for White audiences and, as Gray indicates this was “a common pattern in African American writing. Slave narratives, for instance, were commonly prefaced by a note or essay from a White notable, mediating the narrative for what was, after all, an almost entirely white audience –and giving it a white seal of

approval” (86).²⁴ These were the humble beginnings of the African American literary tradition. From these beginnings writing by African Americans continued throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The twentieth century saw a great increase in literary production by African American writers and the consumption of this literature by an ever-growing cross-section of the populace. During the 1920s and 1930s the Harlem Renaissance emerged and flourished. African American writing therefore achieved increased visibility. Indeed, Demetrice Worley and Jesse Perry hail the Harlem Renaissance as “the first opportunity African Americans had to give birth to –and celebrate –the uniqueness of African American culture. Both Black and White readers were eager to experience a slice of African American life, and the literature of the time provided that experience” (xvii). It could be argued that the interest in African American writing was fueled by what Paul Lauter describes as “white curiosity about [Blacks’] supposed ‘exotic’ qualities” (24). Nevertheless, the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, unlike the majority of those in Europe and Latin America, were of African descent and so were writing their own realities. These writers sought legitimation for their works through the publication of a number of anthologies of African American writings like *The New Negro. An Interpretation* (1925).²⁵ The visibility they received, however, did not remove them from the peripheries of the American literary discourse. As Lauter points out, despite the flourishing of literature among Blacks in the 1920s and 1930s this is not reflected in

²⁴ Phillis Wheatley (c.1753 - c.1784) was an African American woman. She is considered to be first Black woman in America to have her literary work published. Jupiter Hammon (c.1711 - c.1806) an enslaved African American wrote poetry and prose and was the first Black writer to be published in America.

²⁵ This anthology edited by the African American scholar Alain Locke, featured articles, essays, poems and stories by African Americans. One of its goals was to present a new, positive way of viewing the cultural and social reality of Blacks in the United States.

general anthologies of the era used to teach American literature and in the scholarship of Whites of that period. He lists those anthologies that include some Black writers. Among male writers the favorites for inclusion were Paul Dunbar, Contee Cullen, Weldon Johnson, and Langston Hughes. The only woman who was included in a few general anthologies was Phillis Wheatley (25). A greater degree of legitimation was to come later as a result of both literary and non-literary factors.

In the post-World War II era of the 1950s into the 1960s and 1970s certain political moves by African American civil rights groups and leaders were instrumental in promoting solidarity among peoples of African descent and the enactment of legislation that sought to make the United States of America more just in its treatment of minorities. The ideology of Black Consciousness grew out of the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s and Black Power of the 70s.

The concept of Black Consciousness has been used in South Africa, the United States and in other parts of the world with significant populations of people of African descent. It sought to bring about the psychological and physical liberation of Blacks. It was supposed to combat the effects of racialized systems like apartheid and Jim Crow segregation that dehumanized and weakened the individual by fostering a sense of solidarity among Blacks in the particular region first, but later on a more global scale. Pride in self and Black culture, religion and values were promoted through this ideology. With a strengthened sense of Black identity, and the backing of legislation that brought about more access to education, the literary works of African Americans moved forward and gained additional recognition. This was the era of the Black Arts Movement of the mid-1960s and 1970s.

As the cultural arm of the Black Power Movement, the Black Arts Movement focused on promoting Black culture through the establishment of publishing houses, the compilation of anthologies featuring the works of African American writers, and the public performances of literary and other artistic works by Blacks. This was seen as having had a positive impact not only on the development of African American literature but on the field of multiculturalism in the United States (Smethurst 10, 172-178). As Smethurst states:

The influence of the early Black Arts movement on young writers of Puerto Rican descent, both through example and through direct participation of some of those writers in early Black Arts activities and institutions did much to promote the emergence of the Nuyorican writers and, ultimately the multicultural literary movement on both the East Coast and the West Coast. (177-178)

Some key figure of the movement were Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), Larry Neal, Sonia Sánchez, Askia Touré, and Maya Angelou.

In addition to the aforementioned extra-literary forces, the academy played a major role in bringing recognition to Blacks as a whole and to their artistic production beyond the performing arts. In chapter 1 of *Canons and Contexts*, Lauter charts the evolution of the Modern Language Association of America (M.L.A) from 1958 to 1983 and the teaching of literature in the university during that period. He concludes that the profession itself has become increasingly diverse and academics now seek

to explore, celebrate, and understand the differing cultures and traditions that shape real life in these United States (...) [W]e have come to see the differences and interactions of the many cultures of America and have sought ways to organize our scholarship and teaching to illuminate that variety. (16)

Additionally, Gates and McKay state that African American literature since the 1970s owes its success to six factors:

- The large number of women writers (for example, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Rita Dove, Gloria Naylor) who have emerged;
- The number of prestigious literary prizes won by African American writers during the 80s and 90s;
- The various African American writers who have simultaneously made the *New York Times* best-seller list;
- Writers who write to a racially diverse audience, but who also have a large audience of Black readers;
- Black literature now having a prominent place in the university curricula;²⁶
- Various Black writers who have gained other forms of recognition – (for example – Maya Angelou as Inaugural Poet and Rita Dove as Poet Laureate (xxxiii).

Mary Jo Bona and Irma Maini, in their introduction to *Multiethnic Literature and Canon Debates*, highlight some of the very factors mentioned above by Gates and McKay. However, because their work does not only focus on African American writers they emphasize the visibility that has been afforded writers of various ethnicities through prizes and awards like the Tony Award won by David Hwang in 1988 for his play *M. Butterfly*. This recognition brought about a more significant change, namely “the student demand for change in syllabi and curriculum across campuses” (10). Bona and Maini had made the point earlier in their essay that the decade of the 70s had been one in which demands had begun in connection with more pluralistic, democratic and inclusive curricula and syllabi (6). These demands they say, were given impetus by the national debate on the canon that took place during the 80s when “[c]ritics and academics

²⁶ In *Loose Canons. Notes on the Culture Wars* (1992), Gates points to the introduction of Black Studies programs in the university curricula as an important factor in the de-centering of the canon (151).

questioned the criteria used to determine literary value, criteria that usually included vague notions of aesthetic excellence and universality” (6). The canon debates saw those like Lynne Cheney and Allan Bloom who argued for education based on the “Great Books” of the Western Canon and against the liberalization of the education system in conflict with those like Paul Lauter.²⁷ The latter is among those who dared to challenge the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) to expand its focus. This came about in 1976 with the establishment of a Committee on Minority literature and Native American literature (Bona and Maini 5).

It is evident therefore that a number of academic and non-academic factors resulted in the legitimation that African American literature has earned for itself. It is now possible to speak about an African American canon within the literatures of the United States of America. Indeed, Gray’s *History of American Literature* addresses the various other canons within the American literary landscape such as the Native American, Chicano, Latino, Asian American, and European American. However, to return the focus directly to African American literature and the canon it is useful to look at the ideas of one scholar who has written extensively on the topic and has charted a theoretical approach to the reading of African American literature.²⁸

Henry Louis Gates Jr. addresses the issue of the African-American literary canon as an ethnic canon within the American literary tradition in *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* (1992). In this collection of essays, Gates charts the history of the hegemonic Western canons and ways in which African-American writing entered North

²⁷ See Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind*. Simon and Schuster: New York, 1987. Lynne Cheney headed the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) from 1986 to the early 1990s. Though she supported multiculturalism, she stridently opposed the politicizing of the university curricula.

²⁸ See Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* (1988)

American literary discourse. He also outlines the key issues that African-American writers treat in their works and criteria that foster the creation of this ethnic canon. One of the many points Gates makes that relates directly to this study treats the issue of legitimation. Gates sees critics, publishers, those who hold power in the academy, libraries, book stores and other similar institutions as the ones responsible for granting legitimation to literary works (7). As this study progresses one must examine whether the same institutions and agents serve as forces of legitimation within Latin America and the Caribbean and how they function in securing recognition for the literary works of the groups of writers under consideration. Given the success of multicultural studies within the U.S academy, this study takes into consideration the nature of the Uruguayan, Costa Rican and Belizean societies as it makes a determination on the engagement of multiple cultures in the literary field in the three named countries. Gates looks at the pluralism of American society and posits that different cultures will only survive through cultural tolerance, which can only be achieved through cultural understanding (176). It would appear that to some extent the American academy has strived to recognize plural literary canons. Gates, however, feels the society as a whole should work toward greater cultural understanding. He therefore sees “the challenge facing America in the [twenty-first] century [as] the shaping . . . of a truly common public culture, one responsive to the long-silenced cultures of color” (176). As stated earlier, the United States has risen to the challenge to the extent that literary multiculturalism now exists in that society.

In chapter 2, I place the analysis of Spanish American literary anthologies, and university course syllabi against the backdrop of the Latin America’s history and literary history and the canon debates within that region with the aim of determining whether the

concept of multiculturalism is one that is accepted within Uruguay and Costa Rica and as such, if the idea of plural canons can be successfully proposed in these societies. Given that the U.S academy can be credited with the promotion of studies in the field of Afro-Hispanic literatures, my attempts to take the discourse on plural canons outside the North America space are aimed at assessing the possibility of dialogue aimed at achieving interculturality, among the various literary traditions in Spanish America.

Chapter Two: Canon Worthiness and Spanish American Literature

2.1. THE ROLE OF HISTORY IN ASSIGNING VALUE IN COLONIAL SOCIETIES

The process of literary canonization in Spanish America has historically focused on promoting the values and criteria that inform the discourses of dominant society, to the detriment of minority works. To get to the root of issues regarding the placement of canonical value on literary works in Latin America one first has to examine the history of colonization in the region. In this chapter, I show how this history has had an impact on the literary history of the region thereby affecting what is valued and hence, what is transmitted as cultural capital through the educational system. I also examine the contemporary discourses regarding multiculturalism and canonicity in Latin American before going on to look closely at the contents of literary anthologies and course syllabi from the region. Given that Nancy Morejón is to-date the Afro-descendant woman writer who has achieved the most recognition, this chapter concludes with a consideration of the factors that have led to her legitimation.

With the European conquest and colonization of the Americas came a total change in value systems from those that had existed among indigenous cultures. In the case of the Spanish colonies this new order relegated all that was not Catholic and European to barbarism and paganism. In *The Conquest of America*, Tzvetan Todorov refers to Spain's discovery of "the exterior Other, that whole America which will become Latin" (50). Peter Bakewell adds to this "otherization" the importance that the colonial authorities gave to maintaining social hierarchies in colonial societies:

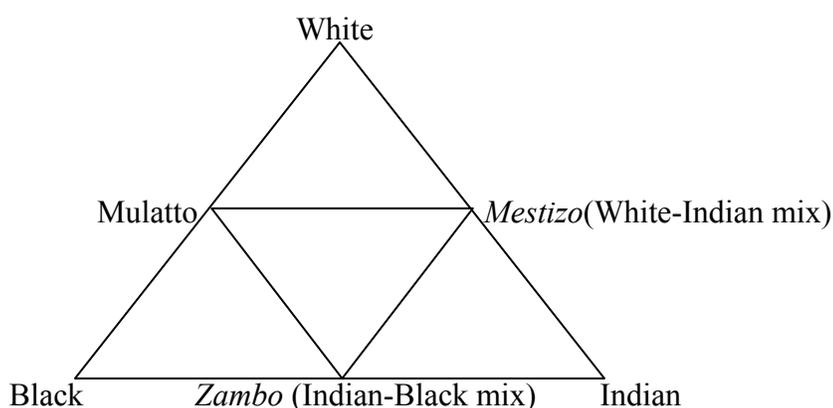
the American population dichotomized into noble Whites and a perverted remainder; the Whites all pure-blooded and legitimate, the rest perpetually contaminated by an assumed bastardy somewhere in their origins. But overriding

this distortion by far in historical significance was the assumption that such a population can be kept orderly only through hierarchical organization. People must have, and know, their place in society. (165)

A letter written by one Viceroy of New Spain expresses his fear (and no doubt that of others like him in society) regarding the problems that could result from a loss of the rigid control that the Crown had sought to establish. He recommends that the Crown curb its importation of Blacks, and that they send some *Mestizos* to Spain because he feared that the society was becoming too diverse in composition and this could lead to a disruption of societal order and to Spain's eventual loss of the territory (Lockhart and Otte 187-89). The strict stratification the Crown sought to maintain in its colonies is explained in this way by researchers of Minority Rights Group:

The concepts of Indian, Black, and White] emerged in the Americas as the kingdoms of Castile and Aragón forged a cultural hegemony of racial separation. The concept of 'race' (Spanish *raza*) itself emerged in European dictionaries at the time of the rapidly expanding racist hegemony in the Americas. (288)

These researchers then go on to illustrate this stratified structure by way of the following diagram:²⁹



The diagram shows Whites at the pinnacle of the societal structure. Groups that are mixed with White, that is, Mulattoes and *Mestizos* are at intermediary positions of the

²⁹ Minority Rights Group, *No Longer Invisible. Afro-Latin Americans Today* (1995): 288

structure. The groups at the structure's base are Blacks, Indians and the Black-Indian admixture – the *Zambos*. Order had to be maintained so that none who found themselves on the lowest rungs of the societal ladder would consider disrupting this hierarchy.

Centering cultural life in the vicerregal courts and the *Capitanías Generales* was one way of maintaining order in society. In these locations the cultural practices and traditions of the Spanish elite were transmitted by those who occupied positions of authority. Ángel Rama uses the symbol of the city to describe the way power was wielded and order maintained in Spanish American societies. Symbolic order was maintained via the written word to project the societal model imagined by those who held power:

El *sueño de un orden* servía para perpetuar el poder y para conservar la estructura socio-económico y cultural que ese poder garantizaba. Y además se imponía a cualquier discurso opositor de ese poder, obligándolo a transitar, previamente, por el *sueño de otro orden*. (11)³⁰

Priests, and other religious functionaries, administrators, educators, professionals, writers, and other intellectual workers held a very privileged place in society and made up the body of “*letrados*” who maintained order through the written word (Rama 25).

The religious functionaries in the “*ciudad letrada*” had the task of maintaining the status of the Catholic Church and religious and moral purity of Spain's colonists through various control mechanisms. In the early days of the colony, the bishops and their appointed officials held inquisitional powers in various parts of the territory (Hamnett 68). The Inquisition was instituted in New Spain in 1571 from which time “it controlled the printed word, not just in Spanish but in the indigenous languages as well” (Hamnett

³⁰Angel Rama refers to those who controlled administrative and other powers in the society as symbolizing the “*ciudad real*.”

68).³¹ One example of this is seen in the indigenous dramatic presentations used in Mexico as a means of teaching Catholicism. Ángel María K. Garibay records that although written by clerics, the enactment and direction of these theatrical works was left in the hands of the Indian interpreters. The latter therefore reinterpreted the dramas according to their own indigenous belief systems (125). Discussing this phenomenon Louise M. Burkhart says that the drama could:

be read as a colonial discourse or as a native one. It is both a translation of its source and a commentary on it, a rendering of Christian teachings into Nahuatl and an adjustment of these teachings to the local situation. Its alterations and elaborations revealing what the Nahua author accepted and what he saw as inadequate or inappropriate for his purpose, constitute a cultural critique of the Spanish model, and through it of Spanish culture and Christianity more generally. He plays the role of critic as well as that of interpreter. (4-5)

In its attempts to keep the doctrine it taught to the colonists pure “the Church made a greater effort to control dramatic production in the colonies than it did in the mother country” (Schons 91). Throughout the centuries of colonial rule, control was also exercised by means of various edicts and regulations that came from the Crown or its representatives in the colonies.³² The limited success of these decrees is evident in the religious syncretism that exists throughout Latin America.

In *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron discuss ways in which the ruling class is able to impose its culture as legitimate, natural and thus universal (vi, 6, 10). They point out that dominant pedagogic actions generally produce elements of culture that are characteristic of the dominant

³¹The Vice Royalty of New Spain (1535 - 1821) had its court in Mexico City and exercised authority over Mexico, most of Central America, the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean, and the Philippines.

³² One example of this control is the 1575 law that was instituted because of theatrical work critical of the colonial administration in Mexico. This law required that dramas first be authorized by the Inquisitor General’s office before being performed (Breining 2002): 203-205.

social group. These cultural elements are propelled into the dominant position (10).

Considering the role of educational institutions in canon formation and maintenance as previously discussed, one sees that this is precisely what took place in colonial societies.³³ In the church, schools and homes the Eurocentric values of those who held power in society were transmitted and perpetuated. So important was the upholding of Eurocentric values as superior that as early as 1508 a school was established in Puerto Rico and the year 1538 saw the founding of the first university in the Spanish American colonies in Santo Domingo. With the upholding of the superiority of Spanish values, anything that fell outside of this mold was by default of little or no value.

This point is borne out by Darcy Ribeiro:

besides the installation of railroads or telegraphs Europe exported to the peoples covered by her network of domination her whole cargo of concepts preconceptions and idiosyncrasies about herself and the world and even the colonial peoples themselves. The latter, not only impoverished by the plunder of their wealth and the products of their work under the colonial regime, were also degraded when they assumed as a self-image the European view which described them as racially inferior because they were Black, indigenous or mestizo and condemned to backwardness, lack of ambition, tendency to lasciviousness and so on. (73-74)

Ribeiro goes on to explain how the colonial system saw it necessary to systematically devalue Indian and Black ethnicities and thereby foster in these peoples a view of themselves as “intrinsicly inferior and therefore incapable of progress” (74). Mark Pedelty discusses how indigenous musical instruments used in churches during the early colonial period in Mexico were eventually replaced by the organ. The adjectives the Council of Trent used to describe the sound of the instruments were “percussive, blaring, and shrill” (52). According to Pedelty “[t]he repression of these instruments by the Council of Trent . . . is a good indication that by the mid-sixteenth century the church (or

³³ See: John Guillory *Cultural Capital* (5, 29, 37).

at least the colonial administration) was growing increasingly less tolerant toward the integration of indigenous or popular culture into the liturgy” (52). Gabriel Saldivar records the passing of a law in 1609 in Mexico that prohibited Blacks from dancing in the streets, except on holidays between noon and six p.m and on those occasions, only in the public square. This was because of the low esteem in which these displays were held by the cultured public and the authorities (264). This same historian also relates the scandal caused in the eighteenth century by the introduction of certain popular *coplas* and their accompanying dances, the *rumba* and *danzón*. These were introduced via Cuba, first to the coastal region of Vera Cruz but they eventually made their way to the capital. The complaints surrounding the dance deride its sensuality and claim that those attracted to it are mulattoes and colored people, soldiers, sailors and low-life. A contrast is made between these and serious, circumspect individuals who do not participate in such spectacles (272).

It was not only in the area of music and dance that minorities were looked down upon and made to feel inferior. Alejandro Gortázar, in his work on the life and work of the free Black Uruguayan intellectual of the nineteenth century Jacinto Ventura de Molina, relates that many sought to discredit and minimize his intellectual abilities by branding him as crazy (“un loco ‘simpático’” 14, 15). William G. Acree Jr. also records a variety of ways in which intellectuals and others in power attempted to minimize the value of Molina’s work. In addition to saying that he was crazy, they launched attacks on his writing style, called him “iletrado,” and even suggested that he be shipped out of the country (51-53). Acree records that despite Ventura de Molina’s erudition and the varied nature of his writing, his race seemed to be the main reason behind these efforts to

discredit him. As Acree states, “[a]fter all being a black man of letters was a not ‘normal’ and posed a contradiction in terms for many” (40). The challenges to the cultural and literary production of minorities during the colonial period were not limited to the popular vs. cultured dichotomy that granted literary value to the latter. In some cases, the writer’s race was a barrier beyond which his White contemporaries refused to see.

2. 2. LATIN AMERICA’S LITERARY HISTORY: A WAY OF MAINTAINING ORDER

The maintenance of symbolic order was done through writing. Literature served as a means of achieving this goal. The *crónicas* with their records of the conquest and colonization from a European perspective were presented as the earliest literary production of the colonies. Carlos A. Solé points out that one of the main roles of the “*crónicas*” was to “acquaint the Old World with American life in all its detail” (xix). Solé goes on to describe the ways in which the European literary traditions made their way into the American colonies:

America was not conquered only by soldiers and adventurers. Along with them came clergymen, men of letters, poets, dramatists and even philosophers, who carried with them new aesthetic doctrines and tendencies that stimulated literary activity in the New World and allowed it to thrive. They brought with them the printing press, and they circulated books that were being read in Spain at the time. Universities were soon founded and important cultural centers established. (xx)

The functionaries mentioned in the above quote were the principal administrators of the “*ciudad letrada*.” The superiority of the European standard was upheld through the transmission of literary forms and subject matter, thus resulting in the devaluation of any violations of these standards, for instance through the use of popular modes of expression.

It is not surprising that much of the literature of the 16th and 17th centuries was imitative of Spanish models thereby serving as evidence of the successful transmission of Eurocentric cultural values. For instance, the poetry of the sixteenth-century Mexican writer Francisco de Terrazas is very similar in content and form to that of Peninsular Renaissance poets. His sonnet that begins with the words “Dejad las hebras de oro ensortijado” uses the form of the Petrarchan sonnet. White, untrodden snow is the image used to signify purity; the female subject is the epitome of Caucasian beauty as pearls and coral metaphorically describe her mouth. Despite her beauty, the woman is cruel and hard because she does not return the attention or affection of the poetic persona as was the norm in the neo-platonic courtly love tradition. The imitative nature of Terrazas’ poetry is evident. It contains nothing to distinguish it from the Peninsular poets of the epoch. Nonetheless, José Promis Ojeda views Terrazas’ imitation as superficial and presents the view that Terraza’s tone and worldview are really different from that of Peninsular poets of the period (43). He posits that early colonial writers, like Terrazas and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, pursued difference but with a tendency to be assimilationist to a Eurocentric tradition (124, 125). Even Juan del Valle Caviedes’ *Diente del Parnaso* which Promis de Ojeda describes as “[a rewriting of] Segismundo’s monologue from Calderón’s *La vida es sueño*” that transforms the work so that it acquires a Spanish American identity (127, 128), adheres closely to the European form in the use of classical and pastoral imagery, and the courtly love tradition. Adherence to the European norm is also seen in Valle Caviedes’ love poem “A una dama en un baño.” This classical sonnet exalts the loved one’s beauty in hyperbolic language, with classical allusions very imitative of earlier Spanish poets of the Renaissance like Garcilaso de la Vega. However, with regard to his

satirical work Raquel Chang-Rodríguez and Malva Filer argue that it did not circulate widely and remained in manuscript form, probably because of the writer's critical focus and his use of popular language (70). The view that those who wielded power at the time did not value work that openly criticized society and that was not expressed in a cultured register, is supported by historians Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson who state:

Colonialism subordinated the indigenous and later creole cultures to European cultural hegemony. Undergirded by Catholicism, cultural colonialism proved to be more durable and resistant to American efforts to establish an independent cultural identity than did the more visible politics and economic structures it helped sustain. (232)

Though not denying the durability of colonial structures and institutions, Steve Stern records a greater fluidity among peoples and institutions than the above quote suggests. According to Stern, during the period he designates as “the first post-Conquest era (c. 1540s to c. 1750s)” the hegemony of the colonial structure and its institutions was destabilized by subalterns and their apparatuses (53). This resulted in “reverse colonization” as the legal system, political alliances, religious practices, and commercial undertakings were among the avenues the colonized subjects appropriated and redeployed to their own benefit (53). There was also “massive social leakage” as people, commodities, identities and social worlds leaked “out of the social arrangements (...) set by the formal parameters of colonial status, right and duty” (54).

An example of this is seen in the written and visual texts of Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala. In his *El primer nueva corónica [sic] y buen gobierno* (a twelve-hundred page letter to the Spanish monarch King Felipe III), this indigenous Peruvian sought to revise the hegemonic accounts of the conquest of Peru and propose a return to indigenous self-governance. He makes the call for self-governance in the light of injustices and bad

governance by the Crown's representatives in the colonies. Though his texts have been criticized for their inaccuracies and the documentation of fictional accounts as historical fact, Rolena Adorno defends Guaman Poma's approach, linking it to the relationship between historiography of the epoch and "the poetic and rhetorical arts" (14). His accounts, she points out, are a combination of oral traditions and European historiographic sources (16), but rather than simply copying from the latter source he "manipulates them according to his own purposes (24). This alternative account of the conquest and challenge to the established order certainly presents these issues from the perspective of the Other. The fact that Guaman Poma's work was not published by King Felipe III as was the desire of the writer, and it was not until the twentieth century that it came to light, is evidence of ways in which the colonial mechanism suppressed discourses that were counter-hegemonic. This bears out Stern's conclusion that despite the leakages and fluidity in these colonial encounters the colonial state still maintained its control (63).

With the advent of independence to the majority of the Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas during the first half of the nineteenth century, these new Republics attempted on the one hand to unify in order to counter U.S expansionism and to seek closer cultural ties with France, and on the other, to project images of nationhood in which they saw themselves as individual states. In *The Idea of Latin America*, Walter Mignolo points out that this conceptualization was the work of Europeans and Creoles of European descent (57, 58). Even after gaining their independence from Spain, the new Republics, in their desire to show their worth looked mainly to France as their cultural and intellectual mentor. It is evident that in a similar fashion to those who conceived of

the region as a united “Latin” America, the nations the Creole elite intended to shape did not include those of Indian and African descent who found themselves at the base of society’s ladder. As Mignolo points out in *The Idea of Latin America*, “[t]o conceive of themselves as a “Latin” race (...), Creoles in “Latin” America had to rearticulate the colonial difference in a new format: to become the internal colonizers vis-à-vis the Indians and Blacks while living an illusion of independence from the logic of coloniality” (86). He states further that “Latinidad” helped to promote a cultural and historical identity that was supposedly inclusive. The reality though, was that the effect of totality this produced, served to silence and render invisible Blacks and Indians (89). Indeed what this makes clear is the neocolonialism that independence produced for minority groups within these nations. The creole elites who were disenfranchised under the colonial social and administrative structures assumed power and in many ways reproduced the hierarchal social structure with Blacks, *Zambos* and Indians relegated to the lowest rung of the ladder, while White *Criollos* and *Mestizos* maintained their places in the higher echelons of the social structure.

The works of key thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century like José Enrique Rodó (*Ariel* 1902) and José Martí (*Nuestra América* 1891) present different versions of this call for a unified “Latin” race of Americans to stand up to the US and its imperialistic expansionism. This “Latin” race conceived by Rodó does not include indigenous people and people of African descent. Describing *Ariel* as “a model for Latin America (and therefore Uruguay),” Gustavo Verdesio comments on the indigenous and Afro-descendant absence in the following way: “[r]eading Rodó’s book one would think all Latin American countries had solved the ‘problema del indio’ or that such a problem

never existed” (204). Martí, by contrast, underscores the presence and importance of the indigenous peoples and rejects racism. One sees therefore two contrasting ways in which the concept of a united “America” was presented by thinkers of the time.

With regard to projects of nationhood in individual states, Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* comes to mind. According to Anderson, the Creoles carved out their imagined nations through (i) uniting as a community against the Spaniards who excluded them from their control of the colonies; and (ii) their written production (newspapers etc.) (58, 65). Works written in the post-independence era in Latin America reflect the important role of language via the spoken and printed word, and the role played by the intelligentsia in projecting an image of the nation that was to be copied thereby excluding certain groups or relegating them to positions of marginality (Anderson 67, 72, 81).

Facundo (1851) by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento is a good example of a work that promotes a project of nationhood. Sarmiento’s main objective is to highlight the suitability of those he considers civilized (members of the Unitarian political party and non-Spanish Europeans) to govern and to aid the new nations in their pursuit of modernity. He cites the United States as a model to be followed with respect to European immigration. Members of the Federalist political party and the minority groups that occupy the nation’s interior (Gauchos, Indians and Blacks) are cast in the role of barbarians. From his viewpoint, they impede progress toward modernity, which justifies their extermination. The circulation of such ideas contributed in no small way to the perpetuation of ideologies that devalued minority groups within society.

Others like José Martí sought to resolve the race issue differently. In *Mi raza* (1893),³⁴ Martí criticizes Spanish colonialist policies for the atrocities committed against minority races. Alejandro de la Fuente argues that the reason Martí and other Creole pro-independence thinkers put forward the ideology of racial fraternity was to attract Blacks to their side as they recognized that they could not win the fight for independence without the Blacks fighting alongside them (*Cuba's Racial Democracy*, 49, 50). He claims that Martí's image of a Cuba free of racial distinctions where all races coexisted and "participated equally in the republic" was crucial to the projection of an ideology of racial democracy that survives to the present (50, 51). Dionisio Poey Baró by contrast, does not attribute an ulterior motive to Martí's treatment of race. In his article he shows that Martí's views on racial equality were sustained in a number of his works (55).³⁵ Poey Baró highlights Martí's vision of racial equality and fraternity based on the "shared spiritual identity" of all humans (55). This point is borne out in Martí's words: "[e]l hombre no tiene ningún derecho especial porque pertenezca a una raza u otra: dígame hombre, y ya se dicen todos los derechos" ("Mi Raza", 117). Poey Baró posits that Martí wrote the piece "not only to demystify the ideas of inferior and superior 'races' but the very concept of 'race'" (57). Considering the positivist discourses on biological determinism in circulation during the time period in which Martí wrote, his views provide a forceful contestation. For instance, he says: "la injusticia de este mundo es mucha, y la ignorancia que pasa por sabiduría y aún hay quien crea de buena fe al negro incapaz de la

³⁴ Cuba was among the last Spanish colonies in the Americas to gain its independence doing so in 1898. Martí wrote in the pre-independence period.

³⁵ In addition to alluding to works he wrote before "Mi raza," Poey Baró cites Martí's views on race as expressed in his personal notes "Para las escenas," and his letter to Manuel Mercado published posthumously.

inteligencia y corazón del blanco” (117). In a period when national unity could only mean victory against forces opposed to independence, Martí’s discourse was indeed timely. Nevertheless as Ada Ferrer documents in *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation and, Revolution, 1868-1898*, several independence leaders found Martí’s antiracism useful in recruiting Blacks at the same time as subordinating them.

Mexico’s nationalist project, one that favored *mestizaje*,³⁶ has had various manifestations and promoters. In *The Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: the Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America*, Marilyn Miller refers to late nineteenth century and early twentieth century thinkers like Vicente Riva Palacio, Justo Sierra, Andrés Molina Enríquez, Manuel Gamio, and José Vasconcelos,³⁷ all of whom proposed or supported the concept of *mestizaje* in one way or another. In *La raza cósmica* (1925), for example, Vasconcelos proposes a theory of a cosmic race. This race he saw as ideal for the then new Latin American Republics, allowing them to achieve great success and development. This cosmic race was to comprise a mixture of the best features of all the races (red, black, yellow and white) that inhabit the region and that had, according to him, at one time or another in history enjoyed a period of dominance. Of course, what Vasconcelos was proposing was *mestizaje*. Like Miller, Alexandra Minna Stern reveals that the project of *mestizaje* as proposed by Vasconcelos and others was really just another way of promoting the superiority of whiteness or hispanism, thus further marginalizing Indians

³⁶The various ways in which the concept of *mestizaje* has been, and continues to be treated by Latin American thinkers are discussed by Peter Wade in “Rethinking *mestizaje*: Ideology and Lived Experience” (2005); Florencia Mallon “Constructing *Mestizaje* in Latin America: Authenticity, Marginality, and Gender in the Claiming of Ethnic Identities” (1996), and Marilyn Miller *The Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: the Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America* (2004).

³⁷ Miller’s references to those who put forward theories proposing or supporting *mestizaje* before Vasconcelos are taken from the work of Agustín Basave Benítez, *México mestizo: análisis del nacionalismo mexicano en turno a la mestizofilia de Andrés Molina Enríquez* (1992).

and Afro-descendants from Latin American societies (191-193).³⁸ Along with policies of whitening (*blanqueamiento*), *mestizaje* was successful in erasing differences and blurring the uniqueness of certain ethnic and cultural realities for a period of time in many Latin American nations. It is important to note though that in the last twenty-five years or so discourses regarding race have moved away from *mestizaje* in some Latin American nations. Particularly since the 1970s and 1980s, Afro-descendants in Brazil have formed a number of organizations aimed at promoting their culture, and advancing economically and politically. In other Latin American nations like Colombia, Panamá, Costa Rica, Perú, Ecuador, and Uruguay, organizations were formed, and conferences and lectures were held aimed at promoting Afro-descendant culture and improving the social situation of this segment of the population (*Afro-Latin America* 184-186). The year 2000 saw the establishment of the Afro-Venezuela Network (Red Afro-Venezolana) a body made up of more than 30 community-based Afro-descendant organizations (García par. 1). In similar fashion indigenous groups in various Latin American nations are succeeding in destroying myths of a single racial, ethnic or cultural identity in the region (Mignolo, *The Idea* 45, 145, 158).³⁹

Another attempt at creating a new cultural identity was *modernismo*. Even though it claimed to be a movement toward literary independence, this reaction against the materialist concerns of modernity with its major trends focusing on beauty, sound and rhythm, historical themes and the valorization of past epochs, for the most part incorporated tendencies borrowed from French parnassianism and symbolism. There still

³⁸ See Miller *The Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race* (40).

³⁹ Mignolo discusses the growth of social movements among indigenous and afro-descendant populations in different areas of Latin America. These contest the previously propagated views of cultural and ethnic homogeneity.

was therefore, a focus on values that were Eurocentric in nature. For example, in his poem “A Roosevelt” Rubén Darío sounds a warning similar to that of Rodó and Martí as regards North American expansionist tendencies toward Spanish America and the North’s materialistic outlook. He evokes Spanish America’s hybrid identity by linking aspects of the region’s indigenous past with the European element particularly in the final stanza. The poetic voice describes Spanish America as “la América del grande Moctezuma, del Inca,/la fragante América de Cristóbal Colón.” The poetic voice warns the U.S (“hombres de ojos sajones y alma bárbara”) that this other America (“que tiembla de huracanes y que vive de amor”) should not be taken lightly (“Hay mil cachorros sueltos del León Español. Se necesitaría, Roosevelt, ser, por Dios mismo,/el Riflero terrible y el fuerte Cazador,/para poder tenernos en vuestras férreas garras.”). It is to be noted that Darío’s America is *mestizo*. The indigenous element is a wonderful past to be evoked as needed while the Afro-descendant element is for the most part absent.⁴⁰

During the first two to four decades of the twentieth century Spanish America’s vanguardist movement developed. The quest of avant-garde writers was independence, and renewal in form and content with respect to the literature that came before. Writers like Vicente Huidobro and César Vallejo broke free from the past with creationism and surrealism as their respective trademarks. In similar fashion many *negrista* writers experimented with the language in their attempts to capture rhythms peculiar to African cultures. Artistic primitivism, in vogue in Europe in the post-World-War 1 era, was the “initial stimulus for ‘black’ literature in the Antilles” (Mullen 442). Generally speaking, *negrista* writers did not engage in any profound treatment of social issues. The evolution

⁴⁰ The Black modernist poet Gaspar Octavio Hernández (Panamá) did not treat black themes in his verse. Rubén Darío’s poem “La negra Dominga” is a stereotypically sensual portrayal of the Black woman. This is how the Afro-descendant female subject was often portrayed in later *negrista* poetry.

in Afro-descendant writing to include social and political concerns corresponds to a similar move by non-*negrista* avant-garde writers like Serafín Delmar and Magda Portal who explored themes of a social and political nature at a level of greater profundity than in previous movements. Although as Mihai G. Grünfeld asserts *negrismo* evolved to a state of more social and political consciousness (45, 47, 49), this new movement was no longer *negrismo* but rather a manifestation of negritude.

Marvin Lewis explains that unlike Francophone countries in Africa and the Caribbean, no organized negritude movement existed in Latin America. Nevertheless, “most Afro-Hispanic authors adhere to the basic tenets of *negritud* in regard to their culture and identity” (*Afro-Hispanic Poetry* 3). Lewis goes on to outline the basic tenets of negritude: (i) a reaffirmation of Black culture and a rejection of those White values that promote discrimination, economic exploitation and racial superiority; (ii) expressions of discontent with the excessive materialism of a technological society; (iii) calls for an “introspective reassessment” in order to bring about a return to “the basic values of life” (*Afro-Hispanic Poetry* 3). Negritude writers therefore sought to present the Afro-descendant subject and his/her situation in a more realistic manner. This is why one observes a change in the Cuban, Nicolás Guillén’s poetry from poems like “Canto negro” that are filled with *jitanjáforas*,⁴¹ and stereotypical images of the Black persona to poems like “Pequeña oda a un boxeador cubano” and “West Indies Ltd.” that raise serious issues regarding U.S imperialism and exploitation.

Literature that has broadly been classified as post-vanguardist generally falls into four (4) categories: (i) the metaphysical, (ii) the social, (iii) the personal, and (iv) the

⁴¹ The term *Jitanjáfora* refers to words (real or invented) and or nonsense syllables used in literary works (mostly poetry) used to create a particular mood, sound effect or rhythm rather than too convey meaning.

writerly. Technically-speaking, this movement extends to the present. Post-vanguard poets explored a variety of styles and themes. In narrative the Boom and Post-boom developed during this period and was characterized by its diversity of styles and tendencies in writing, ranging from works that continue the various vanguardist trends to those that reject all political and social engagement as well as modes of expression rooted in the vanguard mode. Indeed, contemporary literature is characterized by its great diversity of genres and tendencies. Nevertheless, despite this diversity, not all forms of literary expression receive the same critical attention given that some are deemed of greater literary worth than others. In fact, the late Uruguayan scholar Ángel Rama in discussing the concept of a Latin American literary discourse posits as its three main features: (i) a joint “Romance” cultural heritage; (ii) the appropriation of and influence from other foreign cultures, be they Romance or not; (iii) the social stratification that has continued in the continent from the colonial era to the present that has also been used to stratify cultural manifestations (120). In an article originally published in 1974, Rama repeatedly refers to the “folklore” of Indians and Afro-descendants, linking these to oral traditions. The article points to the possibility of viewing these works differently. Rama sees that it is possible for Latin American *literati* to adjust their concept of literary structure with a view toward opening up dialogue with the oral tradition either directly or through intermediaries (121-122). This call for dialogue has gained momentum in some areas in more recent times. As a result there has been much discussion regarding multiculturalism, canon expansion, and plural canons in Latin America.

2.3. CANONS AND MULTICULTURALISM IN LATIN AMERICA

Afro-descendant writing in Spanish America has received much attention by the North American academy thus rendering it visible in this part of the world.⁴² As discussed in chapter 1, this scholarship is due in no small part to the way the North American academy has evolved over the last three decades. This is not to say, however, that Hispanic academics have not been engaged in discussions regarding the canon and the issue of multiculturalism. It would appear that even before Bloom's work was published Latin America academics had been giving critical attention to the issue of canonicity. Two 1991 essays by Walter Mignolo address this issue. Granted, Mignolo writes from a position outside of Latin American. Nevertheless, his views regarding canonicity in Latin America also form a basis for discussions among some of the region's academics. In "Entre el canon y el corpus," Mignolo establishes a distinction between these two concepts. He equates the canon with hegemony and feels it should be conceived in terms of symbolic power structures (25). The corpus on the other hand, even though it relates to the same power structures, also embodies opposition and resistance to these structures (25). For Mignolo, the corpus relates more to the field of literary studies (25). The corpus then is a much larger, heterogeneous body of works than the canon.

In the article "Canons A(nd) Cross-Cultural Boundaries (Or, Whose Canon We Talking About?)" (1991), Mignolo addresses the matter of a cross-cultural consideration of the canon. He distinguishes between the vocational and the epistemic canons and shows how these overlap. He describes the vocational canon as relating to text-selection

⁴² Journals like *Afro-Hispanic Review* and *PALARA* are among those that have been at the fore-front of these efforts. Antonio Tillis' article "Afro-Hispanic Literature in the US: Remembering the Past, Celebrating the Present, and Forging a Future" *IPOTESI, Juis de Fora* 12.1 (Jan/Jul 2008): 21-29 gives a chronological overview of the development of Afro-Hispanic Studies in the U.S academy.

in the college curriculum. The epistemic canon on the other hand, is related to the work of the literary researcher who describes issues related to canon formation, canon transformation, canonical inclusion and exclusion and similar matters (6). Mignolo posits a discussion of canons “across cultural boundaries” because canons are relative to their communities (6). This proposition is important to the concept of publics and counterpublics insofar as individuals could be inscribed in different discourses at any one time. For instance, an indigenous citizen who lives in an urban space could participate, together with other urban dwellers of different racial groups, in discourses regarding overcrowding, and industrial pollution. These same citizens could also be participants in discourses regarding the impact of deforestation on traditional rural life. Even though urban participants in the latter discourse may not have first-hand experience of the impact of such exploitative practices, their empathy and advocacy joins them together with rural dwellers, possibly of different ethnicities and social classes, in this particular canon/counterpublic.

Mignolo’s recommendation is that given the pluralistic nature of Latin American societies and the heterogeneity of their literary communities there should be different canons for different “communities of believers.” They are different and refer to different values. Mignolo sees this as necessary given the relative nature of value (11). This, he says, has implications for teaching, for if this is done with a cross-cultural focus it will prevent one from teaching the regional literary canons as though they were hegemonic. I concur with Mignolo that as teachers and critics of minor literature our position should not be to prove that minor works are “as good as” or the same as those in the hegemonic canon (4, 6). His call for different canons for different communities of believers brings

into focus the issue regarding plural canons. Though it may appear that Mignolo's view that texts that are canonical to a particular community and are recognized and admired from the point of view of that community (17), goes against the principles of interculturality or what Palumbo-Liu's calls "critical multiculturalism," this is not really the case. Mignolo's call for a cross-cultural focus to canons entails that "communities of believers" do not necessarily have to be defined by their race, ethnicity, national origin, social class, political or religious affiliations.

An example of how regardless of differing aesthetics a community of believers could be extended beyond limited racial or ethnic lines is seen when one considers Shirley Campbell Barr's poem "Rotundamente negra." Those unfamiliar with an Afro-descendant aesthetic may find it overly simple and straight forward and argue against its literary worth. The poem's value, however, is not lost on those who subscribe to its discourse. One such example is retired Afro-Costa Rican professor of literature Franklin Perry who describes his impressions of the poem in this way:

El poema desde el punto de vista de la estética Occidental me parece sencilla y sin complicaciones. Tal vez haya que usar otros cánones como el de la estética negra o el del afrocentrismo para acercarse a este poema que es una obra maestra en este sentido. La fuerza y el ritmo son sublimes, el mensaje es directo, crudo, sin tapujos. No se necesita descifrar nada. El grito reivindicativo y denunciante de la voz poética es clarísimo. La repetición de los sonidos nasales [m] y [n] combinados con los de la [d] y [t] y las reiteraciones de las "Y" más el uso del encabalgamiento elevan al poema a nivel de discurso u homilía en términos de eufonía. Y la palabra "rotundamente" sorprende porque no es de uso frecuente en el español de Costa Rica y mucho menos en poesía.⁴³

Perry's point regarding the incompatibility of this poem with the Western aesthetic begs the question of whether or not such a work could only be valued by what some may term an Afro-descendant "community of believers." A poem that develops issues regarding

⁴³E-mail correspondence.

identity and self-worth and a revised standard of physical beauty is one that could hold meaning beyond such a limited audience. The promotion of works with a different aesthetic than the dominant is one step toward initiating dialogue among canons. The criteria I propose for reading works of Afro-descendant writers in chapter 3 are aimed at showing that even if one may not subscribe to a particular discourse, one could appreciate the value it holds for those with whom it resonates. Readers will understand too, that there is scope for dialogue and debate as they become aware of those criteria that either resonate with or diverge from those to which they themselves subscribe. An example of discourses in common would be historical revisionism. Though memories of exploitation as a result of enslavement occur quite often in Afro-descendant discourse, similar experiences of exploitation could also be present in the works of indigenous or for that matter in the work of anyone who participates either actively or passively in those particular discourses. Acceptance of the plurality of discourses within the society and inter-group communication is what will lead to an appreciation of the variety of value systems within the society. It is worth reiterating that acceptance here means more than tolerance. The mutual benefit that results when cultures dialogue with one another speaks directly to the notion of interculturality as discussed earlier.

The publication *Dominios de la literatura acerca del canon* (1998) serves as a good starting point for an examination of the canon discussions within the Spanish and Spanish American academies. This work comprises a compilation of articles, some written before Bloom's book, that engage in the polemic over the canon and place it directly within the realm of Latin America. In the essay that introduces the collection, Susana Cella makes a point that resonates with my own view regarding the issue of plural

canons and the recognition of different criteria for valuing works. She states: “[I]a coexistencia de varios cánones sería entonces consecuencia de las pautas elegidas para los dictámenes sobre las obras” (14). This view highlights the fact that there are no “universal” norms for evaluating literary works. Canons will coexist when there is recognition of the different systems of value that exist among readers. The question of the contrast between canons and traditions is treated by Cella in the article that concludes the collection. For Cella, given that the number of canonical writers in Argentina is quite small (she mentions five names), one should refer more to traditions. She posits that a distinction should be made between the canon as a necessary instrument to make manageable the study of literature and writers who write within certain literary traditions (142, 143). As such, certain writers like Borges find themselves at the center of a particular literary tradition. Contemporary writers who follow Borges’ tradition give their interpretations of that tradition. Cella is quick to point out that traditions are not static because of the actions of those who are engaged in the task of their interpretation (143). The canon/tradition distinction put forward here resembles the one between the canons and corpuses put forward by Mignolo. This, however, is not the only dichotomy under discussion in the debate.

Along with Cella, other contributors to the collection like Noé Jitrik and Nicolás Rosa address the canonicity versus marginality dichotomy showing how the invocation of one, naturally brings the other into the picture. Jitrik, for example, discusses the politics inherent in both canonization and some forms of marginality. Canonical works could be seen as “official art,” that which is sanctioned by those who wield power. Certain marginalizing projects, he states, may come about because those concerned make a

conscious decision to position themselves in opposition to official discourses (23). This observation brings to mind the revisionist project of some Afro-descendant writers. Their subversion of official discourse lies in their presentation of a revised view of Afro-descendant subjects and their experiences. One such example is Nancy Morejón's poem "Mujer negra." Morejón's enslaved persona is not a weak, demoralized woman cowering in fear at the prospect of the master's physical or sexual abuse. Neither is she the sensual, sexualized object of male desire. She survives abuse, escapes to live among other maroons in the "*palenque*" and records her presence among those who fight for Cuba's independence from Spain, and more recently, with the revolutionary forces that helped create Cuba's socialist state. The revisionist project of this poem places the Afro-descendant woman in a central position of strength, allowing her to tell her own story and not to have it told from the perspective of the oppressor.⁴⁴ Cristina Rodríguez-Cabral too, in her poem "Cimarrones," rejects the minority classification placed on non-White peoples with all its inherent negative stereotypes.⁴⁵ The conscious decision to counter the hegemonic discourse has been the path taken by many Afro-descendant writers whose works are not sanctioned by the value-endowing and canon-creating institutions of their nations.

Returning to Jitrik's article, one notes that it also highlights the roles of various mediators in canonization. The critic cites the various shifts that have taken place with regard to canonizing agents and institutions since the nineteenth century. Whereas during that period the canonical was determined by cultured society, the critical discourse of the

⁴⁴ See Miriam DeCosta Willis *Afro-Hispanic Review* 22.1 (Spring 2003):3-12, and Claudette Rose-Green Williams *Afro-Hispanic Review* 8 (September 1989): 7-13.

⁴⁵ See: "Cimarrones," *Memoria y resistencia* (2004): 75-76.

academy has been a major canonizing force during the twentieth century. Jitrik does not negate the continued influence of the academy, but claims that editors, agents and sellers have played an increasingly important role in recent times in canonization of works because all these agencies “establecen y vigilan valores normativos” (30). Jitrik gives the example of the novels of the “boom” as a form of writing that started out as being counter-canonical and moved into such a position of centrality that their style was mimicked (31). Jitrik’s example of the “new” Latin American narrative that resulted in the “boom” causes one to pause and reflect on the mutable nature of canons and on the various legitimizing agencies within society.

The mutability of canons and the importance of not viewing them as conservationist agents are issues discussed by Ricardo Piglia. He points to the speed with which the canon changes given the demands of the curriculum to bring new writers and themes in literary history to students. He concludes that instead of conserving the canon, the exigencies of the academic curriculum modify it and generate the illusion of a radicalized and renovated critical position (157). Piglia feels that the discussion on the canon ought to be taken outside the closed realm of academia. He expresses the view that the redefinition and restructuring of the literary tradition once again become the task of the writers and their works, and what he terms, the invisible literary experience (157). The academy’s role in canon formation and maintenance is reiterated in the article by Adolfo Prieto, which is drawn from a set of notes from a post-graduate seminar on the canon and Latin American literature offered at the Universidad Nacional de Rosario in

Argentina. It reveals that the listing of canonical texts was compiled based on information from dissertations, essays, articles, and reference works all from within the academy (110).

Despite the credit the above-mentioned articles give to the academy's role in canon formation, some works that are taught in universities and receive critical attention still do not form part of the hegemonic canon. Susana Zanetti points out that in Latin America the canon debates are not confined to the academy. As she states;

En los distintos centros de América Latina, con distinta intensidad por cierto, la actividad académica, desarrollada en el interior de muy diversas instituciones, - Academia de letras, asociaciones de escritores, universidades, etc.-, se cruza de manera viva con los demás sujetos que integran un determinado campo intelectual, en el que están presentes tanto los jóvenes escritores, como los ya legitimados, los representantes de otras artes, así como editores, críticos, de los distintos medios, etc., y es allí donde la cuestión del canon se constituye en un punto de lucha... (103)

Zanetti's comment brings to mind the discussions over culture that took place in Uruguay in the early 1990s and materialized in the form of a publication entitled: *Cultura(s) y nación en el Uruguay fin de siglo*. As the editor, Hugo Achugar, states in the introduction: "la o las culturas las hacen o producen no solo los creadores sino también quienes las promueven, las evalúan, las estudian, las financian, las reglamentan o posibilitan" (8). He raises the issue of the fragmentation of contemporary society as a contestation of discourses of homogeneity (9). A perusal of the presentations and debate indicates clearly that those involved represented various sectors of the society (academics, writers, and other culture workers) and addressed issues that not only related to literature but to the concept of culture in a much more ample framework.

Returning to the discussion in *Dominios del canon*, Rosa states in the article “Liturgias y profanaciones” that many Latin American writers like Alfonsina Storni, Alejandra Pizarnik, Juan L. Ortiz, Ricardo Molinari and others do not belong to any canon (73). He attempts to account for these exclusions by proposing that poetry as a genre has more to do with violating rules than with sticking to them (73). Rosa’s arguments are based on his contention that the formulae by which canonical status is achieved or granted is extremely narrow. With this in mind, he describes the Argentine canon as a “panteón,” one that has as its foundation blocks and main pillars writers like Borges and Bioy Casares (76). Rosa discusses the varied nature of the national literature in Argentina with influences from the nation’s history, politics and linguistic traditions and concludes that, with respect to Argentine literature, one cannot talk about a hegemonic canon defined by fixed/narrow aesthetic considerations (82, 83). He therefore describes the literature and the concept of the canon in his country and in the region as a whole as sick (82).

Rosa’s article brings to the fore some of the issues that are pertinent to my study. For one, there is no one single history or experience or aesthetic that can be described in national or regional terms in Latin America or anywhere else for that matter. Rosa’s mention of writers like Alejandra Pizarnik and Alfonsina Storni, along with gauchesque literature and writing that treats the “marginados y desclasados” among others (82), in addition to highlighting the variety of genres, themes, and issues treated within Argentine letters, makes evident why the concept of counterpublics is one that could work well within the Latin American literary landscape. For instance, themes like the rejection of male dominance and the affirmation of female liberation are present in Storni’s poetry.

Therefore when placed alongside the works of other Latin American feminist writers like Victoria Ocampo, Storni's work is not out-of-place. One could therefore talk about a canon of upper/upper-middle class feminist writers within Latin America. Though Rosario Castellanos could belong to this canon her treatment of issues dealing with the plight of indigenous groups in Mexico could cause some of her feminist writings to intersect more with those of writers like Moravia Ochoa López. Of course, as pointed out in chapter 1, a variety of criteria goes into defining a public/canon. So a canon of feminist writers with its various counter-canons/counterpublics would be among those operating in any given nation or region.

Debates surrounding the canon in Spanish America in more recent times could be found in the pages of the journal *Signa: Revista de la Asociación Española de Semiótica*. This journal has dedicated an entire issue to discussions over the canon. In her introduction to the articles Rosa María Aradra Sánchez points to post-colonialism, writing on gender, minority literatures and the impact of technology on literature as factors that have greatly influenced the canon debates in the region (14). She emphasizes that the canon is no longer being viewed as a singular concept but there is now talk of plural canons (15). An examination of articles that present varying views on the issue brings to the fore the conflicts that exist within the Hispanic world regarding the issue of canonicity.

Even though José María Pozuelos Yvancos begins by presenting a unified picture of Hispanic letters, he concludes with the idea of plurality. Regarding literary unity he credits the existence and maintenance of a canon of Hispanic literature to factors like: (i) the acceptance of Cervantes' *Don Quijote* as a masterpiece by persons on both sides of

the Atlantic; (ii) the creation of the Instituto Cervantes and its programs that serve to promote the literary unification of Hispanic countries; (iii) the strong literary influences shared by the peninsular and Spanish American literary traditions; (iv) the multiple literary interchanges that have taken place and continue to take place between the two regions; (v) the promotion of “hispanismo” by the International Association of Hispanists; (vi) the activity of major publishing houses on both sides of the Atlantic like Seix Barral in Spain and Fondo de Cultura Económica, Losada, y Sudamericana in Latin America in publishing works of Spanish and Latin American writers (90, 91).⁴⁶ As is evident from the points listed above, Yvancos presents “hispanismo” as a key factor in the unification of a Hispanic literary canon, controlling what is produced, taught and read (91, 93). He cites universality, that is, a set of values that are recognizable to others as a characteristic that promotes canonicity (95). According to Yvancos, what makes these works universal is the fact that they can be read, commented on, recognized as one’s own by inhabitants of other communities (95). He goes on to describe the Hispanism of which he speaks as plural and global in scale since works of these canonical writers are taken to other societies, other linguistic groups, and other parts of the world (95). It is worth highlighting that even though Yvancos cites linguistic and cultural unity as the driving forces behind the maintenance of the Hispanic canon, he does recognize that this unified body is not a place for the erasure of differences but one where they are recognized, understood, exchanged and discussed using methods of interpretation that are heterogeneous (96). He concludes with the idea of a plural Hispanism: “[u]n hispanismo plural, por tanto, crítico y consciente de su responsabilidad histórica: la de llevar la

⁴⁶ Juan E. De Castro (2008) sees “hispanism” as promoted by Peninsular institutions as a way of presenting Spain as the mediator in cultural and economic discourses between Spanish America and Europe and North America.

literatura escrita más allá de sí misma” (96). It is worth emphasizing that the plurality to which Yvancos refers is not limited to the literary exchanges between Hispanic countries on both sides of the Atlantic. He is also referring to ways in which these exchanges have extended to embrace global audiences. Although he does not list indigenous or Afro-descendant works in the lists of works he provides, I think the idea of pluralism he proposes does correspond in some way to the arguments that form the basis of this study as (i) it is through the work of mediators (publishers, critics etc.) that works have reached global audiences, and (ii) a canon results when the discourses these works treat resonate with audiences outside their linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Genara Pulido Tirado’s article “El canon literario en América Latina” is really an analysis of some of the key debates on canons in Latin America (Mignolo, Cella, Zanetti, Sánchez- Prado). An observation she makes towards the beginning of the article that relates directly to this study is that though it is important to recognize the ways in which a Eurocentric cultural capital was violently imposed in Latin America, one must also remember that even within the sub-continent itself marginalizations were produced. This critic cites as an example of literary marginalization what she terms the abandonment and late recognition of Central American literature. Pulido does not explain the nature of this neglect or the precise time period to which she is referring. Her study focuses though, on showing that marginal, subaltern groups and their worldviews find themselves outside the purview of the canon-endowing institutions of the region (111). Though this may be true in many instances, it is important to point out (and this point will be developed later in the chapter) that at least in the Costa Rican academy attempts are being made to

acknowledge the existence of aesthetics and hermeneutics that are different to the hegemonic and so address the plurality of cultures in the society.

That there needs to be a “real” Latin American canon is discussed by Juan Manuel Silva.⁴⁷ For him a real canon would respect and dignify difference, the unknown and the other (n. pag). Like other critics who have discussed this issue,⁴⁸ while not negating the influences of mediators like the State, publishing houses, and those in power, Silva also cites anthologies, pedagogy and history as principal canonizing factors (n. pag). Much of what Silva discusses resonates with the arguments I raise throughout this study with regard to plural canons and the acceptance and valorization of different aesthetics. For instance, Silva proposes reading peripheral works in relation to other works that belong to the same tradition. This calls to mind what Mignolo classifies as a “community of believers”.⁴⁹ Silva calls the canon fragmented when it entertains these multiple discourses. He sees such a move as a promise of dignified dialogue:

entre tono alto y bajo, entre centro y periferia, haciéndole justicia a las diferentes disciplinas de análisis, a los diferentes subconjuntos de discursos, a las diferentes modalidades de enseñanza, a los diferentes modelos (no de imitación, sino de diálogo, de interfertilización e interdiscursividad), a las diferentes comunidades, a las diferentes tradiciones, a las diferentes identidades en búsqueda aún. (6)

He concludes by pointing out that in Latin America the concept of canon is plural because multiple canons do exist. He states also that where competition exists it is not for a place of centrality but for dignity and justice for oral and written discourses (13). Even

⁴⁷ “El crepúsculo del canon : La (de)formación del canon latinoamericano,” *Cyberhumanitas* 36 (Primavera 2005)

⁴⁸ Yvancos, “Razones para un canon hispánico”; Rosas, Zanetti, and Jitrik *Dominios del canon*.

⁴⁹ See Mignolo, Walter “Canons and Cross-cultural Boundaries (or whose canon are we talking about)” (10-14)

though I agree with Silva's arguments and proposals I would like to add to his arguments regarding the recognition of oral traditions, the multiple written voices that are not given a hearing and that are seeking to dialogue with other voices in the national and regional discourses.

Multiculturalism, interculturality and other such discourses have been gaining currency in Latin America in recent years. In their efforts to pursue these pluralist agendas some governments in the region like Colombia, Bolivia, Peru and Brazil have written into their constitutions laws that give official recognition to their racial and ethnic diversity (Arocena and Aguiar 224, 225). A recent Uruguayan publication reveals that the issue has also been discussed in certain forums there.⁵⁰ Contrary to the vision that various Uruguayan administrations have sought to promote,⁵¹ Uruguay is a country that is very plural racially, ethnically and religiously. Despite the fact that Whites make up 86.3% of the population, even among these there are ethnic and religious differences. For instance, people of Russian descent and of the Jewish faith even though they may self-identify as White may have certain cultural differences that are distinct from those of others in the society. For this reason, in the publication *Multiculturalismo en Uruguay* the editors begin by highlighting the differences between a multicultural society and one in which multiculturalism exists. They explain that even though a society may be multicultural, multiculturalism may not exist in that society. For multiculturalism to exist there must be:

(i) the recognition of the identities of those that belong to different cultural communities;

⁵⁰ *Multiculturalismo en Uruguay* (2007)

⁵¹ For instance, as mentioned in the introduction to this study, in the early twentieth century the Batlle y Ordoñez administration promoted a project of nationalism that sought to erase differences and foster cultural assimilation through the concept of "uruguayidad."

and (ii) the existence within that society of specific policies that guarantee each group the right to live in tune with its own identity (15). In the essay that concludes the publication, Felipe Arocena puts forward five reasons why there should be support for cultural diversity in Uruguay:

- International organizations and minority groups have highlighted the need for this change which carries with it an ethical commitment
- Intercultural relations will intensify in the near future and these are becoming the norm in the world⁵²
- Multiculturalism is a demand of minority communities and it must therefore be supported
- Uruguay's cultural diversity ought to be seen as an important aspect of its cultural capital
- It is urgent that Uruguay perceives of itself in a different way than has been the norm in order to bring itself into the present and to face the future (224-226).

The various historical presentations and interviews with representatives of different ethnic groups within the society (Jews, Lebanese, Afro-descendants, Charrua Indians, among others) that form a part of this publication, present the multicultural nature of the society. The reader is also made aware of areas where multiculturalism is achieving some success within the country and others where progress still needs to be made. The editors cite Law 17.817 that was approved by the Uruguayan parliament in 2004 that targets racism, xenophobia and discrimination and the establishment of an

⁵² Interculturality and its relation to 'critical multiculturalism' is discussed in Chapter 1. The editors obviously feel that the growth of interculturality in the region and world as a whole is important to their argument for an active recognition of cultural diversity in Uruguay. They cite the examples of other Latin American nations that have given official recognition to cultural diversity through constitutional reform (15).

honorary commission against these and other forms of discrimination (225). With specific regard to Afro-descendants both Oscar Montañó and Javier Díaz point out that some of the gains made in recent times with regard to programs and policies to benefit this group came about because of pressure brought to bear on the political administration by international bodies like the United Nations and the World Bank, and the advocacy of Afro-descendant groups like “Mundo Afro” (37, 38,114). Despite small gains like the designation of December 3rd beginning in 2006, as “Día Nacional de Candombe”, the designation of 2007 as the year of Black culture in the country and the recognition granted to Marta Gularte and Rosa Luna, two Afro-descendant *vedettes* of the Uruguayan carnival, on the “Día de Patrimonio” in 2007, and the appointment of Romero Rodríguez the Director of “Mundo Afro” to the post of presidential advisor on Afro-descendant affairs, there still remains much more to be done (Montañó 37). For instance, Díaz points out that music is the main aspect of their culture through which Afro-descendants are identified in the country. He laments the invisibility of the writers and visual artists of African descent:

[u]na cosa que no está bien difundada son las letras, tenemos poetisas y dramaturgos afrodescendientes, como Emilio Cardozo, Beatriz Santos, y Cristina Rodríguez Cabral. Ellos son los que actualmente están trabajando. Otra de las manifestaciones más valederas, que ha traspasado fronteras al igual que las letras son los artistas plásticos. (112-113)

He also points to the structural discrimination, describing social mobility among Afro-descendants as “estancado” (113).

Whereas Afro-Uruguayans are lamenting the invisibility of their writers, Central American academics are engaged in a project that should make the work of minority writers in that region more visible. The “Centro de Investigación en Identidad y Cultura

Latinoamericanas” of the University of Costa Rica has as a major project the writing of a history of Central American literatures. Participants in the project are: The Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua of the Universidad Centro Americana in Nicaragua, the Cátedra de Lengua y Literatura Hispanoamericanas of the Università del Sacro Cuore of Milan, Italy; and the Instituto de Romanística of the University of Postdam, Germany. In addition to these Institutions, researchers from a variety of other universities in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, France, Belgium, Australia, Canada, and the United States are also involved in this venture. The completed project will comprise a number of volumes that treat all types of literary manifestations in Central America.⁵³ Professor Patricia Fumero explains that the volumes are organized thematically and not by literary genres. For example: there will be one that treats the pre-colonial and the colonial text; another for the formation of nation states/foundational literatures; and so on until the last that will look at literature and globalization.⁵⁴

Commendable as it is, this project is not without controversy. Costa Rican professor Magda Zavala records her dissatisfaction regarding the fact that a separate history is not being written for the literatures of Afro-descendants and other minorities in the region.⁵⁵ Fumero defends the Center’s position regarding its transdisciplinary approach in this way:

La premisa metodológica es que en todos los tomos se incluirán afro-caribeño/as, mujeres, gays, indígenas y demás grupos minorizados. Partimos de que tales categorías son ejes transversales y no se van a tratar en volúmenes específicos

⁵³ Proyecto de Investigación: “Hacia una Historia de las Literaturas Centroamericanas,” *ISTMO. Revista virtual de estudios literarios y culturales centroamericanos* No. 8 enero-junio 2004 <http://collaborations.denison.edu/istmo/n08/proyectos/proyecto.html>

⁵⁴ E-mail correspondence.

⁵⁵ Personal interview.

porque corren el riesgo de invisibilizarse o marginarse. Esto es si existe un tomo específico y a alguien no le gusta o no le interesa no lo obtiene, mientras que si se trabaja transversalmente las problemáticas de los grupos minorizados estarán presentes en todos los tomos.⁵⁶

The efforts of this group of researchers are indeed an important step towards bringing to light the various literary traditions within Central America. It is an important step toward the establishment of plural canons or (subaltern) counterpublics. The completed document will no doubt serve as another means of legitimizing the works of writers from various ethnicities and cultures. It will be a means by which literary interculturality could be fostered in Central America.

Discussions among academics, and literary histories, though contributing to canonization cannot be divorced from the forces of the literary anthology and the educational curriculum. In the following section these two tools of canonization will be analyzed with regard to Afro-descendant writing in Latin America in general and in the specific countries and writers that are the focus of this study.

2.4. LITERARY ANTHOLOGIES AND COURSE SYLLABI AS TOOLS OF CANONIZATION.

“All pedagogic action is objectively symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power” (Bourdieu and Passeron 5). Bourdieu and Passeron go on to say that it is the dominant educational system that secures “a monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence” (6). The literary anthology and the educational curricula are tools used to impose such symbolic violence and thus create and perpetuate canons.

⁵⁶ E-mail correspondence.

Most compilers of anthologies outline the criteria they use as a basis for their selection and as a basis for justifying the works they include or exclude from their publication. In this section I analyze the contents of anthologies of Latin American, Uruguayan and Costa Rican poetry to establish the extent of visibility Afro-descendant writers receive and also, to determine what factors guide compilers in their selection based on the criteria they outline in their introductions. It would be useful though to first take a look at an earlier analysis of poetry anthologies as a means of gauging the progress made in more recent times.

Howard Mancing's "A Consensus Canon of Hispanic Poetry" is an article that presents his research on the canon of Hispanic poetry from 1940 to 1980, using as its criteria the frequency with which a particular writer and his works were anthologized.⁵⁷ It is evident from Mancing's research that the most included poetic works of the twentieth century (up to 1980) in Spanish America are Rubén Darío (62 anthologies), Leopoldo Lugones (43 anthologies), Amado Nervo (39 anthologies), César Vallejo (39 anthologies), Pablo Neruda (33 anthologies), Gabriela Mistral (38 anthologies). These writers are included in anthologies that Mancing reports as being general and that seemed to be "most representative and inclusive" (53). Mancing's work clearly reveals the state of voicelessness or marginalization of Afro-descendant writers in Latin America given their exclusion from anthologies. During the period of his focus (1940-1980) Afro-descendant poets like Nicolás Guillén (Cuba), Pilar Barrios (Uruguay), Nicomedes Santa Cruz (Perú), Nelson Estupiñán Bass (Ecuador), and Nancy Morejón (Cuba) were very active. Their works have gone beyond the realms of *negrismo* and *negritude*.

⁵⁷ Mancing's criteria are: poets who (i) appear in twenty-four or more anthologies, or (ii) have one poem that is included in twelve or more anthologies (53).

Nevertheless, Nicolás Guillén is the only Afro-Hispanic poet included in this listing with the distinction of inclusion in 28 anthologies.

Looking at canon-formation from a different angle, Edward Mullen's article "The Emergence of Afro-Hispanic Poetry: Some Notes on Canon Formation," examines a wider range of poetry anthologies and their role in bringing Afro-Hispanic poetry into the literary canon. The anthologies he examines are from the nineteenth century to the early 1980s. Mullen cites the main goals of nineteenth century anthologies as (i) to preserve the works of past writers, and (ii) to provide works that would serve as models for others to emulate (437,438). According to him, the Afro-descendant poets whose works formed part of these anthologies wrote in accordance with the aesthetics of the period. The Afro-descendant works that Mullen charts in anthologies from the first eight decades of the twentieth century tend to focus on *negrista* Afro-Cuban or Afro-Caribbean poetry as well as works that explored the writings of Afro-descendants from various countries of Spanish America. With regard to the question of value and its role in canon-formation Mullen points out that "changing notions of value influence the formation of the accessible and the selective literary canon" (449). He shows how values of compilers, publishers, and readers have changed over the years, leading to the publication of more special interest anthologies that treat the works of Afro-Hispanic writers (449-450). Despite this growth, however, Afro-descendant poets have not been as successful in penetrating the generalist anthology (449). I take issue with Mullen though, for his conclusion that in the twentieth century "anthologists *opened up* the canon and subtly redirected it toward a more authentic and universalist expression of black culture"

(450).⁵⁸ Based on the discussion put forward in the article, I understand Mullen to be saying that anthologists have over the years moved from the presentation of works that were copies of the European tradition including the *negrista* style poetry, which had its origins in Europe, to poetry that was less superficial and more socially committed. In fact, Mullen cites the anthology of Pereda Valdés as an example of this new trend.⁵⁹ The fact that Pereda Valdés' anthology is what Mullen refers to as a "special interest" anthology does not in any way indicate an opening up of the hegemonic canon. In fact, Mullen's article has served to highlight the ways in which hegemonic canons exclude and marginalize certain works. It is precisely this exclusion and marginalization that has led to the emergence of more special interest anthologies that treat the works of Afro-Hispanic writers, as compilers attempt to make them more visible to the reading public. The promotion and use of these anthologies are ways in which counter-canons or counter publics can be established. If, as my research has indicated, to date general anthologies have been slow in their inclusion of Afro-descendant writers, one could only look forward to a time when special interest anthologies will serve as a launching pad for dialogue between literary canons. A question worth considering at this point then is whether younger poets have fared better than their predecessors in more recently published general anthologies.

Anthologies produced during the last twenty-five years tend to embrace a much more pluralistic, panoramic view of literature. They tend to try to include little-known writers, some of whom had not previously been anthologized. These compilers comment

⁵⁸ My italics

⁵⁹ Pereda Valdes, Ildefonso. *Antología de poesía negra americana*. Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Ercilla, 1936.

on the way in which the literary aesthetic in the region has evolved in recent times, abandoning the modernist canon, making use of scientific and technological terminology, along with language that establishes more direct contact between the poet and the reader. In an attempt to discover whether recent anthologies have been more inclusive with regard to Afro-descendant writers I now take a look at some anthologies published within the last twenty-five years.

Compilers of literary anthologies face the unenviable task of deciding which works to include in their publications. Their decisions are governed principally by the focus of the particular anthology. In the case of general anthologies of contemporary Spanish American poetry, some compilers have admitted to the subjective nature of their task.⁶⁰ Knowing the important role anthologies play in the process of canonization, I decided to analyze the criteria and contents for the twenty general anthologies of Latin American literature and twenty anthologies each of Uruguayan and Costa Rican poetry with a view to (i) determining the criteria they use for the choices of writers and works included; and (ii) the extent to which Afro-descendant writers are included or excluded from these texts.

My perusal of poetry anthologies reveals that while some compilers cite consensus and literariness as their criteria, others cite innovativeness and a desire to highlight the multiplicity of ethical and aesthetic tendencies that exist in the region. In the case of those that claim to be in pursuit of representativity and plurality an attempt has been made to include the work of at least one Afro-descendant poet. One could contrast the anthologies (2 volumes) compiled by Guillermo Sucre with that of a group of Puerto

⁶⁰ Idea Vilariño compiler of *Antología poética de mujeres hispanoamericana Siglo XX* (2001) is one example of a compiler who describes her decisions as subjective. Mario Campaña defends his subjective selections in the prologue to *Visiones de lo real en la poesía hispanoamericana* (2001)

Rican academics (editors Matilde Colon et al). Published just two years apart (the former in 1993 and the latter in 1995) both claim to be giving a panoramic view of literature and point to the link between the academy and anthologies. In the case of Sucre's anthology the academy is credited as an important mediator in canon-formation by stating the exigencies of this body as one of the criteria for the works he includes in his anthology. An analysis of the content of this work would seem to suggest that works of Afro-descendant writers are not taught in Universities, since none of these writers' works are included. The Puerto Rican anthology on the other hand proposes to present to schools and universities a diverse panorama of multiple aesthetics and critical criteria of well-known as well as little-known writers. Even though there are some notable omissions in this latter anthology, it does include the work of one Afro-descendant writer (Nancy Morejón) along with that of indigenous writers like Rigoberta Menchu (Guatemala), and Pedro Shimose (Bolivia) among others.

It is to be noted that the vast majority of anthologies that cite consensus and literariness as their criteria were published earlier in the period under review. These anthologies tend to focus on the works of the "fundadores" and those who follow their lead closely.⁶¹ While acknowledging the subjective nature of their tasks as compilers, many use phrases like "las mejores voces literarias" (Zapata 8) and "[poesía] contemporánea clásica ... viva y fija a la vez" (Jiménez 7) to describe the contents of their collections. The anthologies published in the last five to ten years are those that for the most part lean toward diversity and representativity.

⁶¹ Saúl Yurkievich's work of critical essays on Latin American poetry is entitled *Fundadores de la nueva poesía latinoamericana* (2002). In it Yurkievich treats the poetry of Vallejo, Huidobro, Borges, Gironde, Neruda, Paz, and Lezama Lima.

Before analyzing the inclusion of Afro-descendant poets in general anthologies it is important to return to the criteria of “literariness” cited above. The questions that arise from a consideration of these criteria are similar to those that have been asked about art. Who or what determines what is art/literature? Does it have to do with a particular mode of expression? Is it determined by particular institutions like museums or universities? In literature the case of the testimonial comes to mind. Works like Domitila Barrios de Chungara’s “*Si me permiten hablar...*” *testimonio de una mujer de las minas de Bolivia* (1978) and *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchu y así me nació la conciencia* (1982) were written not as literature but as personal testimonies aimed at advancing particular political agendas. Nevertheless, they have been studied as literature in universities. Does this make them literary?⁶² These questions are at the very core of debates surrounding arts and aesthetics. My position is that the existence of an audience /readership for these works means that they resonate with a community (a counterpublic), one that is willing to engage with them either passively or actively. Additionally, despite the fact that testimonials were not originally literature, the academy’s engagement of the genre in classrooms and through criticism has served as a legitimizing factor.

In terms of legitimation of Afro-descendant writers through inclusion in general anthologies, there has been a slight change from the time of Mancing’s analysis of anthologies and the present. Nicolás Guillén and Nancy Morejón share the honor of being the most included in the twenty-five general anthologies analyzed. They are both included in 6 anthologies, representing a 24% rate of inclusion. The fact that some of these anthologies focus solely on women writers would also be a factor that accounts for

⁶² Though some of Miguel Barnet’s works like *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1968) has been classified as testimonial, he himself describes what he writes as novels. See, Y. Espinola in “Introduction” to *Social Text* 15 (Autumn 1986): ii-xii

Morejón's sharing equal standing with Guillén with regard to inclusion in anthologies. Apart from these two Cuban writers, the only other contemporary Afro-descendant writers whose work is included in at least two of the general anthologies consulted are the Dominicans, Aida Cartagena de Portalatín, and Sherezada 'Chiqui' Vicioso. It is worth mentioning that these writers subscribe more to a Latin American feminist discourse than to one that is Afro-descendant in focus. The anthology that has included the greatest number of Afro-descendant poets is one that emanated from the U.S academy. Compiled by Chilean poet and professor at Wellesley College (USA) Marjorie Agosín, this anthology presents English translations of a wide variety of Spanish American female poets.⁶³

In recognition of the fact that compilers of general Latin American anthologies also face restrictions with respect to how many writers they could include in any one anthology, I also analyzed the contents and criteria of twenty anthologies each from Uruguay and Costa Rica published during the same period (1984-2009). Once again the criteria range from aesthetic quality and visibility to plurality and marginality. In the case of the Uruguayan anthologies, plurality, representativity and diversity were cited in the criteria for at least three anthologies. Nevertheless, these terms did not result in the inclusion of the works of Afro-descendant writers. In fact, Afro-descendant poetry was only given voice in Uruguay through special interest anthologies. In the 1930s Ildefonso Pereda Valdés published *Antología de poesía negra americana*. It included works of Afro-descendant writers from the Americas that is, Haiti, Brazil, the United States, Argentina, Cuba, and Uruguay. More recently, the *Antología de poetas negros uruguayos*

⁶³ *These Are Not Sweet Girls Here. Latin American Women Poets* (1994).

was compiled by Alberto Britos Serrat and published by ediciones Mundo Afro in 1990 and 1997. Apart from these anthologies, Graciela Leguizamón, poet and administrator of the blog REDESCREA (red de escritores/as y creadores afrodescendientes) states that many Afro-Uruguayan writers and poets die in obscurity.⁶⁴ She declares that the only anthologies apart from the special interest ones mentioned above, that contain the works of Afro-Uruguayan poets are what she calls, “libros cooperativos editados por grupos como AEDI (Asociación de escritores del interior), ERATO, “Botella al mar”, Grupo aBrace de ediciones Bianchi, etc.”⁶⁵ One such anthology that includes the work of Afro-Uruguayan prose writer Jorge Chagas is a compilation of the work of writers who participated in the literary workshop led by writer Lauro Marauda.

Lamenting the situation of Afro-Uruguayan letters, historian Oscar Montaña feels that the Afro-descendant community has in some ways moved backwards instead of progressing. He sees this as being the case when one compares the literary and intellectual activity of Afro-Uruguayans during the 1930s to 1950s and the present situation.⁶⁶ Montaña is referring here to the activities of Pilar Barrios, Juan Julio Arrascaeta, Virginia Brindis de Salas and others who wrote and published in the mid-twentieth century, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s.⁶⁷ In two different publications Marvin Lewis documents the work done to promote Afro-Uruguayan letters in Black newspapers, and periodicals like “Nuestra Raza”, “Revista Uruguay” and other similar

⁶⁴ This blog was originally called REDAFU (red de escritores/as y creadores afro-uruguayos). Leguizamón made the comment cited above during a personal interview.

⁶⁵ <http://publiredafu.blogspot.com/2008/05/convocatoria-llamado-poetas-y-html>

⁶⁶ Personal interview.

⁶⁷ *Población afrodescendiente y desigualdades étnico-raciales en Uruguay* (2008):74-93 also documents the intellectual activity of Afro-Uruguayans in the early twentieth century.

publications.⁶⁸ Working alongside these men were Afro-Uruguayan women. In an article published in 2004,⁶⁹ Carroll Mills Young addresses the role of these pioneering Black women intellectuals who worked tirelessly during the first half of the twentieth century with the Uruguayan Black Press in the interest of social justice. Women like Maruja Pereyra Barrios, María Felina Díaz, María Esperanza Barrios and Iris Cabral laid a strong foundation of feminist letters among Black women in Uruguay. This has paved the way for the next generation of writers: Beatriz Ramírez, Beatriz Santos Arrascaeta, and Cristina Rodríguez Cabral among others (36). Mills Young affirms that these contemporary writers “refuse to allow the literary and cultural legacy of Afro-Uruguayans to become a part of historical invisibility” (33).

One major challenge that has a direct impact on the field of literary production in Uruguay is education. In interviews, Oscar Montañó, Alejandro Gortázar, and Beatriz Santos all point to the high percentage of Afro-descendant youths who fail to complete their primary and secondary schooling as a major impediment to their progress. It is not that education is not available to them, but poverty is a social ill that works against them in this respect. For instance Beatriz Santos reveals that 92% of Afro-descendants in Uruguay live below the poverty line and sums up their situation in these words:

[e]l problema más grande es la pobreza. Por supuesto, el racismo ni que hablar. Si no hubiera racismo no habría pobreza porque la pobreza parte del no poder el individuo acceder a estadios educacionales para poder prepararse y competir en una sociedad la cual se ha tornado cada vez más competitiva en todos los aspectos. Entonces, nosotros, es como que siempre nos estamos volviendo de atrás. Y es muy difícil llegar a poder competir si no tenemos herramientas. Porque no basta con que la educación sea pública porque un muchacho que no ha podido

⁶⁸ Lewis, Marvin A. *Afro-Hispanic Poetry, 1940-1980. From Slavery to “Negritud” in South American Verse*. (1983) and *Afro-Uruguayan Literature: Post-colonial Perspectives* (2003).

⁶⁹ “From Voicelessness to Voice: Womanist Writers of the Black Uruguayan Press.” *Afro-Hispanic Review* 23.2 (Fall 2004).

descansar en una buena cama, que no ha podido alimentarse, que no ha podido tener acceso a la salud, difícilmente pueda rendir mentalmente y competir con su compañero de banco. Tenemos que apostar a una equidad social y racial y social para poder competir.⁷⁰

These observations find support in *Población afrodescendiente y desigualdades étnico-raciales en Uruguay*, a 2008 publication commissioned by the United Nations Program Development in Uruguay. Researchers document the link between education and economic resources pointing out that one interviewee who managed to attend university revealed that he was forced to pursue a career different to the one he would have liked to because of the costs involved, this despite the fact that he was employed during the time he attended university (163). It must be noted that even though students do not have to pay for schooling in government-run schools and universities, there are still basic costs of clothing, books, and other materials that students in dire financial straits find it difficult to meet.

Despite these challenges some Afro-Uruguayans have continued to express themselves in writing. The impact of poverty on those with literary ambitions is not lost on REDESCREA's creator. Leguizamón comments on the volumes of poetry that exist in notebooks, many of them written by working class women.⁷¹ A few have succeeded in having their works published at home and abroad. In 1993 "Mundo Afro" published Cristina Rodríguez Cabral's first anthology of poems "Desde mi trinchera" while her most recent anthology "Memoria y Resistencia" was published by Editorial Manatí in the Dominican Republic. Other writers like Beatriz Santos Arrascaeta have published short

⁷⁰ Personal interview.

⁷¹ Personal interview.

stories in special interest anthologies.⁷² One contemporary prose writer, Jorge Chagas whose work is published locally by small, private publishing houses like Editorial Rumbo and Editorial Jorge Morón, claims that he is recognized as a historical writer but his literary works have not achieved recognition. Despite this claim, Chagas has achieved a degree of success greater than any other Afro-Uruguayan writer to date. His historical writing has won the following prizes over the years:

- National Prize for Literature, 2003 given by the Ministry of Education and Culture (for the novel *Gloria y Tormento*) in the category of unpublished work.
- Honorable Mention in the Annual Literary Contest of the National Municipality of Montevideo, 2003 (for the novel *Gloria y Tormento*)
- Third place winner for Literature, 2004 awarded by the Ministry of Education and Culture (for the novel *Gloria y Tormento*) in the category of published work.
- Honorable Mention, 2007 awarded by the Ministry of Education and Culture (for the work *Pacheco la trama oculta del poder*) in the category of unpublished Historical Essay.
- National Prize for Literature, 2009 awarded by the Ministry of Education and Culture (for the work *Banco La Caja Obrera*) in the category of Unpublished Historical Essay.

In addition to these laurels in 2007 the musical version of *Gloria y tormenta*, a work that charts the life of the Afro-Uruguayan footballer José Leandro de Andrade won a prize in the country's carnival. Chagas is proud of his recognition as a historical writer but laments the lack of recognition of his literary works. In his view, to achieve the recognition he deserves, he would have to win an international literary prize or be published by a foreign publishing house. He describes the literary circles within Uruguay

⁷² Because in the case of Uruguay the focus of this study is more poetry than prose, the anthologies in which Beatriz Santos' works appear were not analyzed. These are not general anthologies but those that (i) focus specifically on Afro-descendant writing and (ii) are the product of literary workshops. They are, however, listed in the bibliography. Some of Santos' poems were published in an issue of the U.S academic journal *Afro-Hispanic Review* 22.2 (Fall 2003).

as very closed. This and the small market dominated by established writers, he feels, account for the difficulties Afro-descendant writers face.⁷³

My analysis of the extent of inclusion of Afro-descendant writers in Uruguayan course curricula was limited to three courses in (i) “Latin American narrative 1916-2000”, (ii) “Orality Writing and Representation of the ‘intellectual’ in Latin American literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries”, and (iii) a survey course on Latin American literature. These courses were offered between 2006 and 2009 at the University of the Republic. Afro-descendant writing is treated in these courses through the *negrista* and *negritude* writings of Luis Palés Matos, Nicolás Guillen, Aimé Césaire. Jacques Roumain’s *Gobernadores del Rocío* is taught as a representative work of Francophone Caribbean narrative. In addition to these twentieth-century writers, Uruguayan academic Alejandro Gortázar claims that the work of the nineteenth-century enslaved writer Manzano is studied.

Gortázar describes his own task in relation to Afro-Uruguayan literature as one of recuperation of the literature of this group. His work to-date has resulted in a publication that looks at the life and work of Jacinto Ventura de Molina, the first known Afro-Uruguayan man of letters.⁷⁴ Gortázar describes the absence of critical attention to Afro-Uruguayan literature in the rest of the academy as a general disinterest and the fact that Afro-descendant culture in the country has traditionally been tied to one particular form of oral expression, that is, the *candombe*. Gortázar’s work and his indication that at least

⁷³ Personal interview.

⁷⁴ Gortázar, Alejandro. *El licenciado negro: Jacinto Ventura de Molina* (2007).

one Uruguayan professor, with ties to the US academy, makes an effort to introduce new perspectives in Latin American literature into the curriculum are signs of progress.

In the Afro-descendant community in Uruguay, Cristina Rodríguez Cabral is recognized as a writer whose work has value. Some academics in North America and Brazil have also given critical attention to her work.⁷⁵ To date, however, it has not engaged the attention of the Uruguayan academy. Rodríguez Cabral comments on the varied recognition of her work in this way:

A nivel de la comunidad negra, siento que se me reconoce y respeta mi trabajo. A nivel de la academia uruguaya no se me tiene en cuenta. Hace poco me encontré con una antología de escritores uruguayos, algunos de ellos son colegas que trabajan aquí en Universidades, así que no es un problema de distancia. No existo para la academia uruguaya, a pesar de estar afiliada desde hace muchos años en la asociación de escritores uruguayos.⁷⁶

A conversation with Professor of English literature at the Universidad de la República in Uruguay, Lindsey Cordery, suggests that at least in her case, it is not an issue of invisibility but one of lack of availability or inaccessibility to Rodríguez' works. According to Cordery she made a marginal reference to the work of Cristina Rodríguez Cabral in a conference paper she was presenting on African-American literature. She reveals, however, that her access to information on Cabral was very limited and she had to rely on what she could find on the Internet.⁷⁷ The work of Gortázar, along with references like the one made by Cordery in her presentation and the introduction of diversity in the curriculum are initial steps in the direction of the recognition of the

⁷⁵ Some U.S academics who have analyzed Rodríguez Cabral's work or interviewed her are : Lorna Williams, Miriam De Costa Willis, Carol Mills-Young, Marvin Lewis, and María Cristina Burgueño. Brazilians Ana Goncalvez and Luis Ferreira have also dealt with her poetry in their work.

⁷⁶ Personal interview. Her use of "Aquí" in the penultimate sentence of this quote refers to the United States. Rodríguez Cabral is herself an Assistant Professor of Spanish at a US university.

⁷⁷ Telephone conversation.

existence of a plurality literary aesthetics in Spanish America. The acceptance of the aesthetics present in the works of contemporary Afro-Uruguayan writers who subscribe to the Afro-descendant counterpublic is a matter that will have to be assessed in the future.

The issue of the availability of the works of these writers within Uruguay is one to be explored. The fact that Rodríguez Cabral's work was published by a small publishing house in the Dominican Republic with no distribution networks in other countries shows a weakness in the system of mediation that has affected the availability and recognition of her work. Marvin Lewis' *Afro-Uruguayan Literature*, a work that treats Afro-Uruguayan writing from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, is one work that, if it becomes available in Spanish would go a long way toward bringing the breadth and tenor of Afro-Uruguayan literature to a wider readership within Uruguay and the rest of Latin America.⁷⁸ Uruguayan Sub-secretary of Industry and Energy, Edgardo Ortuño, has indicated that a Spanish language translation of this work is complete and awaiting permission from the relevant authorities for publication.⁷⁹ This is indeed another step in the direction of bringing Afro-descendant discourse to the attention of others within the community. The subsequent visibility of this body of writing could result in the much-needed dialogue among the various national literary discourses.

The foregoing analysis has shown that generally speaking, Afro-Uruguayan writers of literature are engaged in a struggle to penetrate a literary tradition that has so far not admitted them. As stated earlier in this study, writers are not the recipients of the legitimation granted to Afro-descendants in other spheres of cultural production. Singers

⁷⁸ Lewis, Marvin. *Afro-Uruguayan Literature: Post Colonial Perspectives* (2003).

⁷⁹ Personal interview.

like the late Lágrima Ríos, and Rubén Rada are household names in Uruguay and beyond. The social, economic, and political factors that drive the legitimation of popular, performance culture over and above literary culture are beyond the scope of the present study. It bears pointing out, however, that this lack of legitimation has not stifled the creativity of Afro-descendant writers. They continue to compose, recite, and when possible publish their works. It remains to be seen whether the Uruguayan academy will take the lead in legitimizing Afro-descendant writers. The Spanish-language translation of Lewis' work and the work of Gortázar and others are possible means of not only legitimizing Afro-descendant literature in Uruguay, but also of promoting the dialogue that is so vital between the various literary traditions of the country with a view to developing an understanding and an appreciation of the differences in world-view that have an impact on varying aesthetics. Turning now to look at Costa Rica, we will see whether Afro-descendant writers in this Central American country have received more attention from legitimizing agents than do their Uruguayan counterparts.

In Costa Rica, Afro-descendant writing has developed differently from in Uruguay. In fact to look at Afro-descendant writing in Costa Rica is to take a look into the nation's history. Blacks mainly from the English-speaking West Indian islands of Jamaica and Barbados migrated to Costa Rica during the late nineteenth century to work on the banana plantations and in the construction of the railway.⁸⁰ These immigrants took and retained various important aspects of their culture to their new Spanish-speaking homeland. They maintained the high regard for education that is characteristic of the

⁸⁰ See Sawyers Royal, S and F. Perry "Costa Rica," *No Longer Invisible: Afro-Latin Americans Today* (1995): 215-224. See also Dorothy Mosby's *Place, Language, and Identity in Afro-Costa Rican Literature* (2003).

English-speaking Caribbean, the protestant religions, mainly Anglicanism, their use of the English language (which they continue to use in the schools they established), and the English-based creole dialect (mek-a-tell-yu). Early Afro-Costa Rican writers like Dolores Joseph and Alderman Johnson Roden wrote in English (Mosby 33). Even today, writers like Marcia Reid, Kiria Perry, and veteran calypsonian singer and song-writer Walter Ferguson continue to write in English or creole English.⁸¹ Other subsequent writers though, have used mainly Spanish as their mode of literary expression. These writers are poets Eulalia Bernard Little, Shirley Campbell Barr and Delia McDonald Woolery, and prose writer Quince Duncan Moodie.⁸²

In looking at Costa Rican literary anthologies I was once more seeking to determine to what extent Afro-descendant writers are represented as part of the literary traditions of the nation. In the case of Costa Rica, not all of the publications examined focused solely on poetry. At least two treated Costa Rican literature in general, while four anthologies examined looked at Central American writing. In one instance the works compiled were those of Nicaraguan and Costa Rica writers, and another looked at Costa Rican and Dominican poets. Like many Latin American anthologies and some Uruguayan anthologies, at least 6 (30%) of these compilations of Costa Rican poetry cite representativity and a panoramic view of the nation's literature as their criteria. Some

⁸¹ Ferguson's music is known in Costa Rica and overseas. He has received much recognition in his homeland. See Gerardo González' interview with Ferguson, "Toda mi gratitud es para Costa Rica" in *nación.com/entretenimiento* 28 de julio de 2010. Such recognition of a musician reiterates the point made in the Introduction of this study with regard to the legitimation of folklore and performace-type cultural manifestations over and above literary forms.

⁸² Eulalia Bernard Little (b. 1935) writes mainly in Spanish even though she does have some poetry in English and creole English and a bilingual volume of poetry. She is the author of the volumes *Ritmo héroe*, *My Black King*, and *Ciénaga*. Quince Duncan (b. 1940) is an internationally recognized prose writer. He is the author of novels, short stories and non-fiction essays. His works include *Los cuatro espejos*, *La paz del pueblo*, "Teoría y práctica del racismo," and "Contra el silencio." For details on Delia McDonald and Shirley Campbell, please see chapter 3 of this study.

anthologies seek to present a variety of aesthetics. Quince Duncan who is the Afro-Costa Rican writer who has made the greatest impact both within and outside his country is included in the works that treat Central American writers in general. Eulalia Bernard is also included in these works. Of the younger poets, whose work is treated in this study, Shirley Campbell's work is featured in just one anthology that has as one of its criteria, poetry with the widest aesthetic categories.⁸³ Delia McDonald's poetry is in three anthologies (15%) that cite representativity, a desire to present the country's literary culture, a variety of themes and aesthetics, and to give visibility to previously invisible works.

In an interview, Shirley Campbell recognizes Quince Duncan's position as the most renowned Afro-Costa Rican writer. She comments that whereas the works of other Afro-descendant writers are pigeon-holed into the category of "*lo negro*", his has been able to surmount those barriers and is now even included in the schools' curriculum.⁸⁴ Fernando Durán-Ayanegui, retired President and Provost of the University of Costa Rica, agrees with her and attributes Duncan's success to the quality of his work. He claims that race is not a factor that hinders the publication of works but admits that there are cases in which female writers face discrimination.⁸⁵

A comparison of the situation regarding the inclusion of the works of Afro-descendant writers in Uruguay and Costa Rica does seem to suggest that the latter country has made more progress than the former in this regard. Durán-Ayanegui points to

⁸³ Sonia Mora and Flora Ovarés Ramírez, *Indómitas voces. Las poetas de Costa Rica. Antología* (1997).

⁸⁴ Personal interview.

⁸⁵ Personal interview.

the tireless advocacy of Eulalia Bernard in the early 1980s to have a course taught at the Universidad de Costa Rica on Afro-descendant culture as one important factor that has aided the promotion of Afro-Costa Rican literature. Despite the poverty faced by a large portion of the Afro-Costa Rican population, Sawyers and Perry point to high levels of education enjoyed by members of this community who take advantage of “the rather meager opportunities available for self-improvement” (222). For Afro-Costa Ricans therefore, poverty does not seem to be a hindrance in their pursuit of learning.

The educational curricula have also made some strides in the direction toward inclusiveness. An examination of course syllabi from the University of Costa Rica (sede occidental) for 2007 and 2008 reveals that Quince Duncan’s and Eulalia Bernard’s works form a part of courses in contemporary Costa Rican literature. Though the works of younger writers like McDonald and Campbell are not reflected in these course syllabi, course syllabi from the English Department of two private colleges, the Universidad Internacional de las Américas and the Universidad Latina de Costa Rica show that at least one professor has taught the poetry of these younger writers.⁸⁶

With regard to courses in Spanish American literature, syllabi from the University of Costa Rica (2004 to 2007) and the University of the Republic (Uruguay) (2006) reveal a trend similar to that of the majority of general anthologies of Spanish American literature. The Afro-descendant writer whose works are taught is Nicolás Guillén. Guillén is taught as an avant-garde writer with his *negrista* style poetry as the object of study. As is the case in Uruguay, Aimé Césaire is read in relation to negritude.

Considering that Costa Rican students are receiving some exposure to their own Afro-descendant writers in courses on their local literature, professors should consider

⁸⁶ These were courses taught by Franklin Perry.

expanding their syllabi on Spanish American Literature to include other Afro-descendant writers. This would allow students to see that the evolution in Afro-descendant writing that has taken place in Costa Rica is part of a larger body of African diasporic writing in Spanish America.

Having discussed the role of the literary anthology and the educational curriculum, it is important to consider the factors that result in a writer's recognition and eventual acceptance into a hegemonic canon. A look at Cuba's Nancy Morejón will provide some insight into this matter.

2.5. THE LEGITIMATION OF NANCY MOREJÓN: ISSUES WORTHY OF CONSIDERATION

Of the anthologies perused in the previous section of this chapter the female Afro-descendant writer who has achieved most recognition through anthological recognition is Nancy Morejón. Even though Morejón's inclusion is far below that of non-Afro-descendant writers like Cristina Perri Rossi and Giaconda Belli and Ana Istarú, in comparison to other Afro-descendant writers she is the one who has been included in the most anthologies. The reasons surrounding Morejón's success are many and varied. In this final section of chapter 2 I discuss some of the factors surrounding Morejón's increased visibility during the course of the twentieth century in order to establish certain crucial differences between the extra-literary factors that have allowed for her success and those that may hinder those of some of the younger writers under consideration.

Morejón, a poet and literary critic, is a former Director of the Casa de las Américas Caribbean Studies Center in Cuba. Her first work was published in 1962 and to-date she has published at least fourteen (14) volumes of poetry, and a number of

essays. Some of her works have been translated into English and German. She is the recipient of various literary prizes like the “Premio Nacional de Ensayo ‘Enrique José Varona’ ”, (1980), “Premio de la Crítica” (1986) and “Premio Nacional de Literatura” (2001). Although these are all prizes granted by institutions within her homeland, Morejón has achieved a considerable degree of recognition beyond Cuba’s shores. Some of her works have been published outside of Cuba, in Mexico and England for example, and she has attended many conferences and given lectures and readings of her poems in various countries in Europe, in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean. There is no doubt when one looks at Morejón’s body of work and her achievements that her recognition is well-deserved. Nevertheless, it is important to consider some other factors that have had an impact on her visibility such as political decisions, opportunities for publishing and promotion, and an established Afro-descendant literary tradition.

The long history of writing by Afro-Cubans began with the recognition of nineteenth century writers like Juan Francisco Manzano and Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (Plácido). As discussed earlier in this chapter, Afro-Caribbean *negrista* style poetry came to prominence during the 1920s and 1930s. This particular genre of poetry was mainly evident among non-Afro-descendant writers in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. The early work of Nicolás Guillén followed this trend. Given the large populations of Afro-descendants in these Caribbean nations and the promotion of concepts like negritude by Caribbean-born academics like Aimé Césaire it would appear that the confinement of blackness to the realms of the Caribbean served the ideological interests of those who wielded political and cultural power in other areas of Spanish America. As discussed earlier, equating *negrismo* with Afro-Cubanism/Afro-

Caribbeanism was one way of linking Afro-descendant letters in Spanish America mainly to Cuba and the rest of the Caribbean. The only non-Caribbean Afro-descendant writer included in one of the twenty-five general anthologies is the Ecuadorian writer Luz Argentina Chiriboga. All the others were from the Caribbean. The literary tradition among Afro-descendants in Cuba has been maintained and strengthened through the centuries. Particularly in the twentieth century writers like Nicolás Guillén, Nancy Morejón and Georgina Herrera have advanced Cuban poetry.

In addition to the tradition that began in the nineteenth century, certain political factors have gone a long way to establish the presence and reputation of writers like Morejón. In the wake of the 1959 socialist revolution in Cuba the Castro regime sought to establish an egalitarian society. In 1962 it boasted that it had eliminated racism from the Cuban society (De la Fuentes, “Cuba’s Racial Democracy” 1). Some non-Blacks even felt as though they were being discriminated against in order to promote Blacks within the society. De la Fuente cites a former soldier as saying “The white there [in Cuba] isn’t worth a thing. A Negro is worth more than a white” (278). The advances in education and the promotion of culture of the Castro regime through institutions like the Casa de las Américas went a long way in aiding the development and dissemination of the works of writers like Morejón.⁸⁷

In the very year of the revolution, the “Casa de las Américas” was established. This institution conducts and promotes research, publication, and dissemination of literary, musical, and theatrical works, along with the works of visual artists. It also

⁸⁷ Casa de las Américas was founded in Cuba in April 1959 with the aim of promoting the nation’s culture and establishing cultural links with Latin America, the Caribbean and the international community as whole.

awards important literary and cultural prizes. The “Casa” is an institution with a truly international scope, sponsoring lectures, conferences and exhibitions and engaged in serious cultural collaboration with various countries around the world.⁸⁸ In fact, the “Casa de las Américas” was the premier Latin American cultural institution from the 1960s to the 1980s. In her capacity as Director of that institution’s Caribbean Studies Center, Morejón no doubt benefitted from numerous opportunities for visibility and collaboration. It is no surprise therefore that her work has flourished and has been legitimized internationally.

Added to the above is the considerable critical attention her work has continued to receive. A search of the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) international bibliography shows seventy-three works that treat Morejón and her writing. Though the majority of these works were published by journals and studies produced in the United States, others were from Spanish, Spanish American, and Brazilian publications. The worldwide library catalog “WORLDCAT” lists at least 229 works (articles and books) in which Morejón’s work is discussed, and the Spanish database “DIALNET” records nine articles on her work. These results are evidence that Morejón’s work has received considerable legitimation and may soon be considered part of the hegemonic Spanish American canon.

The legitimizing practices this chapter treats, publication, promotion, inclusion in anthologies and the academic curriculum, and literary prizes are factors one must also consider when reflecting on writers from outside a space like Cuba that has been constituted as the place for Afro-descendant literature. Questions regarding what happens

⁸⁸ See «Casa de las Américas » website: www.casadelasamericas.com

in countries where peoples of African descent are even more of a demographic minority and where official policies do not actively promote their literary production are important to bear in mind as the discussion in chapter 3 looks more closely at the aesthetics in the work of three Afro-descendant writers from Uruguay and Costa Rica, namely Cristina Rodríguez Cabral, Shirley Campbell-Barr, and Delia McDonald Woolery.

Chapter Three: Afro-Costa Rican and Afro-Uruguayan Women Writers and Aesthetics

3.1. AESTHETICS AND LITERATURE IN SPANISH AMERICA

“Desde Mi Trinchera” – Cristina Rodríguez Cabral

Desde mi trinchera combato cuentos y mentiras
desde mi trinchera canto para matar la agonía,
siembro flores
y lanzo relámpagos de estrellas,
pierdo batallas y gano la guerra.
Desde mi trinchera despego cada día
y me hago águila – mujer – guerrera,
vibro fuego y corazón con mi bandera.
Desde aquí extendo mi mano
y toco las olas,
creo en la vida
y en un después.
Desde mi trinchera destello luces y rayos,
batallo la vida
y silencio el adiós.
Desde mi trinchera oigo tu voz,
y tu canto
ecoando en el viento
espanta lamentos
libera el dolor.-

Cristina Rodríguez Cabral’s poem “Desde mi trinchera” evokes the warrior image, which she presents in many of her poems. On one level this poem could be interpreted as a love poem, as the voice of a woman relating her experiences of survival against the obstacles of life, motivated by the memory and knowledge of a lover’s existence. On another level it could relate to the militant position of the poetic persona in a social struggle. The image of the trenches, a place of defense and offense for the soldier, is present throughout the poem. In the trenches, one is in a position below ground level. From this disadvantaged position she fights against the attacks of dominant society. Her

invisibility to the enemy far from being a hindrance or inconvenience, allows the persona to employ subversive tactics to resist and overcome.

Anaphora in the first two lines places emphasis on the position from which the persona launches her attacks. She combats “cuentos y mentiras”. Whether what the persona combats relates to gender, or ethnicity, or negative criticism in general, or all of these, she presents herself as a formidable opponent (“me hago águila – mujer- guerrera” l. 7). This triad of images (eagle, woman, warrior) highlights the strength, perception, and determination she possesses and uses in her commitment to overcome any obstacle she may encounter. Her use of militant verbs like “combatir”, “lanzar”, and “batallar”, along with the images of the eagle, the flag and the warrior reinforce the idea of a soldier dedicated to the battle. The harshness of combat in the first line contrasts with the positive actions of singing, and planting flowers in lines 2 and 3. The latter two actions suggest a determination to make good of a bad situation. A similar contrast between negative and positive actions is communicated in line 5 where the persona contrasts loss and victory (“pierdo la batalla y gano la guerra” l. 5).

The energy embodied in the verbs “despegar”, and “vibrar”, and the natural forces of the “relámpago de estrellas” and “rayos” confirm the intensity of the battle and the active role the persona plays in launching her attacks against her enemies from her concealed position. The light that the stars and lightning emit also suggests the promise of a future beyond the darkness of the trenches. In the context of a dangerous battle, the persona dares to extend her hand outside the trenches (“Desde aquí extendiendo la mano/y toco las olas” l. 10,11). Waves are symbols of both strength and change. The persona touches the waves and this infuses her with power to continue fighting in order to bring

about a change in her situation. The idea of a better life outside of the trenches continues with the words “creo en la vida/y en un después”. Here the persona voices her expectation of betterment in this life and in the hereafter.

The poetic persona rejects the farewell/dismissal with the words “silencio el adios” (l. 15). In the context of a love poem, this could be interpreted as a refusal to accept a lover’s departure. However, in a militant poem this line could signal resistance against the invisibility and devaluation by dominant society. The last five lines of the poem speak directly to someone with the words: “Desde mi trinchera oigo tu voz,/y tu canto/ecoando en el viento/espanta lamentos/libera el dolor” (l. 16-20). The “you” addressed could be a distant lover whose love infuses the persona with the motivation to persevere. The referent could also be a spiritual or other motivational force that encourages the poetic persona to continue in her struggle. The four short lines at the end of the poem convey an atmosphere of peace that contrasts with the combative tone of first part of the poem. The voice the persona hears from the trenches drives away her grief and pain. The poem thus ends on a note of encouragement.

My analysis of Rodríguez Cabral’s poem serves as an introduction to the Afro-descendant literary aesthetic in Spanish America. The militancy of this poem written by an Afro-descendant writer inscribes it within this particular counterpublic. A reading of the poem that foregrounds the poetic voice’s fighting spirit and will to overcome is part of a literary tradition that began in the days of the negritude movement. The above poem is one that definitely follows in that tradition since it places emphasis on struggle, hope, and victory. In *Afro-Hispanic Poetry, 1940-1980* (1983), Marvin Lewis cites “armed resistance” as one of the tropes Spanish American negritude writers employ frequently in

their texts (4).⁸⁹ The poem can be read too, in the light of Afro-descendant feminisms where patriarchal social and political institutions and systems are what the female subject must fight against in her daily struggles. Cabral's poem presents one of the many facets of the Afro-descendant literary counterpublic in Spanish America. Afro-descendant literature as a counterpublic within the plurality of literary aesthetics in Spanish America is the focus of this chapter.

The analysis of literary anthologies and course syllabi in the preceding chapter indicated that for the most part compilers cite representativity and plurality as their criteria for selecting and including works. Four of the most recent anthologies analyzed also give detailed explanations in their introductions of ways in which the poetry in the region has evolved, and of the trends and aesthetics that inform contemporary works.⁹⁰ In every case the editors/compilers point to the multiplicity of tendencies and aesthetics that characterize contemporary poetry. They see the avant-garde (and, in at least one case, modernism) as having provided the foundation on which contemporary writers construct their works.⁹¹ According to Miguel Ángel Zapata:

[h]oy vivimos esa continuidad iniciada por las vanguardias: cambios de estructura, fracturaciones, ritmos, bailes, desnudos, ideologías, experimentaciones, redefiniciones y nuevas alucinaciones que buscan redefinir el sentido de la palabra quebrantada. El lenguaje es el medio, el signo por el cual se reinventa el mundo. (29)

⁸⁹ In addition to armed resistance, Lewis states that Afro-Hispanic creative writers in Spanish America draw upon social customs related to marriage, religion, food, funeral rituals, dance, music, language, oral traditions, language and myths as their ways of expressing afro-centricity in their literary works.

⁹⁰ Ángel Esteban y Ana Gallegos Cueñas. *Juegos de manos. Antología de la poesía hispanoamericana de mitad del siglo XX* (2008) ; Mario Campaña *Casa de luciérnagas. Antología de poetas hispanoamericanas de hoy* (2007) ; José Olivio Jiménez. *Antología de la poesía hispanoamericana contemporánea 1914-1987* (2000) ; Miguel Ángel Zapata *Nueva poesía latinoamericana* (1999)

⁹¹ Miguel Ángel Zapata *Nueva poesía latinoamericana* (1999: 9, 11, 22, 24, 29)

Additionally, Ángel Esteban and Ana Gallegos Cueñas in their prologue to *Juegos de manos (Antología de la poesía hispanoamericana de mitad del siglo XX)* comment on the tendency in some writers to revive a tradition that is a purely Spanish-American cosmopolitanism close to Borges' *criollismo* (22). If as Esteban and Cueñas point out contemporary poetry is marked by, among other features, its amplification of aesthetic horizons, the argument for plural canons based on plural aesthetics is very relevant. In advancing this argument, it is important to highlight the interconnectivity that sometimes occurs in these discourses. The discourses of rural writers like Guadalupe Trullens for instance, may be different from those of urban, middle-class feminist writers like Ana Istarú. This is not to say, however, that these discourses must of necessity remain separate and apart. There will be points of overlap that provide room for dialogue. Similarly, critiques of the silences and inaccuracies of official history are very prevalent in the work of Afro-descendant writers but they are also treated by writers of other races and ethnicities. Examples of this are Rosario Ferre's *La casa de la laguna* (1997) and Arturo Azuela's *Manifestación de silencios* (1978). So in spite of differences in gender and worldview individuals unite to form publics or counterpublics because of the discourses that resonate with them.

As discussed in chapter 2, the syllabi examined for courses in Spanish American literature in both Uruguay and Costa Rica include the work of both Palés Matos and Guillén as *negrista* writers. The Uruguayan syllabi analyzed discuss negritude through the works of the francophone Caribbean writers Aimé Césaire and Jacques Roumain, and the Cuban Nicolás Guillén. This suggests that in those courses issues related to blackness as highlighted in *negrismo* and negritude are reserved for the space of the Caribbean

since these concepts are only considered in the works of Francophone Caribbean and Hispanic Caribbean writers. This lack of academic legitimation of other poets, other poetic tendencies, and other forms of literary production from various parts of Spanish America does a great disservice to the evolution of Afro-descendant literature and to the works of the writers who have been attempting over the past fifty years or more to have their voices heard. Writers like Pilar Barrios, Virginia Brindis de Salas, Nicomedes Santa Cruz, Luz Argentina Chiriboga, Nancy Morejón, Cristina Rodríguez Cabral, and Jorge Chagas come to mind. Costa Rican students, on the other hand, are exposed to the evolution of Afro-centric and Afro-descendant writing from *negrismo* to negritude and beyond since they also study the works of some of their own Afro-descendant writers in courses on Costa Rican literature.⁹² This chapter treats the aesthetics and worldview that inform Afro-descendant writing by considering a set of criteria that might be used to read these works productively, thereby generating dialogue with other literary traditions or canons. This is done through an analysis of the works of Rodríguez Cabral, Campbell Barr, and McDonald Woolery. It concludes that the Afro-descendant aesthetic adds to the diversity of tendencies present in contemporary Spanish American literary discourse. It shows also that even among writers who choose the Afro-descendant aesthetic there is variety in styles, and modes of expression. Given the vanguardist foundations on which contemporary writing in the region constructs itself, it is important to examine the negritude movement's impact on Afro-descendant literary discourse in Spanish America.

⁹² The syllabi show that at the University of Costa Rica students also study the works of local Afro-descendant writers Quince Duncan and Eulalia Bernard.

3.2. A CLOSER LOOK AT NEGRITUDE IN SPANISH AMERICAN LITERATURE

The late Martinican writer and statesman Aimé Césaire is considered the father of negritude. His name, along with that of his contemporaries Senegalese writer and statesman, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and the French Guianese León Damas surface whenever the term is invoked. Born in the 1930s, negritude has evolved over the many decades since its birth and continues to inspire peoples of African descent around the world. In her 1973 study of Aimé Césaire, Susan Frutkin credits this ideology with having provided a point of departure for Pan-Africanism, the Black Consciousness, Black Power, and other similar movements.⁹³ She gives it credit also for being the force behind the pressures that have resulted in the creation of Black Studies programs and Black Studies groups in U.S universities (22, 23). Consequently, it is important to examine for a moment the evolution of negritude and the differences in this ideology as advocated by Césaire in contrast with how it evolved with Senghor.

Césaire's *Cahier au retour au pays natal* (1939) is often termed a manifesto of negritude. In this long poem, the persona rejects the assimilationist tendencies of French colonialism by bringing to the fore the value of Black culture and civilization. He does this by questioning Eurocentric values that have sought to deny the value of Black cultural and intellectual achievement. According to Frutkin the "three most significant themes in Césaire's *Cahier* on which he built his concept of negritude are:

⁹³Although Frutkin cites Pan-Africanism as one of the movements that owes its existence to negritude, the former movement had much earlier beginnings. Hadim Adi and Marika Sherwood give 1897 as the beginning of Pan-Africanism in an organized way with the founding of the African Association in London. See: *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora since 1787* (2003).

- (i) A preoccupation with Black identity and with the heritage of slavery shared by many Blacks of the diaspora.
- (ii) A hatred for and rejection of the White world as the perpetrator of slavery, colonialism and racism
- (iii) A confidence in a future of universal fraternity (17, 18).

She calls the first theme “the cornerstone of negritude” (18). In his introduction to Césaire’s “Cahier” Mazisi Kunene posits that for Césaire, negritude as ideology also speaks to the rights of all (regardless of race and ethnicity) who have been subjected to dehumanizing systems (23). This latter point indicates that from its early manifestations, Cesarian negritude pointed to the benefits to be derived beyond the Black community if Blacks receive the rights and social justice they deserve. Frutkin records Césaire’s 1971 description of negritude’s role as: “an historic stage, a point of departure [...] in the awakening of the black world ... the blacks of the world make up a kind of community, ideas circulate within that community... there are repercussions everywhere.”⁹⁴

Senghor, on the other hand, began like Césaire by affirming the beauty and value of things Black. He proposed this as a contestation to the Eurocentric assimilationism that was the hallmark of French colonialism. Irving Leonard Markovitz describes Senghorian negritude as having evolved from the pre-World War II era to Post-Independence Africa. It moved from an ideology that promoted the singularity of Black culture and experience to a focus on collaboration between colonial and African elites (40, 41). It does appear that many who refer to Senghor’s concept of negritude tend to focus on the revolutionary first stage of development of the ideology where he proposed an essential difference in,

⁹⁴ Susan Frutkin, *Aimé Césaire. Black Between Worlds* (1973). Frutkin quotes from her interview with Césaire in her study.

and even superiority of, Black culture as a reaction against cultural assimilation. During this phase he presented the essence of blackness as having more to do with the emotional than with the rational. It is this phase that Kenneth Ramchand refers to when he states that for Senghor, a poem's negritude has more to do with its style, established through its imagery and rhythm, than through its content. He describes this style as being "bound up with the African's sensuous apprehension of the world and his immediate participation in the cosmos ... These sensuous qualities which, according to Senghor, represent the essence of African civilization, are the properties of Africans everywhere, whether they are conscious of it or not" (106). Bill Ashcroft et al are among those who are critical of Senghor's interpretation of negritude during this phase. They see it as promoting a stereotype that had its origins in White European prejudice (20). Markovitz for his part shows that there was a gradual modulation of these early ideals. By the Post-independence era, Senghor was more focused on linking negritude to national, economic development, showing how through educational reform the focus on communal trends peculiar to traditional African life could be used as a basis for forging the future development of his nation.

Negritude's critics are also to be found among Afro-descendants. These include intellectuals like Franz Fanón, Jacques Roumain, and René Depestre, who criticized negritude's supposed essentialism and what they conceived as its homogenizing of blackness and the Black experience.⁹⁵ Femi Ojo-Ade's article (1997) summarizes criticism of Senghor's philosophy in this way:

⁹⁵ J. Michael Dash. "Before and Beyond Negritude." *A History of Literature in the Caribbean: Hispanic and Francophone Regions* (1994):529-546

[f]rom Stanislas Adotévi's *Négritude et négrologues* (Negritude and negrologists), 1972, to Marcién Towa's *Léopold Sédar Senghor: Négritude ou servitude?*, 1976, to my own *On Black Culture*, 1989, the elements of mystification and potential acceptance of Negro inferiority and irrationality (a question of instinct) have been addressed in Senghor's work. (*A History of Literature in the Caribbean* vol.3, 361)

As stated earlier, negritude though, has not remained stationary. It has evolved, and it has inspired writers, thinkers, politicians and activists from various parts of the world to respond to relations between colonizers and their colonial subjects, to portray the existing realities in their nations and regions of the world, and to project their conceptualizations of the future of their people and nations. In more recent times negritude's evolution has resulted in what some call "post-negritude."⁹⁶ Far from being a disavowal of its earlier manifestations, post-negritude builds on some of negritude's principles like universal fraternity and a moving beyond matters that focus solely on race relations.⁹⁷ Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes this new tendency as a story about "blackness without blood", of "elective affinities, unburdened by an ideology of descent" (*Loose Canons*, 151). The community therefore encompasses a global citizenry of those who identify with the sentiments expressed in these works. This community is none other than a counterpublic, united by the discourse that treats matters that affect members of the group.

It is evident from history that Black Latin Americans were not immune to the discourses on negritude that were circulating in other parts of the world. The trans-national nature of the work of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance was not lost on

⁹⁶ Post-negritude treats issues that are of concern to those of various racial groups and genders who have developed a socially acquired understanding of the effects of racism and patriarchy on individuals and groups and their culture(s). For more on this concept see Mark Reid's *PostNegritude Visual and Literary Culture* (1997).

⁹⁷ The creolité movement in the Francophone Caribbean has also been termed post-negritude as it seeks to move beyond what it sees as negritude's essentialist, universalist tendencies and its lack of relevance to the specificities to Caribbean realities. See: Juris Sileniéks « Postnegritude Developments » in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean. Hispanic and Francophone Regions* (1994) : 517- 528

Afro-descendant writers in Spanish America. Richard Jackson discusses the links Langston Hughes established with Afro-Hispanic colleagues and his influence on their work.⁹⁸ He records the constant references to Hughes in the Uruguayan Black press of the 1930s and 1940s and mentions Hughes' correspondence with the writer Pilar Barrios (89). According to Jackson:

A positive blackness, the recognition of the universality of the black experience, and a commitment to radical change for the black masses bind Langston Hughes to Pilar Barrios, Manuel Zapata Olivella, Nicolás Guillén, Nelsón Estupiñán Bass, and Nicomedes Santa Cruz. All concern themselves with the black masses and place their literature squarely on the side of the proletariat. (92)

As pointed out in chapter 2, Marvin Lewis is of the view that despite the fact that “no organized movement grew up around *negritud* in Spanish-speaking South America comparable to what the French-speaking worlds of Africa and the Caribbean experienced, most Afro-Hispanic authors still adhere to the basic tenets of negritude in regard to their culture and identity” (*Afro-Hispanic Poetry*, 3). He states too that the themes of “marriage, family, religion, folklore, language, food, funeral rituals, dance, music, oral traditions, myths and armed resistance” provide Spanish South American writers with “the impetus for their own sense of *negritud* (4). An analysis of the works of Afro-descendant writers, Lewis claims, reveals their attempts to negotiate their African heritage in the light of national policies regarding race, through looking back to a mythic past and by using positive self-valuation to arm their future struggles (6, 7). These works reveal writing done in accordance with aesthetics that in many instances do not conform to those of hegemonic society. Here is where the issue of the values and criteria that comprise a particular literary public is of importance, as I discuss below.

⁹⁸ See also: George Reid Andrews' *Blackness in the White Nation : A History of Afro-Uruguay* (2010 : 101-102).

3.3. AFRO-DESCENDANT LITERATURE AND AESTHETICS: A PROPOSAL OF SOME CRITERIA

From Kant and Heidegger to Marx, Adorno, Benjamin or Duve, the issue of aesthetics has been the focus of diverse theorizing for centuries. Whether it was conceptualized as written on the body, or encompassing both mind and body, or whether the debate was over its relationship to technology or the society, value judgments have always been called into question in relation to aesthetics. If, as I indicated in chapter 1, the discourses that are essential to publics and counterpublics (hegemonic canons and plural counter canons) treat the values and concerns of those involved in these discourses, then it is vital to consider what criteria generally form the basis of the discourse of Afro-descendant writers in Spanish America who favor a Black aesthetic. Additionally, when one considers Danto's theories on the plurality of aesthetics one recognizes that even within any body of work there will be differences in style and in approaches to themes. Afro-descendant literature is no different.

The issue of a Black aesthetic among Afro-descendant writers in Spanish America has received attention from writers like Jospahat B. Kubayanda and Richard L. Jackson who concludes his *Black Writers in Latin America* (1979) by questioning the possibility of the development of a Black aesthetic among Afro-descendant writers in Latin America. Jackson feels that despite the influence of the Black Liberation and Black Consciousness movements, and the promotion of diasporic unity and cooperation, official discourses of miscegenation and racial unity in the region could work against the success of such a venture (195, 196). He posits that success is only possible if the assertion of blackness is not perceived as contesting the national imaginary. He feels too that equating

racial sameness with racial equality could provide a spark for the development of such an aesthetic (197). In a later work, *Black Writers and the Hispanic Canon* (1997), Jackson proposes a set of criteria that inform the work of the writers whose works he treats. Though it is not always clear whether Jackson is proposing an expansion of the Spanish American literary canon to include works by Afro-descendant writers or the establishment of a separate canon of works by Afro-descendant writers, the criteria he proposes are:⁹⁹

- The expression of literary blackness (this includes the preservation of popular oral forms in writing and the treatment of the Black experience in the region)
- The affirmation of Black culture and treatment of miscegenation
- The creation of characters that stand out
- The encouragement of racial awareness and the protestation against injustice
- The exploration of the importance of blackness to national identity.

Kubayanda raises points similar to Jackson's as regards the role of this literature in relation to national identity, its role in protesting injustice, and its treatment of literary blackness (114 – 123). With regard to literary blackness, Kubayanda points out that orality and written forms combine to foreground sociolinguistic and rhythmic patterns rooted in African languages and traditions (119). He also discusses the subversive technique of deterritorialization of language whereby the writer uses Spanish to create a style that is “almost unrecognizable” within the hegemonic discourse of the nation and region (119-121). Many of the criteria put forward by Jackson and Kubayanda are

⁹⁹ Miriam DeCosta Willis expresses her views on Jackson's ambivalence in her article “Can(n)on Fodder: Afro-Hispanic Literature, Heretical texts, and the Polemics of Canon-Formation.” *Afro-Hispanic Review*. 21.1-2 (Spring-Fall 2002):53-62.

reflected in the works of earlier negritude writers like Nicolás Guillén, Manuel Zapata Olivella and Nelsón Estupiñán Bass, as well as in the work of contemporary writers like Cristina Rodríguez Cabral, Delia McDonald Woolery, and Luz Argentina Chiriboga. As Jackson, Kubayanda and Lewis show from their discussion, negritude had an extended life in the works of Spanish American writers. Though the works of many contemporary writers attest to negritude's evolution, the basic tenets of pride in the Afro-descendant heritage and identity and a quest for social justice are still evident in their works.

My reading of the works of Afro-descendant writers has led me to propose a set of criteria that can help the reader to better appreciate works written in accordance with an Afro-descendant aesthetic. By no means a definitive list, I arrived at these criteria through a careful analysis of the works of the Afro-Costa Ricans, Shirley Campbell Barr, and Delia McDonald Woolery, and the Afro-Uruguayan, Cristina Rodríguez Cabral, as well as through reflection on the proposals of critics like Richard Jackson, Marvin Lewis and Josaphat Kubayanda. The criteria bring together features of negritude and its most recent manifestation (post-negritude). It is to be noted that a number of the criteria listed below, for example, historical revisionism, exile, and spirituality among others, are also present in works of non-Afro-descendants from Latin America and other regions of the world. However, in Afro-descendant writing these criteria very often are treated in ways that call attention to the specific experiences of Afro-descendants. In works that are more post-negritude in nature, the criteria tend to focus on experiences of the disadvantaged regardless of race, ethnicity and gender. These are:

- A revisionist treatment of history, (official renderings of history are often challenged and contested.)
- Evocations of racial/ethnic memory which manifests itself in themes related to the African experience of slavery, and in invocations of a mythical past¹⁰⁰
- A re-affirmation of Afro-descendant identity
- An emphasis on spirituality. (This is based on a Judeo-Christian tradition or on the treatment of Afro-centric traditions like Obeah, Voodoo, Umbanda, and Santería, or syncretic religious practices)
- Questions of belonging and exile, so that the subject describes his/her alienation in a hostile space as exile. Elements of double and even triple exile are evident in writers who have migrated away from the Spanish American home-space
- The treatment of social and psychological issues that do not limit themselves to the Black-White binary but that resonate also with members of other racial, ethnic, and social groups
- The exploration of the theme of the unity and brotherhood of citizens of the nation, region, or world
- Afro-descendant feminism: the male is not the enemy but a partner in the fight against an oppressive system rooted in historical, imperialistic traditions. (An important aspect of Afro-descendant feminism is the foregrounding of race, gender, and class intersections)
- An exploration of various ways in which gender and sexuality are performed

¹⁰⁰ Racial/Ethnic memory relates to the psyche of members of a particular group. This is formed through experiences, feelings and thought patterns and is transmitted generationally.

- The use of literary and stylistic devices that highlight aspects of the Afro-descendant cultural experience and that serve to subvert hegemonic discourses. (These include various techniques of defamiliarization, and the use of devices like polysyndeton, and anaphora that promote orality)

One expects that changing policies and concerns will continue to inform the evolution of these criteria.

It is important to note that not all of the above criteria are present in the work of every writer who subscribes to an Afro-descendant aesthetic. Additionally, though Afro-descendant writers are most often found to explore these issues in their writing, this does not preclude writers of other racial groups from treating these issues in their works. It is the presence of a concentration of these criteria in a work and the way that work impacts on those who share in the particular discourse, that make it part of the Afro-descendant literary counterpublic. To demonstrate how these criteria have been explored in works written by Afro-descendant writers, I analyze their use in the works of Cristina Rodríguez Cabral, Shirley Campbell Barr, and Delia McDonald Woolery.

4.2. A LOOK AT THE WORKS OF THREE AFRO-HISPANIC WOMEN WRITERS

In his study of Afro-Uruguayan literature, Marvin Lewis asserts that Afro-Uruguayan writers operate between a philosophical and an anthropological tradition. According to Lewis, in their work “[t]here is the process of self-reflection as well as ethnic differentiation” (79). He attributes their self-reflection to a situation of internal colonization that causes “othered” subjects to question their identity and how they are perceived by the dominant culture. The choice to “resist marginality” and affirm their

identity is central to their work (79). Both the philosophical and the anthropological threads are present in Cristina Rodríguez Cabral's poetry.

Cristina Rodríguez Cabral

Cristina Rodríguez Cabral (b.1959) is a native of Montevideo, Uruguay. She began experimenting with writing as a child. So far two of her poetry collections have been published in book form. These are: *Desde mi trinchera* (1993) and *Memoria y Resistencia* (2004). The first volume and some of her individual poems were published through the Uruguayan organization Mundo Afro. *Memoria y Resistencia* was published by Editorial Manatí in the Dominican Republic. This latter volume comprises poems from Rodríguez Cabral's other poetry collections. The poems that make up this anthology are varied in both form, and content. Much of Cabral's earlier poems treat themes of love, nature, and existentialist concerns. Her more recent poetry reveals more race consciousness and militancy than her previous writing. Carol Mills-Young in her analysis of Rodríguez Cabral's work asserts that the poet's sojourn in Brazil (1988) and her residence in the United States (since 1997) awakened her "to social and political realities in Uruguay" thus allowing her to see that country's social and racial problems more clearly (*Daughters of the Diaspora* 405, 408). This has resulted in writing that is "bolder and more dramatic, [as the writer affirms] her identity as a rebellious, Black, South American woman" (405).¹⁰¹ Cabral herself acknowledges this change and explains that her dual roles as writer and literary critic have also contributed to her work having been

¹⁰¹ This point is echoed in the introduction to the chapter on Cabral and her work in *Daughters of the Diaspora: Afro-Hispanic Writers* (2003). Miriam DeCosta Willis, the work's editor, asserts that this writer's exposure to Afro-centric culture and philosophy in Brazil and the United States is what contributed to the maturation of her ideas on race, gender, and identity (389).

influenced by the expectations of the North American academy. She also credits her experiences as an immigrant in an alien space as having had an impact on her writing.¹⁰²

With regard to form, Rodríguez Cabral experiments with a variety of styles that range from prose poetry, to those that are more conventional in form, to those that seek to communicate additional meaning through their external structure. Though the majority of her poems are written in Spanish, some are in Portuguese, while others switch between Portuguese and Spanish. In at least one Spanish poem that treats the theme of exile, she uses an English word. The resulting defamiliarization is consistent with the alienation the poem treats.¹⁰³ I began this chapter with an analysis of Cabral's poem "Desde mi trinchera." I now go on to analyze three more of her poems: "Monte-vi-deo", "Memoria y resistencia", and "De Manos Completas."

Themes related to exile and belonging manifest themselves in various ways in the works of Afro-descendant writers. Some of these are" (i) an exploration of the concept of exile among African diasporic peoples; (ii) the feeling of being an outsider or not belonging in one's own country; (iii) a longing for home; and (iv) an exploration of attempts to cope or survive in a foreign home space. The two latter characteristics are particularly evident in works of writers who have lived outside their home countries such as Lourdes Casal, Cristina Peri Rossi, and Sherezada 'Chiqui' Vicioso.

Cristina Rodríguez Cabral explores various treatments of exile in her work. Alienation within one's home space is the theme of "Monte-vi-deo." The poetic voice accuses the city of treating her like a stranger. Despite this she pledges a collective loyalty (expressed in the first person plural) to Montevideo.

¹⁰² Personal interview.

¹⁰³ See for example Rodríguez Cabral's poems "Meninas," "Nossa Herença." and "Destierros."

MONTE-VI-DEO

Ciudad que me vio nacer, crecer
 amar, sufrir,
 morir,
 y resucitar,
 hoy me mira con extraños ojos
 me apunta con su dedo crítico
 y me condena al exilio.

¿Por qué olvidaste
 tu antigua sonrisa
 de niña mimada
 asomándose a la vida?,
 el horror, la angustia
 y el desencanto
 no han de ser
 obstáculos suficientes
 para impedirnos defender
 cada pétalo
 de tu murguera flor.-

The poem is structured as a statement of familiarity, followed by a question that captures a feeling of perplexity. It then closes with an affirmation of loyalty. The unequal lengths of the two stanzas that comprise this poem correspond to the differences in perspective. The first section can be interpreted as more formal in address than the second if one takes the implied 'Usted' as the subject that governs the verbs in stanza 1. The city is the addressee throughout but whereas the poetic voice in stanza 1 is single, that of stanza 2 is a collective voice expressed in the first person plural. Additionally, this collective voice pledges loyalty to the city. The poetic voice seeks to remind the city of the previous close relationship they enjoyed through the use of verbs associated with the stages of life ("Ciudad que me vio nacer, crecer/amar, sufrir,/morir/y resucitar," l. 1-4). The placement of verbs in the infinitive at the end of the first line and in the succeeding lines (l. 2, 3, &

4) brings the actions into closer focus. The former closeness no longer exists but the persona is not to blame for this alienation. The poetic voice lays the blame on the city (“hoy me mira con extraños ojos/me apunta con su dedo crítico/y me condena al exilio” l. 5-7). The use of the implied formal Usted verb forms in this stanza emphasizes the estrangement. It is to be noted that the poetic voice could also be speaking to someone else about the city. In this case, the idea of estrangement is still relevant since the city has turned its back on one with whom it formerly had a close relationship. The second stanza begins with a question. The poetic persona asks the city why it has changed (“Por qué olvidaste/tu antigua sonrisa/de niña mimada/asomándose a la vida?” l. 8-11). The image of a spoiled child on the verge of her coming-of-age suggests that at one time the city was the recipient of attention that aided its growth and development. The nature of the question asked in lines 8 to 11 along with the repetition of [a] and [m] sounds in the words create a plaintive tone that highlights the persona’s feelings of alienation. The question that begins the stanza is followed by a declaration of allegiance. The collective voice here states that despite being subjected to negative forces, (“el horror, la angustia,/ y el desencanto” l. 12, 13) it will still defend the city. The city is represented metaphorically in these final lines as a flower. The collective voice pledges to defend each petal of this flower (“no han de ser/obstáculos suficientes/ para impedirnos defender/cada pétalo/de tu murguera flor” l. 14-18). The description of the city as “murguera flor” could have a variety of interpretations. The adjective ‘murguera’ derives from “murga.” This now popular musical theater is an integral part of the Uruguayan carnival celebrations. The farcical nature of this theater and the elaborate costumes and face painting characteristic of the genre could be a negative criticism of the society, a

description of it as a façade or spectacle. On the other hand, the fact that the “murga” is a popular working-class genre that satirizes society could signal its role of bringing some degree of relief and happiness to people who might otherwise be experiencing painful circumstances.¹⁰⁴ The space of the city is used as a synecdoche to represent the nation, in the same way that the first person of stanza 1 is really the collective subject that expresses itself in the second stanza. Despite the horror, anguish and despair they experience, the members of this group that feel alienated within their own society are still prepared to fight to defend what they see as theirs – their country.

Historical revisionism, Afro-descendant feminisms, and ethnic memory are the main focus of the poem “Memoria y Resistencia.”

¹⁰⁴ See: Gustavo Remedi, *Carnival Theater. Uruguay's Popular Performers and National Culture* (2004).

This poem is written in praise of the Black woman. It begins with an epigraph that serves as a dedication to Black women who ennoble history. Men though, are not excluded since the dedicatory epigraph also recognizes the role of “aquellos hombres/que también lo hacen.” From the beginning this poem employs techniques of defamiliarization, and elements of Afro-descendant feminisms. The Yoruba language salutation “Axé” that concludes the epigraph takes the reader immediately into the African world thereby privileging blackness. This bold move reflects Henry Louis Gates Jr. position that Black writers should not be afraid to write from their position of blackness, drawing on the difference of their experience and discourse (*Loose Canons*, 83).¹⁰⁵ The African word “Axé” disrupts the homogenizing discourse of Spanish and draws attention to the heterogeneity within the society. This expression that emphasizes Afro-descendant solidarity causes the language of the colonizer to lose its “colonial privilege” (Ashcroft et al 37).¹⁰⁶ So from the very beginning of the poem the writer presents her challenge to the hegemonic, imperialistic worldview.

In the epigraph too, even though the poetic voice is a female and indicates that she is privileging women’s role in history, she does not negate or devalue the role that men have played in the process. This is an aspect of Afro-descendant feminisms that contrasts with White, Western feminism. Afro-descendant feminisms see the patriarchal, imperialistic political systems rooted in history, institutions, policies, and the results of these as the real enemies (Steady 34-35). They feel that sexism, racism and social class

¹⁰⁵ It is important to note that Gates’ position here does not contradict one he makes in a later essay in the same collection and quoted on page 111 of this study. The two, are different postures Afro-descendant writers and critics adopt in their work.

¹⁰⁶ Ashcroft et al define abrogation as a refusal of the aesthetic, syntactic and semantic categories of the imperial culture. Appropriation is a ‘remodelling’ of language to new usages so as to create distance from the space of the colonizer (37).

oppression all intersect. So whereas some White feminists promote the concept of a fractionalization from men, Black feminists feel that racial solidarity with Afro-descendant men is important as both men and women are in the struggle against racial discrimination (Carby 62, 63).

The poetic voice that speaks to the Black man “Hombre Negro” (l. 1) is the Black mother (“Madre,/ Negra” (l. 101-102). The words that refer to the man and the mother are capitalized. This indicates the representational roles of these characters, since those being referred to, are not individuals but part of a collective – the community of Black men and women. The Black woman rejects the traditional role offered by the patriarchal world. She tells the Black man that she refuses to be simply a woman to warm his meal and his bed “que caliente tu comida y tu cama” (l. 3, 4). She says this even though she recognizes the role of patriarchy and dominant society, since she lives as a prisoner of time and stereotype (“prisionera de tiempo/y del estereotipo” l. 36-37). The stereotypes that often imprison Afro-descendant women are attributions based on pejorative views of their race, gender and class. Kimberlé Crenshaw in discussing how race and class intersect says these burdens result because Black women are “subject in some ways to dominating practices of both a sexual hierarchy and [one that is] racial” (404). Here the poetic voice rejects the burdens that traditionally go along with the gender, race, and class intersections. She does this by emphasizing the different ways in which women have contributed to society – through physical labor, and through giving of themselves to nourish not only their own children but those of the master as well. These affirmations are brought out in the following lines: “construí el camino del amo” (l.11); “Yo curvé la espalda/sujetándote durante la cosecha” (l. 29, 30); and “Fueron mis senos/quienes te

alimentaron,/y al hijo del amo también” (l. 38-40). Rodríguez Cabral invokes ‘ethnic memory’ in her references to slavery. These are evident in the aforementioned lines and in others like “la Casa Grande”, “la Senzala”, “el látigo”, and “las humillaciones.” These references are critiques of the patriarchal imperial system that introduced African slavery to the Americas as a part of its capitalist expansionist endeavors. The image of the Black woman nourishing the master’s child draws attention too, to ways in which the colonial powers drew their strength (economic and otherwise) from those whom they subjugated. The poetic voice therefore rejects patriarchy by highlighting its role as an imperialistic system of domination that imposes ideas, identities, and stereotypes.

The poem’s female subject has made many sacrifices but far from being a lament, this poem celebrates her strength. Despite the suffering and sacrifices she still lives the life of a warrior, fighting against injustices and teaching her children to do the same: “yo soy la reina guerrera/que te hizo bajo las estrellas/la que de niño te enseñó/a amar la tierra/y a usar el fusil” (l. 66-68). Life’s harsh experiences, which include the absence of her male partner, inhere in the Black mother “ethnic memory” and cultural heritage that she in turn passes on to future generations: “Le enseñaron a cantarle /a nuestros Dioses,/a preparar los niños del mañana/para que sus vidas de hombres/y mujeres liberados/testifiquen/fielmente/la total nobleza/ de nuestras batallas” (l. 91-99). The archetypal Black mother is once again the referent in this section of the poem, hence the third person object pronoun. What she learned and has passed on to future generations is the reason the poetic voice can begin her affirmation in the final seven lines of the poem with the word “Yo”. Here, as in lines 49-51, cultural heritage is further emphasized through the invocation of the Yoruba goddesses “Iemanjá, Oxum, e Iansá” (l. 49-51; 104-

106). By referring to herself as “Iemnájá/Oxu,/e Iansá a la vez” the poetic voice attributes all the qualities of these goddesses to the Black woman.

The poetic voice reminds the Black man of his absence (“escasas veces estuviste allí” l. 18; “ausente de siempre” l.24), and points to the woman’s perpetual role as mother, “generación tras generación/yo te parí,/como a tu padre/y a tus hermanos” (l.25-28). The stressed mid and high vowel in the words of line 31, (“sangro, lucho, resisto”) together with the repeated [o] sound with which the same words end indicate a movement from suffering to triumph. They highlight the woman’s sacrifices and stand in contrast to the succeeding line where the man’s forgetful nature is called into question (“y desconoces mi voz” l. 30-32). History has forgotten the Black woman. This is of great concern to the persona. Her claim that even the history written by Black men has forgotten the Black woman or has relegated her to the space of legend, suggests that the woman is accusing her male counterparts of having allowed the patriarchal system to affect them negatively: “Ausente en tus memorias” (l. 33); “la leyenda me recuerda/pero nunca la historia,/aunque tú la escribas,/Hombre Negro”; (l. 53-55). She refers to herself as a lost memory (“memoria perdida” l. 70). The amnesia of the Black man is a cause for serious concern. In his discussion of this poem Marvin Lewis sees as ironic the anger the woman directs toward the Black man seeing that he is in no position to help her as he “is also unempowered and not capable of improving her situation materially” (*Afro-Uruguayan* 100). Although they may both be “unempowered,” I see any anger directed toward the man as due to him having allowed himself to be influenced by the dominant culture, its discourse, and ideologies. Indeed, the critique in this poem could be extended to people (regardless of gender and race) who abandon their roots and heritage and

assume the role of oppressors of others. What is necessary is a revision of history. This is what Aurora Levins Morales points out in her article entitled “Revision” in *Women*

Writing Resistance:

They said, this governor built a wall, and that one built a road [...] But the governor did not lift blocks or stone or dig through the thick clay ... We have always been here. How could they not see us? We filled their plates and made their beds, washed their clothing and made them rich [...] Look, wherever you look it's our work you see. (20)

The female protagonist of the poem corrects male amnesia by writing her story. She records how she fought shoulder to shoulder with her male counterparts “codo a codo/espalda contra espalda” (l. 20-21). She therefore takes herself out of the spaces of invisibility and silence that history and the dominant society would like to impose on her. She resists male forgetfulness by calling to mind her past and her contributions to the future. As a mother to the absent, forgetful Black man, the poetic voice seems to be recalling him to his senses, to his roots.

One way in which she does this is through an affirmation of her own identity. Self-assertion is evident at the beginning of the second stanza in the affirmation, “soy memoria y resistencia” (l. 10). The anaphoric use of “yo” in the greater part of stanza 6, gives this section of the poem a staccato rhythm that interrupts the flow of the preceding lines. This heightens the effect of orality and provides a physical description of the persona. The poetic persona is not afraid to affirm her identity through the repetitive use of this personal pronoun and references to her physical attributes. She describes her lips as “gruesos”, her hair as “salvaje”, her skin as “azabache”, and her hands as “raídos”. She therefore makes a direct contrast between herself and the Hollywood star or the man's blond workmate. The Hollywood star and the blond workmate represent the aesthetic

standards established by hegemony. Beauty, in the Hispanic world, whether physical, linguistic, or literary, has traditionally been Eurocentric.¹⁰⁷ The poetic persona dares to foreground the very aspects of the physical appearance of Blacks that are devalued and criticized by non-Blacks, thus placing them in direct opposition to the hegemonic standard. This is her way of affirming her identity and expressing pride in her difference. Indeed, this difference is what marks her as a warrior and a survivor (“yo soy la reina guerrera/que te hizo libre bajo las estrellas” l.64, 65). “*Mestiza*” is one of the many identities the poetic voice adopts (l.77). The Woman/Mother/Queen/Black/Mixed person is the voice of the woman who has been oppressed historically. The poetic persona’s adoption of this identity is in itself a contestation of the traditional Uruguayan discourse on race that favored whiteness. In referring to herself as *Mestiza* the persona shows her solidarity with other regions of Latin America that have acknowledged and even celebrated the existence and contributions of ethnic minorities to the national ethnic fabric, and its development. The persona’s self-identification as “cimarrona” (l. 48, 102) is her way of reaffirming her role as a resister of hegemony, a person in control of her own identity and destiny. Her poem too, is evidence of “cultural maroonage,” a concept that informs the writing of many Afro-descendant writers.¹⁰⁸

As stated earlier, even though the persona critiques the man’s absence and his amnesia, there is no bitterness. The poem is really a celebration of the woman’s strength.

The celebratory tone is achieved through a combination of literary devices like anaphora

¹⁰⁷ Historians like Alejandro de la Fuente (*A Nation For All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*, 2001), and Edward E. Telles (*Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil*, 2004) have recorded ways in which Latin American Blacks have been kept out of certain sectors of the economy because of unwritten laws that have to do with “good appearance.”

¹⁰⁸ René Depestre calls cultural maroonage the way in which the Black person reconstructs his lost self by rejecting the values of the dominant culture in order to establish his/her personal values in: “Saludo y despedida a la Negritud,” *Africa en América Latina* (1977):346.

and other acoustic effects, defamiliarization, and the use of images that relate to the experience of enslavement. These invoke ethnic memory. The woman's strong role in past, present, and future society, and her identity are affirmed through images of the mother, warrior, royalty and the maroon. Through a combination of ethnic memory, affirmation of identity and use of the principles of Afro-descendant feminisms the poem claims a place for women in History and into the future.

Rodríguez Cabral's poem dialogues with works like Nancy Morejón's "Mujer nueva." Both works show the Black woman as protagonist of the past, present, and future of her people. Though the protagonist of these two works is the Black woman it is clear that this persona represents the collective. As discussed above, in Cabral's work capitalization is one technique that emphasizes the collective identity of the persona. In Morejón's poem the persona writes Cuban women into history from the time of the conquest through important moments in the country's history, such as the Revolution. The woman as maroon is also present in Morejón's poem. Although she does not use the word "marron" (cimarrona), the woman protagonist goes to the mountains where she finds true freedom in the "Palenque." It is the use of this word ("palenque") that makes it clear that Morejón's woman is also a maroon at one stage in her existence. It is to be noted that Cabral's poem provides more detail regarding the flight from the plantation to the maroon community ("dejé el ingenio y descalza/me hice cimarrona" l. 15, 16). Ethnic memory and racial identity are present in Morejón's poem not only through the references to the slave trade and enslavement but also in the sound of the drum that rings out in the last line ("su pródiga madera ya resuena.") Cabral combines the theme of ethnic memory with avant-garde aesthetic in her poem "De manos completes."

“latidos profundos de voces bravíos” (l. 7). The alliteration created through the repetition of the strong voiced consonant [b] in the first two words of stanzas 1 and 2 (“Vientos volcánicos” and “Brisa violenta”), emphasizes the intensity of the winds, while the repetition of nasals [m], and [n] in words like “gemidos”, “mares”, “formando mareas”, “remueven cimientos”, “marea”, “quimera”, and “me mete”, creates a somber tone, one that evokes feelings of pain.

The shape of the first section of the poem, formed by the first and second stanzas, is that of a ship. This is achieved through a combination of long and short lines with the appropriate indentation to provide the shape. This seems deliberate given the contents of the poem and indicates influences from the avant-garde, particularly *creacionismo*. The change that takes place as the poem evolves is captured in the changes of nouns and verbs. For instance, the wind (“viento”) becomes a breeze (“brisa”), the seas (mares) cause “seasickness (mareas), and the winds go from razing/devastating the earth (arrasando la tierra) to drawing out sighs (“arrastran suspiros”). These changes become more evident as the poem progresses.

The violent breezes that begin the second stanza (“Brisa violenta que golpea mis labios mares’ l. 10, “Brisa que me mete dentro del pecho” l. 13) seem to evolve to provide relief as they, together with the songs, lull the persona to a sleep from which she awakens refreshed (“y con cánticos claros me arrulla,/ en las mañanas serenas’ (l. 14, 15). These two lines correspond to the waterline on the ship’s starboard side. They suggest relief from the anguish of the preceding section as night falls and there is rest. A major change that takes place beginning in this second stanza is the introduction of a first person poetic persona. Whereas in the first stanza the persona was an observer, in the

second and third, first-person personal pronouns indicate the persona's personal involvement in the experience. The unlikely combination of nouns that conclude the first line of stanza 2, ("mis labios mares" l. 10) form a connection between the sense of taste and memories of the past. The violent breezes that assault the lips bring with them the taste of the sea. The result is a dream (una quimera l. 12). The dream touches the persona's heart and results in a feeling of serenity. This suggests that the visions and memories of the past provide a positive experience. The alliteration created by the sounds at the beginning of the words "con cánticos claros" and the repetition of the "as" sound in the words of line 15 ("las mañanas serenas") provide an element of musicality that corresponds to the tranquility the persona now experiences.

The final stanza stands in complete contrast to the first two in structure, and images. Whereas, as stated earlier, the first two stanzas suggest the image of a ship, the second does not represent a deliberate image. This ten-line stanza of mainly six-syllable lines (only the first line contains seven syllables) forms one long sentence divided at the mid-point by a semi-colon. The pace of this stanza is definitely quicker than the previous section and the images of light, like the stars and the moon, combine with the positive actions (renacer, besar, lanzar) to form a contrast with the harshness and negative images of the first stanza.

The persona seems infused with renewed energy and love ("la fuerza de vida/que agita mis días/y besa mis ojos" (l. 18-19). It would appear as though the experience of the dream ("quimera") has provided a connection with the past that now causes the persona to move ahead with confidence. The force that causes the persona to move forward is also filled with the love she receives through the kiss to her eyes. The kiss to the eyes

communicates a special tenderness of action. It also suggests that the persona can now see clearly since it is the brightness/brilliance of the stars that kiss her eyes.

In the final five lines of the poem the persona presents herself with flower-laden hands, clothed by the moon as she throws herself into the sea (“cargada de flores/de manos completas/vestida de luna/me lanzo en la espuma/de la noche plena” (l. 21-25). This act of giving oneself fully to the sea suggests a willingness to identify with the experiences of enslaved ancestors. The sea foam (“espuma”) into which she throws herself provides the link between the sea and the ship of the first two stanzas, and the actions of the persona in stanza 3.

The poem clearly invokes ethnic memory and shows a willingness of the persona to accept these memories and be a part of them. This willing acceptance of the painful past has been a characteristic of earlier Afro-descendant writing in Uruguay. For instance, poems like “Canto para un muchacho negro americano del sur” by Virginia Brindis de Salas, and “Martirologio” by Pilar Barrios explore this theme. Brindis de Salas’ poem calls on an elder to remind the youth of his Bantu heritage, while Barrios’ focuses on the stoicism with which Blacks have endured their suffering. In the works of more contemporary writers these past experiences, are invoked in order to celebrate African heritage and claim it as an integral part of Afro-descendant culture. Mayra Santos-Febres, for example, invokes ethnic memory in the untitled poem that begins her collection “Anamu y Manigua” (1991). It is the grandmother who forms a link between the present and the past by sharing her experiences and wisdom with the younger generation.

The poet’s exploration of this theme through a combination of avant-garde tendencies and Afro-centric ideas highlights ways in which some contemporary Afro-

descendant writers draw on various foundational aesthetic tendencies of Latin America literature while at the same time focusing on issues close to the Afro-descendant experience in the Americas.

Shirley Campbell Barr

Shirley Campbell Barr (b.1965) is a Costa Rican of West Indian descent. She grew up in San José, Costa Rica. Both volumes of her poetry were published in Costa Rica. The first, *Naciendo* (1988) was published by the Universidad Estatal a Distancia, and the second, *Rotundamente negra* (1994) by Editorial Arado. Campbell's work, particularly her poems on motherhood, humanity, love, and negritude have received some critical attention in the US and Caribbean academies.¹⁰⁹ In her poetry Campbell explores themes of human brotherhood, religious faith and hope, motherhood and eroticism expressed with a subtlety of language and richness of imagery. She also uses very direct language in her strident yet celebratory negritude poems. I analyze two poems from *Naciendo*: the untitled poem on page 57, and "A una abuela negra cualquiera." From *Rotundamente negra* I analyze poem "VIII" from the second part of that volume, and poem "XI" from part 3.

Spirituality is a theme close to Afro-descendant communities. The very lives of Africans were bound up in religious beliefs and practices which many did not totally abandon after being up-rooted from their native lands. As brought out in chapter 2, an important element of the colonial endeavor involved conversion of the indigenous

¹⁰⁹ The MLA Bibliography lists 8 journal articles on Campbell and her work (one of these is an interview) published between 1991 and 2009. A chapter is dedicated to examining Campbell's work in Miriam DeCosta Willis ed. *Daughter of the Diaspora: Afro-Hispanic Writers* (2003). Her work is also treated in Dorothy Mosby's *Place, Language and Identity in Afro-Costa Rican Literature* (2003).

peoples and peoples of African descent to the religious beliefs of their colonial masters. Like the indigenous peoples, many enslaved Africans adopted the imposed religious practices without abandoning totally their former beliefs. The horrors of their everyday existence also made the Bible's message "of spiritual equality before God appealing and [they] found comfort in [its] theme of deliverance ("Religion and Slavery" par. 3). In Afro-descendant literature spirituality manifests itself in a variety of ways. These range from either an affirmation or a questioning of Christian faith and hope, to the treatment of beliefs and customs linked to religions of Yoruba or Bantu origin, to an acknowledgement of a variety of religious beliefs and traditions indigenous to the region along with those from various parts of the world.

Shirley Campbell Barr, for instance, treats spirituality that appears to be related to the Christian tradition in some of her poems. In the fifteen-line untitled poem on page 57 of *Naciendo* the persona confesses belief in God.

Ahora yo creo en Dios
 porque sé que a pesar de todo
 él trata de mirarnos
 desde una [r]endija de su cielo
 y nos guía
 desde su apretado trajín
 en la inmensidad
 y descubrió que su piel
 no tiene un color definido
 sino que también el nuestro
 forma parte de él
 y que nuestra vida aquí
 es tal vez más difícil
 que la suya
 tan al margen de nuestro tiempo.

The word "Now" ("Ahora yo creo en Dios") in the opening line suggests that the persona may previously have had doubts. The fact that she uses the subject pronoun "yo"

emphasizes the personal nature of this belief. She goes on to give reasons for this belief. These reasons have to do with the attention God pays to humans and specifically his transcendence of color.

Though the persona expresses certainty in her new-found belief her use of the verbs “to try” (“el trata de mirarnos l. 3), and “to discover” (“y descubrió que su piel” l. 8) in connection with God suggests an implicit questioning of his omnipotence and omniscience. The poetic persona thus presents God as having limitations similar to those of human beings. Other phrases like “in spite of everything” (“a pesar de todo” l. 2) and “perhaps” (“tal vez” l. 13) also contribute to the ambivalence the poetic voice expresses. The persona states that her belief is based on God’s efforts to take care of humans “sé que a pesar de todo/él trata de mirarnos/desde una [r]endija de su cielo/y nos guía/desde su apretado trajín en la inmensidad” (l. 2-7). The crack or chink (“[r]endija”) in contrast with the vastness of the heavens suggests a limited field of vision. It also indicates the special effort he makes to see humans. The idea of vastness is repeated through the subsequent contrast of the cramped carriage against the immensity of the universe. What gives the persona confidence though, is that even with this limited field of vision God has reaffirmed that there is a connection between him and humans.

The statement that God discovered that his skin does not have a definite color (“descubrió que su piel/no tiene un color definido/sino que también el nuestro/forma parte de él” l. 9-10) could have at least two possible interpretations. A literal reading indicates that this discovery is not limited to his transcendence of color but also to his recognition and acceptance of the poetic persona’s color. Another interpretation could be that the persona is sarcastically refuting past notions of the superiority of the European

colonizers in the eyes of God. The use of “our” (el nuestro) reinforces the collective nature of the speaking subject and indicates that any reader, regardless of racial identification, is accepted by, and could believe in this God. The group with which the persona identifies has a life that is perhaps more difficult than God’s and she expresses her awareness of God’s realization of that possibility (“que nuestra vida aquí/es tal vez más difícil/ que la suya/ tan al margen de nuestro tiempo” (l. 12-15). These final lines give the assurance of God’s awareness of the difficulties humans experience even though he may be far removed from them.

The ideas in the poem are expressed as one sentence suggesting one complete thought. The ideas in the first and last lines bracket the rest of the poem thereby communicating the principal expression of faith: “Ahora yo creo en Dios/tan al margen de nuestro tiempo.” It could be that the poetic voice is here saying that given God’s recognition of the group to which she belongs she is now willing to believe in him.

There is no indication that the poetic voice’s expression of belief in God in this poem is not directed to the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the works of other poets like Cristina Rodríguez Cabral, Delia McDonald Woolery and Georgina Herrera, however, it is clear that the spirituality they explore is African-derived in nature.

Spirituality and Afro-descendant feminism combine to project the vision of a positive future for Afro-descendants in Campbell’s poem “A una abuela negra cualquiera” (*Naciendo* 40, 41).

A UNA ABUELA NEGRA CUALQUIERA

La vieja levanta un trozo de
sueños
en el caminar del día
y un trozo de melancolía
de la que aún recuerda
Se trenza el pelo
como hizo alguna vez
con su vida
y empieza a caminar.

Bajo ese sol indiferente
y sin misericordia
bajo la degollante
mirada del día
Bajo los zapatos del cielo
que ya no mira
por dónde camina.

Se ha detenido
a recoger un trozo de llanto
que cayó de su cartera
y en esta esquina oculta
se mira solo desde nuestra acera
su infinito rostro
cargado de sonrisas.

Camina erguida

aprisionando los besos
de todos los hombres necesarios
golpea o acaricia a los hijos
entre su llanto
y su felicidad con límites
se enamora a veces
de algún viajero
para descansar la vida
desnudando los sueños
sin verdad posible

Se ha fabricado un altar
bajo la casa
donde no le limiten
la esperanza
señalándola
(como si Dios tuviera límites)

Camina erguida
aprisionando los besos
de los hombres
y los hijos necesarios
para que su piel cercada
de mujer
y de otros
sea eterna.

The poem tells the tale of an old woman on a journey through life who prepares the way for future generations. The title indicates that the woman represents the collective of poor Black women. The hope she engenders despite her difficult circumstances is expressed from the outset through the use of the verb “levantar” and the noun “sueños” (“La vieja levanta un trozo de sueños/en el caminar del día l.1, 2). Her past and present are linked since together with her dreams she carries a bit of the sadness from past experiences with her on her journey (“y un trozo de melancolía/de la que aun recuerda” l. 3, 4).

The word “aún” (l. 4) suggests that she may have lost some of these memories because of age. With the memories she still possesses she begins her journey (“y empieza a caminar” l. 8).

Stanza 2 pictures the old woman walking under an indifferent and merciless sun, the murderous gaze of the day, and the shoes of the sky, quite likely a reference to the moving clouds (“Bajo ese sol indiferente/y sin misericordia/bajo la degollante/mirada del día/Bajo los zapatos del cielo” l. 9-13). The sun, day and sky suggest the societal powers that have no interest in this old, Black grandmother (“Bajo los zapatos del cielo/que ya no mira por donde camina” l. 14, 15). By limiting punctuation to the uppercase letter that begins the stanza and the period with which it ends the poet indicates that each stanza is a complete sentence. This being the case, the verb “mirar” in the lines quoted above could be governed by each of the preceding elements individually, these are: the indifferent sun (“el sol indiferente”), the murderous gaze of the day (“la degollante/mirada del día”), or the sky’s shoes (“los zapatos del cielo”). The anaphoric repetition of the word “bajo” underscores the oppression to which this woman is subjected. Her journey continues in the third stanza where her dire circumstances contrast with her smiles. Her financial woes are symbolized by the tear she stops to pick up when it falls from her purse (“se ha detenido/a recoger un trozo de llanto/que cayó de su cartera” l.16-18). The woman carries the quadruple burdens of race, gender, class, and age. She, however, does not allow these problems to deter her. The reader sees her walking erectly at the beginning of the fourth stanza (“Camina erguida” l.23), and again in the final stanza of the poem (l.40). Stanza 4 comprises eleven lines. In this, the longest stanza of the poem, happiness, love, and hope combine with sadness and disillusionment. The woman’s hardships are not only

economic. They are also emotional. The men in her life are not constant. She holds on to the good from these relationships, which are transitory and serve as a distraction (“aprisionando los besos /de todos los hombres necesarios” (l. 24, 25), (“se enamora a veces/de algún viajero/para descansar la vida/desnudando los sueños/sin verdad posible” l. 29-33). There is no bitterness or anger toward these transitory men. At times she beats her children and at other times she caresses them. These actions seem to depend on whether she is sad or happy (“golpea o acaricia a los hijos/entre su llanto/ y su felicidad con límites” l. 26-28). In the penultimate stanza the dreams are more firmly linked to spirituality since the persona is shown as having constructed an altar below her house where she manifests her hope. This hope is limitless. The bracketed words that follow the idea of her limitless hope connect the woman more firmly with God, since taken together with the preceding lines, they show that her hope is as limitless as God (“donde no le limiten/la esperanza/señanándola/(como si Dios tuviera límites”).

The beginning of stanza 4 is parallel to that of the sixth and final stanza. They both present the old woman walking erectly. In the final stanza, she holds on not just to kisses but to the men and children (“camina erguida/aprisionando los besos/los hombres/y los hijos necesarios l.40-43). Her reason for doing so has to do with the future. With the men she is able to have children and so pass on her proud legacy (“para que su piel cercada/de mujer/ y de otros/sea eterna” (l. 44-47). I agree with Dellita Martin-Ogunsola that the protagonist of this poem has lived an “embattled life” and is an example of endurance in the face of extreme hardships (*Daughters of the Diaspora* 429, 430). It is my view that the nouns and adjectives that highlight her pride and hope for a better future are what communicate this endurance.

Section II of *Rotundamente Negra* is subtitled “Ahora que puedo gritarlos” and is dedicated to a male companion, perhaps a lover (“a ti,/el compañero en la fe/y en los deseos”). The majority of poems in this section treat love and sexual desire. In these poems the man and the woman are shown as partners equal in their love and desire. Poem VIII begins with an epigraph that is a quote from a poem by the Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti (“Ahora vale la pena/Dios/Se quedó dormido”).¹¹⁰

Ahora vale la pena
Dios
Se quedó dormido.

Mario Benedetti

Nadie puede juzgarnos ahora
nadie ahora tiene autoridad
de llamarnos culpables
es el momento de querernos mucho
sin pensarlo mucho
Benedetti lo dice
Dios se quedó dormido
hagamos el amor entonces
hasta que amanezca
besémonos sin misericordia
hasta que Dios despierte
vale la pena
porque después será tarde
y será igual
tendremos que esconder las manos
y los sueños
tendremos que bebernos de a poco
sin disfrutar del sudor
después será tarde

¹¹⁰ Mario Benedetti. “Ahora vale la pena” *Poemas de la oficina y del hoyporhoy* (1984): 64.

me mirarás desde allá	en silencio
y me querrás	no vaya a despertarse
sin palabras	creamos
Dios se quedó dormido	aunque sólo sea antes
Benedetti lo dice	de llamarnos cobardes
y a veces hay que creerle a los poetas	o culpables
a veces dicen cosas	que Dios en verdad
que tienen sentido	se quedó dormido.
soñemos con él entonces	

In addition to giving Benedetti credit for his words in the epigraph the persona does so in two other sections of the poem, citing him as an authority, “Benedetti lo dice/y a veces hay que creerle a los poetas/a veces dicen cosas/ que tienen sentido” (l. 25-27). The persona cites Benedetti as an authority but in so doing also implies that her verses carry similar authority.

Similar to Benedetti in his poem, the poetic persona in Campbell’s poem calls on her lover to seize the moment. Through repetition of the words “nadie” and “ahora” in the first two lines the persona establishes the right of the two lovers to express their love free from the judgment of others. The persona tells the lover that they should take advantage of the absence of judging eyes to make love (“Benedetti lo dice/Dios se quedó dormido/hagamos el amor entonces/hasta que amanezca/besémonos sin misericordia/hasta que Dios despierte” l.6-11). The absence of punctuation in the body of the poem communicates the urgency of the request and the desire. According to the poet’s persona, when God awakens they will be under scrutiny and therefore, not free to express their love (“tendremos que esconder las manos/y los sueños/tendremos que bebernos de a poco/sin disfrutar de sudor” l. 16-18). The poetic voice feels that it is worthwhile to take advantage of the situation (“ahora vale la pena”). The inability to express their love and the distance that will exist between the lovers in the future are

expressed through the words “me mirarás desde allá” (l. 20). The lover will only be able to observe the persona from a distance without being able to verbally express his feelings (“me mirarás desde allá/y me querrás/sin palabras” (l. 20-22). The persona encourages the partner to believe that God will not awaken from his sleep (“no vaya a despertarse/creamos” l. 30, 31).

The poem is one long sentence. The only punctuation mark is the period at the end of the last line. The absence of punctuation, in addition to the alternating long and short lines, contributes to the rhythm, and pace. The rapid pace creates a feeling of breathlessness that corresponds to the poem’s theme.

Campbell’s use of intertextuality in this poem links her to a Hispanic tradition outside of the Afro-descendant community. Poems with the *carpe diem* theme have been part of the Hispanic literary tradition since the Renaissance. The fact that the request to seize the day in this case apparently comes from a female poetic voice rather than from a male persona as is the case with Benedetti, and as has traditionally been the norm, points to the agency the female subject has assumed. No longer content to be the object of male desire, the female subject writes her own desire and places her male partner on equal footing with her. In other poems in this section Campbell explores sexual desire between the female persona and her lover in ways similar to Gioconda Belli.¹¹¹

The final section of Campbell’s *Rotundamente Negra* explores questions of race in a more forceful manner than in other sections of the work. Campbell describes herself as a negritude poet and she explores the theme of affirmation of Black identity in several

¹¹¹ See: Campbell ‘s poems “ IV”, and “VII” *Rotundamente negra* 71, 81-82), and Belli’s “Como gata boca arriba”, and “En la doliente soledad del domingo” (*El ojo de la mujer* 1992)

poems in this collection.¹¹² Her treatment of this theme goes from the very subtle to the strident. Poem XI for instance, explores the issue of affirmation of Black identity and links this to the brotherhood of all humans.

XI

Cuando nazca
vestílo con el color de la tarde
y no te importe
que sea varón o niña
es más importante
que sea humano.
Cuando nazca
Contále que el día es duro
y que hay que vivir la vida
con la certeza plena
de estar viviendo
con la plena certeza
de estar sintiendo
decíle
que tendrá que armarse la sonrisa
con trozos dispersos de calma
que tendrá que armarse el llanto
con pedacitos de mar
y fragmentos de noche oscura
como su piel.

¹¹² See Campbell's blog <http://rotundamentenegra.blogspot.com>. She also described herself in this way when I interviewed her.

<p>Cuando nazca vestílo con el color de las huellas de las pisadas inmensas decíle que se es negro como se es compañero que debe endurecerse el pecho para ser humano y tragarse de pronto las lágrimas</p>	<p>para seguir andando y no olvides decirle que si se detiene a luchar en las duras esquinas revolucionarias bastara con que aprenda que este su mundo es de seres humanos.</p>
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The poem lacks stanzaic divisions and is comprised of three long sentences that treat the importance of teaching children about their identity and place among the brotherhood of mankind from an early age. The words “Cuando nazca” begin the poem and are repeated at the beginning of each new sentence. Though the advice is to dress the child with the color of evening, which serves as a reference to the child’s race, the poetic voice points out that what is more important is his/her humanity (“no te importe /que sea varón o niña/ es más importante/que sea humano” l. 3-6). The second bit of advice has to do with the kind of life this unborn child must expect. Derivations from the verb ‘to live’ are used on three occasions in this section, “y que hay que vivir la vida/con la certeza plena/de estar viviendo” (l. 9-11). Despite having to learn early that life is hard (“Contale que el día es duro” l. 8), the child must live life with confidence. The rhythmic patterns of the four lines (“con la certeza plena/de estar viviendo/con la plena certeza/de estar sintiendo”) are achieved through a combination of assonance and end rhymes in alternate lines. To combat the hardships of life the child will have to find strength in smiles, tears, and nature. Nature is represented by the sea (“pedacitos de mar” l. 18) and the night (“fragmentos de noche oscura/como su piel” l. 19, 20). The identity of the child is again affirmed in these lines and they indicate that the child will also be able to draw strength from his/her Black identity. The idea of a heritage is introduced at the beginning of the

final sentence. The advice here is to dress the child with the color of footprints (“vestílo con el color de las huellas/de las pisadas inmensas/decíle que se es negro/como se es/compañero”). The repetition of the low vowel [a] in the final syllable of the words in two of these lines (“huellas, pisadas, inmensas”) produces a resounding tone that when taken together with the words cited draws attention to the importance of the experiences of the Black predecessors. These experiences are vital to the child’s Black heritage. A similar repetition occurs in the line “en las duras esquinas revolucionarias” (l. 33). The irregular end rhymes of alternate lines from lines 24 to 30 actually come together to communicate the central message of the poem. Those lines read: “decíle que se es negro/como se es/compañero/que debe endurecerse el pecho/para ser humano/y tragarse de pronto las lágrimas/ para seguir andando” l. 24-30). The poetic voice is here saying that Black children must learn of their racial heritage and also of their place in the world as human beings. They must be strong to face life’s challenges but should not give up. In this poem Campbell brings together two themes she treats in her work: racial pride and human brotherhood. It is significant that the poet’s referent is an unborn child. This is symbolic of future generations. In these, there is hope for a future of greater harmony and understanding, even though one does not forget the past: “bastara con que aprenda/que este/su mundo/es de seres humanos” (l. 35-37). The poem therefore emphasizes the importance of human brotherhood.

Delia McDonald Woolery

Delia McDonald Woolery (b.1965) was born in Panamá to Costa Rican parents. Her parents returned to Costa Rica when she was very young and she grew up in San José. McDonald is the author of four published anthologies of poetry *El séptimo círculo*

del obelisco (Ediciones del café 1994), *Sangre de madera* (Ediciones del Café 1995),
...la lluvia es una piel (Ministerio de Cultura, Juventud y Deportes 1999), *Instinto tribal*
 (Editorial Pícaras 2004).¹¹³ She is still seeking a publisher for another volume of poems
Todas las voces que canta el mar, and her first novel *La cofradía cimarrona*.

McDonald's poetry is marked by its brevity and treats themes like discrimination, love, search for identity, ethnic memory, spirituality, and the poet as creator. There is a strong autobiographical thread in the poems of *...la lluvia es una piel*. I analyze two poems from *...la lluvia es una piel* and her treatment of historical revisionism, spirituality, and the various literary devices she employs in developing these themes in her manuscript *La cofradía cimarrona*.

...la lluvia es una piel is a collection of 71 untitled poems. Afro-descendant, and Afro-Caribbean ethnic memory, spirituality, alienation and trauma, and identity are among the themes treated by the poems in this collection.

Plural religious practices are alluded to in poem 25 of *...la lluvia es una piel*....

The poem reads:

En casa,
 los negros somos de papel y aleluyas,
 y guardamos el vudú y el make-a-tell-yu,
 en una canasta con sombrero;
 con miedo a escuchar los llamados de
 los demás...

In this brief six-line poem the poetic persona presents her view of Blacks as made of paper and hallelujahs. This could be interpreted as their possession of a superficial Christianity. They are also said to keep voodoo and the Caribbean English-based creole dialect "make-a-tell-yu" in a hamper, afraid to listen to the so-called fears of others.

¹¹³ *Instinto tribal* also contains poems from McDonald's three published anthologies.

Christian tradition is evident in the “aleluyas” to which Blacks are equated. The keeping of African and Caribbean traditions in a hamper, however, suggests that these elements of their heritage are cherished and therefore kept hidden away. Their desire to hold on to these Afro-centric traditions calls to mind the very nature of the development of Catholicism in Latin America. As Ondina E. and Justo L. González explain

. . . the religious practices among slaves still in bondage are much less shrouded in mystery [than those of those in the maroon communities]. While adopting several traditional Catholic practices such as godparentage and baptism of infants, Afro-American slave religion was much like that of the quilombos: a mixture of African, Indian, and European. Within the slave communities, particularly those in rural areas, the practice of traditional African religions could often be “hidden” within Catholicism or simply practiced in secret. (129)

The second and third lines of the poem contrast in at least two ways. Firstly there is the contrasting of soft, liquid sounds in line 2 with the strong, voiced consonant of line 3. An additional contrast is that of the Christianity and implied Euro-centrism in line 2 with the Afro-centrism of the line that follows. It is significant that strong sounds are used to introduce Afro-derived religion and Afro-Caribbean dialect, two strong indicators of ethnicity and identity.

The poem’s structure relates to its content in line 4. This line that speaks about the act of hiding these practices is shorter than the preceding and succeeding lines, essentially being hidden between them. The idea of hiding or keeping from the view of others what goes on in the private space of the home contrasts with an allusion to space outside the home (“En casa con miedo a escuchar los llamados de los demás” l. 5, 6). The structure, language and symbolism of the poem combine to convey the double consciousness and inner conflicts that sometimes mark the identity of diasporic peoples.

The mother-figure who passes on important aspects of history and identity is the focus of Delia McDonald Woolery’s Poem 18 from *...la lluvia es una piel....*

¿Mamá...?
 Conocía de viajes
 y de puertos,
 de amigos
 -muy negros-
 de Panamá y de Limón.
 A veces, (...)
 Olvida el rincón solitario
 donde embrollaba sus memorias
 y me habla de una mamá buena,
 con cabello blanco
 y piel de achiote
 con ojos de candela,
 sabia y jamaiquina
 sabia y señora

The first line of the poem is a one-word incomplete question (“¿Mamá...?”). The poetic voice’s response to the question records the memories the mother passes on. These are of “viajes/y de puertos,/de amigos/ -muy negros-,/de Panamá y de Limón” (1.2-6). The element of movement that captures the dispersion of a people is reflected in the words “viajes”, “puertos”, “Panamá “, and “Limón.” The latter two words relate to the poet on both the personal and collective levels. As stated earlier, McDonald was born in Panamá to Costa Rican parents of Jamaican descent. She moved to Costa Rica as a child. In the same way that many Antilleans of Jamaican descent made their homes in Costa Rica (principally Limón) many of their compatriots travelled to Panamá to work on the construction of the Canal. The younger generation learns of its heritage through their elders in society. The mother who passes on these experiences thus ensures that her offspring are imbued with a sense of their history and both their Central American and Antillean heritage. These are both vital elements of their identity.

The notion of identity continues with the image of the grandmother (“una mamá buena,/con cabello blanco/[...]/sabia y jamaiquina/sabia y señora” l. 10-14). The

reference to this other, wise, ancestral mother provides an example of a strong matriarchal foundation, one that no doubt serves as an example for the persona. This poem calls to mind Shirley Campbell's untitled poem on page 22 of *Naciendo*. Like McDonald, it is the grandmother who passes on the memories and traditions. They share these with the younger generation thereby providing a legacy that allows them to preserve a strong ethnic identity. The white hair that adorns the female ancestor's head contrasts with her "piel de achiote." The annatto ("achiote") is red on the inside and brown on the outside and used to color and flavor food. Apart from the color contrast this metaphor provides it calls attention to a fruit indigenous to Latin America and the Caribbean and used in the dishes of these regions. The ancestor is therefore presented as a product of the Americas. Her Caribbean identity is highlighted as she is later identified as "jamaquina." The poetic voice uses another metaphor in its reference to the fore-parent's eyes. These are described as "ojos de candela" (l. 12). The fiery intensity this metaphor portrays combines with the image of white hair in line 11 and the anaphoric use of the word "sabia" in the last 2 lines to emphasize the wisdom and knowledge this female fore-parent possesses and passes on to her off-spring. The fact that the poem begins and ends with words usually linked to the female gender – "Mamá" and "señora" highlights its feminine focus.

Afro-descendant female writers continue to paint positive images of Black women. In so doing they generate a revisionist counter-discourse, one that challenges the representations of Blacks in dominant discourse (Gabriel García Márquez' character "Nigromanta" comes to mind).¹¹⁴ This is an important challenge as even some male Afro-

¹¹⁴ Nigromanta the sole Black woman named in Gabriel García Márquez' *Cien años de soledad* (1967) is a prostitute.

descendant writers have portrayed the Afro-descendant female in ways that are negatively stereotypical.¹¹⁵

*La cofradía cimarrona*¹¹⁶ is a neo-baroque, carnivalesque work that combines elements of magic realism and the abject. It tells the story of slavery and maroonage in Central America with a particular focus on Costa Rica. Written to reflect a combination of genres, namely historical chronicle, religious prophecy, and fictional prose *La cofradía cimarrona* contains a variety of lyrical elements, and even includes a poem. My brief analysis of this work focuses on ways in which it reflects elements of historical revisionism, and spirituality. I also focus attention on some of the literary devices and tropes employed and their role in the work.

The main narrative voice belongs to Ludovina, the griot.¹¹⁷ Ygnacio, a dead former enslaved person invokes her because he wants to meet El Cantante Cimarrón. She recounts the chronicle that tells of Costa Rica's role in the slave-trade and the enslavement of Africans and indigenous peoples. Her account highlights the atrocities the enslaved peoples face and the various ways in which they subvert the system. Many escape and flee to the maroon settlements in the mountains. The work highlights the active role some Afro-descendants play in supporting the activities of the colonists. They serve as guards and trackers who seek to deter escape and to capture and punish any who attempted to escape. This general chronicle becomes more personalized when it focuses on Juan Sorías Rubí (el Rojo) and his plantation. One of the enslaved Blacks, who

¹¹⁵ See, for example: Nicomedes Santa Cruz' "Que mi sangre se sancoche", Nicolás Guillén's "Mulata", and Jorge Artel's "Bullerengue."

¹¹⁶ Referred to in parenthetical documentation as *Cofradía*.

¹¹⁷ Griots are individuals in African societies who serve as the repositories of history and oral traditions.

becomes his lover, is actually the son of an enslaved person he ordered dismembered and killed. This trusted partner is marked as special from birth. He is Nicolás (El Moro/el Cantante Cimarrón). Nicolás eventually kills his master and in his role as savior of the enslaved people, takes them to the mountains to the land of the maroons. All efforts to find and destroy the maroon settlement fail and some even lose their lives and disappear in their attempts to do so.

Ludovina's narrative is interspersed by dialogue between her and Ygnacio, and Ygnacio and Yunas, another person from beyond the grave. The work also contains fragments of documents which, combined with the narrative, call into question official history regarding Costa Rica's role in the slave trade. Further, the work casts doubts with regard to Costa Rica's official record relating to the number of enslaved Africans in that territory during the colonial era.

Official history of the Afro-descendant presence and experiences in Spanish America often obscures the true nature of the extent of their demographic distribution across the territory and of their contribution to the development of these nations. In his preface to *No Longer Invisible: Afro-Latin Americans Today*, Alan Phillips, the Director of Minority Rights Group, states that the role of the publication is in part, to:

gain recognition for the experience and situation of Afro-Latin American communities, to identify both their needs and the resources that they can offer to the wider society. [...] It is intended, above all, that *No Longer Invisible* should be a timely and useful contribution to a wider understanding of the African presence in Latin America and to a future for the region characterized by increasing social and economic justice. (ix, x)

An example of why such recognition is necessary is seen in the distortions in the official accounts in Uruguayan history of the role of the enslaved person Ansina.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸Joaquín Lenzina « Ansina » was an Afro-descendant who served as a companion to General Artigas.

Under-Secretary to the Uruguayan Minister of Industry, Energy and Mining, Edgardo Ortuño laments the falsification of Ansina's role, one in which he is portrayed as a mere servant to the nation's hero General Artigas.¹¹⁹ According to Ortuño, Ansina's role was more positive and substantial, one of collaborator and interpreter for Artigas. His relegation to a position of servitude, he claims, has been perpetuated in the nation's educational system, art and other forums. Such distortions, Ortuño feels, are among the tools dominant society has used to keep Blacks in inferior positions of servitude, impacting on their very psyche regarding their place within society. It is only in recent times through the efforts of Afro-descendants, that a correction to this image has been made.¹²⁰

The foregoing is just one example of the need to revise official historical accounts. Afro-descendant writers like Carlos Guillermo Wilson (Cubena), Georgina Herrera, and Nancy Morejón are among those who have in various ways, treated this theme in their works. *La cofradía cimarrona* is Delia McDonald's contribution to revisionism.

Some official historical accounts claim that the labor force in colonial Costa Rica comprised Whites (*Criollos*), *Mestizos*, and Amerindians.¹²¹ According to Juan Carlos Solórzano Fonseca, miscegenation among the above-named groups resulted in a homogeneous group that would be the future Costa Ricans of the center of the country (29). Historian Michael D. Olien accounts for a small number of enslaved Africans,

¹¹⁹At the time of this interview Ortuño was a Deputy (Diputado)/Representative in the Uruguayan parliament (the only Afro-descendant in that position).

¹²⁰ Personal interview.

¹²¹ See: Juan Carlos Solórzano Fonseca, « Costa Rica Colonial: Una Síntesis Interpretativa. » *Costa Rica Colonial: Tres Ensayos* (1984):15-43. See also: Elizabeth Fonseca, *Costa Rica Colonial: la tierra y el hombre.* » (1983) and Elizabeth Fonseca, *Centroamérica: Su historia* (1998).

larger groups of persons of mixed race, and maroons. He describes the role of slavery in Costa Rica as “minor” and states that according to available census data “the number of ‘pure’ Blacks remained constant and small, only about 200 in any given census” (18). Maroons (those who had escaped enslavement) would not have been accounted for in official censuses. As a result, there is really no way of saying with any degree of certainty how many Blacks or Afro-descendants there were in Costa Rica during the colonial era.

McDonald contests the official discourse regarding slavery and the slave trade in this area of Central America. She does so through a combination of content and literary devices. A close examination of the work shows that there is much use of imagery and symbolism. For instance, the stars are personified early in the work as they tell the tale of:

los miles de muertos y desaparecidos por la práctica de las reducciones, las mitas, encomiendas y naborías; con que Macambos y Macamberos, Pardos y principalmente Leales; limpiaron la sombra de los naturales por millones; los pocos sobrevivientes a la invasión de fetidez y enfermedades desconocidas, en bosques y caminos inciertos de montañas, cuevas y en todo lugar donde fueran inalcanzables se escondían, transformándose, sin transición alguna en los Azules y Cimarrones que asolaban montes y senderos por docenas. (*Cofradía* 5)

It is evident that the tale is also that of indigenous peoples who suffered and died at the hands of the colonial masters. Like Afro-descendants, many of these sought refuge in the mountains. The narrator later describes Veraguas as:¹²²

seguro refugio de piratas, negreros, y esclavistas, cama ancha y sin penas para hacer inmensas fortunas con la venta, trueque, compra y reventa; para más referencia; con el robo de toda clase de que mercadería ilota, sin merced ni temor de Dios, por ser uno de los campos esclavos de mayor riqueza e importancia del mundo conocido hasta entonces. (*Cofradía* 33)

¹²² Columbus called the eastern Central American coast, from the Cape Honduras to the area near Cape San Blas, which he discovered during his fourth voyage “Veragua.” This name was used in early colonial references to the region. At one time a distinction was made between the Province or Dukedom of Veragua and Royal Veragua. The former referred to areas of modern-day Panamá and the latter, Costa Rica. See: Segismundo Monet y Prendergast and Vicente Santamaría de Paredes. *Costa Rica-Panamá Arbitration. Opinion Concerning the Question of Boundaries Between The Republics of Costa Rica and Panamá* (1913).

The fragments of correspondence supposedly exchanged during the period, which she incorporates into her work calls into question Costa Rica's true role in both the legal and the illegal trading and distribution of enslaved Africans. Below are two examples of the interpolated historical fragments with their dates and sources:

. . . por las constantes incursiones de zambos musquitos, y piratas, pero más para controlar el ilícito mercado de contrabando de especies, esclavos y tesoros públicos, se ordena se construya un fuerte en la Boca del Río San Juan cuyo nombre será San Fernando . . . Felipe XII, (2 de agosto de 1758, Cartago, sin folios numerados, C.R., --caja no. 34). (*Cofradía* 34)

Complementario Colonial, 01258, registro de compra esclava, La Matina (Documento borroso y deforme) . . . martes 28 de febrero, día de San Pedro Nolasco arribo de El San Cristóbal, con una carga total de cinco mil cuatrocientos veinte esclavos a cargo de la Real Compañía Importadora de Esclavos para América . . . Bonifacio Jiménez Vonilla, encargado de puerto . . . --[s.l.] – [s.f.].caja no. 21. (*Cofradía* 68)

The work's disclosure of a sizeable population of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the country and the formation of a formidable maroon population questions too, Costa Rica's official image of itself as a *Criollo/Mestizo* nation, one that was projected for much of that country's modern history.¹²³

Revisionism extends also to a refutation of Spain's religious mission of civilization in its New World colonies. The narrator relates that one Governor received the sum of two million ducats "para civilizar las almas de los esclavos, indios, sarracenos y blancos" (9). Later in the work, a priest demands that those who want to be saved give their offerings in gold:

¹²³ Costa Rican History professor Rina Cáceres related in an interview the efforts of culture worker Carol Britton to sensitize people of mixed African and Indian heritage in Guanacaste, Costa Rica to their African heritage. These have adopted an indigenous identity and not one that is Afro-descendant. Through e-mail communication, Britton confirmed that in August 2007 she took the Angolan National Ballet Company to Guanacaste. She recalls that many residents recognized their African ancestry through this contact. They were able to identify with utensils, musical instruments and dances.

un rocín gris y pimienta que iba frente a Fraile Soto recogiendo la ofrenda diaria y obligada de los que deseaban escapar a la maldición de su palabra: Oro. Oro, en monedas y cartones, tierras y comida, oro, cuyo placer mayor era ver la forma mórbida y sentenciosa en que se movían en el fondo de la carreta para él... (80)

One character in the work even remarks that some minds only think in metal (“*algunas mentes solo piensan en metálico!...*” (99)). The quotes above highlight the material benefits that motivated both secular and ecclesiastical officials in their mission in the Americas.

In some instances the lines between this apparent historiography and fiction are blurred. For example a supposed correspondence written by one Alejandro de Ojeda of LaJoya, Costa Rica to Francisco Vivar and dated September 17, 1756, taken from box number 63, appears between pages 43 through 48. In part, Ojeda’s correspondence points out who is to be blamed for the slave trade and its consequences. Interpolated among these fragments are other fragments (in different font) that begin with the same words as Ojeda’s “*culpa de . . .*” These draw attention to other places where blame should be placed. For instance, it must include those who use religion as an excuse to boost the slave trade and to impose their religion on others. The interpolated fragments are supposedly Vivar’s responses (written on the same date and stored in box number 64) to Ojeda’s missive. The tone of the interpolated fragments calls into question their authorship since they represent a strong condemnation of the practices surrounding slavery in the territory. One section of Vivar’s response reads:

Culpa de los barcos negreros, que dando las notas de su arribada con los cañones relucientes contaban las piezas apiñadas y estibadas en bodegas llenas a rebalsar, apartando, brillando con aceite de coco, pescado y tiburón las pieles cansadas, mientras teñían el pelo de los viejos con resina para que pasaran por nuevos, separando la murga de lo bueno, para luego lanzar lo inservible, y los muertos por la borda para festín de los depredadores que seguían las naves. (Cofradía 46)

Even though authorship here could possibly be attributed to a narrative voice it could also be that of an authentic critical voice from the colonial period. If the latter is indeed the case, it draws attention to the fact that the White (exploiter) vs. Black (exploited) binary was not as simple and straightforward as some history books present it.¹²⁴ This is brought out too in the description of the role of non-Whites and even enslaved Africans or their descendants in the exploitative practices connected with slavery:

y no solo los de blanca piel así actuaban: indios, de los llamados Pardos, Ladinos, Mestizos, Capitanes de Línea por su conocimiento de los tres mundos y negros esclavos de los conocidos y llamados como Matineros, Macomberos, y en especial Leales, también lo hacía . . . (*Cofradía* 8)

In fact the revisionism in this work blurs a number of lines regarding race, gender and religion some of which I discuss later.

The contestatory role of historical revisionism, whether of past centuries or of more contemporary periods creates a space for dialogue. Questions regarding the reasons behind attempts to erase a portion of the nation's history may relate in some ways to the misunderstanding or even non-acceptance of the aesthetics of this group's literary and artistic works. The questions that arise could also cause those members of the society who are open to exploring and/or embracing the various facets of their racial identity to do so.

In her novel *La cofradía cimarrona* McDonald explores the issue of Afro-centric spirituality extensively. The work itself could be described as an example of textual syncretism. In a work of fiction in which fragments of historical documents are skillfully interwoven, the structure is also very often reminiscent of scriptural accounts and prophecy. The writer achieves this in a variety of ways. For one thing, a number of

¹²⁴ Steve Stern makes a similar point, which is cited in chapter 2 of this study.

sections are numbered like verses of scripture and begin with words taken from the Holy Bible. These very verses though give way to treating concerns and beliefs of the enslaved Africans. For instance, the work begins:

1.1 y. En el principio era el Verbo . . . 1.2 y. El Verbo eran todas las cosas . . . 1.3 y. Todas las cosas fueron hechas por Los Samunfos; y sin ellos nada de lo hecho, fue hecho . . . 1.4 porque. En el principio, el espíritu del descubrimiento flotó sobre cabezas infladas de fiebre, y el verbo era palabra y la palabra era ELEOSHUM. (2)

The verses quoted above start off like the biblical verse at John 1:1. However, they continue with references to other spiritual entities (Los Samunfos),¹²⁵ and practices not referred to in the Bible. The word Eleoshum seems to be a derivation from the Hebrew word for God, Elohim. In the context of the syncretic nature of this work Eleoshum could also be a combination of the Hebrew Elohim with the Yoruba Ochum. These verses and other sections of the narration indicate that the enslaved people followed the customs taught to them by their masters externally while maintaining their own beliefs and practices. This is highlighted in one section where the words of the Lord's Prayer (typed in bold print) are interspersed with verses (in regular print) that show that in reality, the enslaved characters were directing their prayers to their own god, asking him to see their plight, and to deliver them by pouring out his wrath on their oppressors (156). There is no mistaking too the parallels between Jesus, the Biblical savior and El Cantante Cimarron, the savior and leader of the group that leads those who are still enslaved by Juan Sorías to join the maroon community. In both cases their births and roles as saviors are prophesied. Like Jesus, El Cantante Cimarron is endowed with healing powers and powers of resurrection.

¹²⁵ The work's glossary does not say what the "Samunfos" were but the context suggests that they were some form of deity or angelic forces.

The syncretic prayers of the enslaved prompt their gods to intervene on their behalf. The Samunfos are shown with the hurricane rolled up in their hands. They then let it loose over the land (26). The winds of this storm are personified as they tear through buildings, driving fear into the hearts of the occupants, and destroying all in their path.

El viento se dedicó a abrir puertas, cerrar ventanas, dar trancazos sobre las llaves, haciendo girar el centrote de las mesas, y sillas, a asomarse a las habitaciones vacías para ponerse los zapatos, los manteados, mirarse en los espejos, ver cómo le quedaba la ropa ajena bailando de un lugar a otro y reírse de los dueños de esas casas que muertos del susto ante semejante cosa, en otro rincón, babeaban tanto o más que la lluvia cayendo afuera. (26, 27)

The personification in the above example draws attention to the ways in which the Afro-derived deities enjoy their acts of vengeance. The enjoyment pictured above relates too to the reference to thunder as “El Aplauso de Dios” (19). In a later tale of flight, even the animals play a role in aiding those who flee enslavement. They defecate in front of the doors of the Macamberos (those who helped the masters to enforce slavery and who hunted down the runaways). In fear of this act because it represented bad luck, the trackers were confined to their homes. This allows the escapees to flee to the mountains (61). These are only a few of the ways in which McDonald brings the reader’s attention to roles of the forces of nature as the agents of the Afro-derived gods.

The mixture of references and allusions to Christian and Afro-centric spiritual are abundant in this section. The society is described as a Sodom and Gomorrah (21). The animals that flee to the mountains as the storm is about to begin are pictured moving straight ahead on their path as though they feared being turned into a pillar of salt or something similar (24). The water and the land are said to open new paths (“mostrando caminos que no habían sido vistos desde los tiempos en que los hebreos corrieron por sus vidas huyendo de farón por sus vidas huyendo de farón bajo esas mismas aguas”) (30).

These and other such references indicate that whereas the storm is a work of vengeance by the gods of the enslaved peoples, the acts of deliverance are equated with similar acts in the Bible. This emphasizes the work's syncretic nature.

The storm's severity is captured through visual, tactile, and auditory images. The auditory element is captured through the use of onomatopoeia in one instance, and personification in another. The sound of thunder crashing through the sky is clearly heard in the word: "BrRrRaaaaaaa.bUm" (22). A sudden downpour is captured with "Brabratummmmm" (16). This is indicative of the rain's intensity which is further emphasized through a combination of the auditory and the tactile in the phrase "el griterío de vidrios de agua" (16). Additional visual imagery is provided in the metaphoric reference to the rain as multicolored diamonds: "diamantes multicolores cayendo descuidadamente del cielo" (16). The light and colors form a contrast with the darkness that follows as the storm progresses. The rain of this storm is personified as an asthmatic person who coughs up darkness: "Asmática la lluvia, tosiendo oscuridad desde los rincones hacia donde sale el sol en las mañanas" (17). Here the sound of the rain is linked to the darkness that results from the inclement weather.

The intensity of this storm is the work of the gods and it brings the bones of those long dead back to life. In so doing it causes a separation between "los muertos nuestros de los muertos aquellos" (30). One of the many instances of magic realism in the work is evident when the resurrected bones of the Afro-descendants return to life and seek refuge in the mountains ("sin una libra de sangre, o carne dentro de ellos para hacer contrapeso, pálidos, y ojerosos, algunos huesudos, y chimuelos, otros (...) eternamente sonrientes entraron a la montaña tras la peregrinación de los animales" (29).

Spirituality as an important feature of Afro-descendant cultural identity is treated in its various manifestations in the works of Afro-descendant writers. McDonald's works are no exception. As an aesthetic criterion the works that treat traditional Christian beliefs and value systems will no doubt form an easy basis for dialogue with works from other canons that treat similar themes and share the same worldview. They could also form a basis for contestatory dialogue with those within the same canon and outside of it, for instance Afro-centric and indigenous religions. As readers explore these texts they become aware of the truly diverse nature of the cultural manifestations within Spanish American societies. The fact that in some Spanish American societies Afro-derived religious practices are not confined to people of African descent also draws attention to the issue of counterpublics at the basis of this study.

The combinations of literary techniques and tropes McDonald uses in this work are closely related to issues of plurality and heterogeneity. For instance, she engages in strategies of defamiliarization through the use of names of individuals, deities, events, locations, and utensils. The use of character names like NachoDosVeces, SantaNoMeMiresPiedra, RosaMaria MataEspinoza, and ElCaradeSerpiente, written as shown, relate to the personalities of the individuals. NachoDosVeces, for example, is described as one who always desired more of everything, including gold, silver, land, and slaves (*Cofradía* 35). SantaNoMe MiresPiedra for her part lost her eye and is therefore blind (57). Her use of these names calls to mind some of the symbolic character names in *Chombo* (1981) by the Afro-Panamanian writer Carlos Guillermo Wilson (Cubena). In Cubena's work, for example, a young American woman who lives on the military base is called "Magnolia Zam," and Karafula Barrescoba is the name given to a Panamanian

woman of African descent (colonial Black) who rejects blackness as part of her identity and is vehemently opposed to the Antillean presence in the country.

In other instances upper and lower case letters are combined for emphasis. This is the case in the phrase “enegrecieron los litorales PoR tOnElAdAs con la sangre de hombres, mujeres y niños” (*Cofradía* 7). Emphasis is also achieved through the writing of phrases and sentences entirely in bold, uppercase letters. McDonald’s experimentation with language truly defies normal usage. In addition to the examples cited above, there are frequent references in the narrative to the titles of various deities or spiritual forces, and agents within the society like the Mocamberos and Leales. These are used throughout the work and some are indigenous while others are African-derived in nature. So extensive is this usage that a glossary is provided for the benefit of the reader. The diversity of defamiliarization techniques in the text could be interpreted as a means of contesting homogeneity and calling attention to heterogeneity and difference on a societal level. In some sections of the work, defamiliarization combines with elements of magic realism and the abject.

On a structural level, this work is an excellent example of polysyndeton in prose. In certain sections the conjunction “y” is placed at the beginning of lines and a period is placed after it:

y. Su tienda está en el alma de cada persona oprimida, y su nombre es el deseo de quienes sufren; grande es la fama de El Eleoshum entre quienes no conocen su nombre y su poder, llamándole El Cantante Cimarrón

y. Sin saber que al contrario de otros dioses, memoria y poder, abrigo y túnica, sandalias de oro, y halo de esplendor pondrá a sus izquierda tierra de labranza para aquello que significa lo que otros ven, cosechando de su costado derecho para los suyos la más pura semilla de esperanza, . . . (*Cofradía* 67, 68)

This strategy, in addition to providing rhythmic flavor to the work, gives these sections a sense of continuity and orality reminiscent of historical or scriptural chronicles. The fact that these sections are recounted by Ludovina, the Griot, not only reinforces the element of orality but also emphasizes the link with African traditions and the work's syncretic nature.

As stated earlier, this is a work of prose that is filled with lyrical features. In addition to personification, and polysyndeton there is frequent use of similes, metaphors, and oxymoron. In addition to the examples previously mentioned, personification is seen for instance when the storm ends and the sun gradually begins to shine again. The sky is said to have opened its eyes (“el cielo abrió sus ojos de nuevo sobre ellos”). The sun for its part, poked its nose out (“el solaris más pequeño asomó por fin las narices de entre las esquinas del cielo una mañana del noveno día, alumbrando tímidamente las costillas...”) (31). Personification here serves to highlight the living nature of the elements mentioned thereby linking them to the gods for whom they serve as agents.

The narrator's description of one colonial governor is a mixture of irony, similes, antithesis, and oxymoron. He is described as having: “un corazón de piedra bruta, tan feo, por dentro como por fuera era bello y agraciado como un burro vestido con encajes y collarín de perlas y diamante; siendo su lengua dulce como miel con ácido” (9). This description highlights the theme of appearance versus reality. The Crown's representative appears to be cultured and civilized and no doubt speaks with refinement but is really harsh and cruel.

The element of orality and folklore is further emphasized through numerous repetitions of a section of the narrative. The section begins with the words:

No hay nada peor, que un pueblo ignorante a su destino y crédulo al poder de su destino, porque simplemente hace sus propias reglas, pudiendo a la orilla de cualquier parte y, más junto al mar, si se está solo para pensar solo en hacer dinero con el pellejo de los demás sin que importe nada más. (152)

To each of the three successive repetitions of the above more information is increasingly added thereby building on the original material. This technique, typical of oral traditions, is reminiscent of a game of narrative improvisation in which new information is added by ensuing participants. The use of this technique calls to mind Kubayanda's observation that:

Black minority literature, even when it uses a European language seeks rhythmic reintegration into the signs and substance of the Afro-American and African traditions. It is fundamentally a written expression of reconnection and reappropriation. (122)

To capture certain rhythms and cadences Afro-descendant writers employ literary devices like assonance, oxymoron, anaphora, polysyndeton, and onomatopoeia. These writers do not seek simply to create a superficial effect as was the case in *negrista* poetry. The tropes they employ are combined with profound ideas and issues that reflect the complexity of the reality they are exploring.

At the outset of this chapter reference was made to the diverse aesthetics that inform the poetry of our post-modern, post-vanguard era. The themes contemporary poets treat are social, historical, and existential. They do so in a variety of styles that stretches the limits of poetic form. Their use of registers too varies from the formal and highly metaphoric to the colloquial. Similarly, contemporary narrative follows a variety of aesthetics. Some writers show clearly their discipleship to the 'new narrative' of the 1960s by their use of magic realism and the fantastic, or techniques of introspection and time shifts. Testimonial-type writing brushes shoulders with new eco-narratives, and the

works of those who seek to divorce themselves completely from the earlier 'Boom' narrative by pursuing writing that they describe as 'disinterested', and that treats the current realities of the modern Latin American urban experience in a neo-baroque style.¹²⁶

The Afro-Uruguayan and Afro-Costa Rican writers whose works I have analyzed also experiment with different styles and subject matter. The variety of forms these writers employ indicates that Afro-descendant writing is developing along the lines of that of other contemporary Spanish American writers. The uniqueness of the work of this group of writers is defined by their use of additional aesthetic elements peculiar to those whose discourse is Afro-centric in nature like their interest in spirituality, ethnic memory, reaffirmation of identity, revising history and the position of the woman in society, and the pursuit of unity and brotherhood among all humans. Their attempts at interculturality are evident in their use of syncretism, intertextuality, and a combination of techniques from foundational Latin American literary movements like the avant-garde with Afro-descendant aesthetics.

As mentioned previously, the majority of critical work on these writers has come from the U.S academy. One reason for this could be because these academic critics are sensitive to the Black aesthetic from their own experiences and engagement with African American literature and criticism. Another reason is the existence in some U.S universities of programs that focus on minority literatures. This being the case, academics in this field, seek out works of minority writers and make them the focus of their research.

¹²⁶ See: Alberto Fuguet, "Prólogo al libro *McOndo*" (March, 1996), and Jorge Volpi *et al* "Manifiesto Crack" (October 2000).

As discussed in chapter 2 official legitimization of Afro-descendant writing in Spanish America is varied. In the two Spanish American countries we focus on in this study, Costa Rica seems to have granted more recognition to its Afro-descendant writers than Uruguay. This has been achieved through inclusion in some anthologies, and in the academic curricula. Nevertheless, writers in both areas still feel the difficulties they face with regard to legitimization are due to (i) a lack of appreciation of their aesthetic and (ii) unequal access to sources of mediation that aid in the promotion of literary works.¹²⁷ In the conclusion of this study I draw attention to some of the areas of aesthetic overlap that exist between the Afro-descendant counterpublic and other literary traditions within Spanish America. These areas are spaces that provide room for dialogue that could help in the achievement of literary interculturality as the Afro-descendant strands are woven into the plural literary fabric of the Spanish America. I now turn to address issues surrounding the recognition of Belizean literature within the corpus of literature of the English-speaking Caribbean.

¹²⁷ Personal interviews.

Chapter Four: Aesthetics and Literature in the Anglophone Caribbean: A Look at Belizean Literature

4.1. ON CARIBBEAN CANONS

HERITAGE – Felene Cayetano-Swaso

I am as much rice and beans as ereba and bundiga; I am as much porridge as sahou uwala busiganou. I was nourished with Mrs. Manting’s chow mein in the same week my granny made tapou on the fire hearth. I bathed in Gumagaruga wata right there in Dangriga,	in the same week relatives bathed our ancestors who left us with more than memories. My mind juxtaposes the blood of Christ with hiu in a dugu; sets the priest beside the buyei and says: I’m open to your message so what am I? I am both.
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Felene Cayetano-Swaso’s poem “Heritage” highlights the diverse cultural elements that come together to create her Belizean identity. The question that inspired Cayetano to write this poem asked whether she self-identifies as Belizean or Garifuna.¹²⁸ Though some may see the question as simplistic, Belizean teacher Leodegario Obando claims that many Belizeans, on an everyday basis, do favor an ethnic identity before one that is national.¹²⁹ If this is indeed the case, the poem above could be seen then as presenting a national identity that brings together the various ethnic facets of Belizean society. The poetic persona brings out the nation’s diversity through references to the European (“porridge”, and Christianity), the indigenous (“tapou”), the Asian (Mrs. Manting’s chow mein), and the Garifuna (“ereba”, “bundiga”).

¹²⁸ Personal interview.

¹²⁹ Personal interview.

This focus on diversity is progressive since it does not favor one identity over another. The various elements that make up the national as well as the ethnic identity are presented as equally important. The persona juxtaposes the national dish “rice and beans” with those specific to the Garinagu like ‘ereba’ and ‘bundiga’, and puts the priest side by side with the Garifuna spiritual leader the *buyei*.¹³⁰ Her openness to the practices of both of these religions together with her previously cited actions point to an identity that is not made up of just one or other element but of the diverse strands that when braided together represent Belizean and by extension, Caribbean culture. In the last line of the poem the poetic persona asserts that she is “both” – both Belizean and Garifuna. As indicated above, by accepting a Belizean identity, the persona established the heterogeneity that such an identity represents. The Garifuna identity too is not singular given the racial and cultural fusion that characterizes this group. The poem therefore touches on an issue that is important in our discussion about the Caribbean literary aesthetic. It also serves as an appropriate introduction to a discussion on the special place of Belizean literature within the Caribbean.

So far the discussion in this study has focused on (i) the canon debates in the United States and in Spanish America, (ii) legitimizing practices and their impact on the visibility of Afro-descendant literature in Spanish America, and (iii) criteria that bring writing into the Afro-descendant canon/counterpublic. The aesthetic of writing among those who are members of this counterpublic is different from the hegemonic Latin American literary canon because it focuses on themes and styles that speak to the Afro-descendant experience in the region. In this chapter I discuss Belizean literature within the Caribbean literary tradition. My discussion on the place of a national canon as a

¹³⁰ Garinagu is the collective plural form of the word Garifuna.

counterpublic within a larger body of regional works examines mediation issues that affect legitimation and that are of concern to contemporary writers in Belize. It also considers the impact of the colonial legacy on literary development.

In March 2010 I conducted a survey of academics and critics in the field of Caribbean/West Indian literature from the University of the West Indies, and the University of Guyana. Their responses indicate that for them a contemporary canon of literature for the English-speaking Caribbean will contain works written by more female than male writers. The texts these academics see as canonical also include those written by women of Indo-Caribbean descent, works written in English by writers from the French Caribbean, Derek Walcott's epic poem "Omeros" and Lorna Goodison's "Gardening in the Tropics." With regard to themes, these academics feel that the works in a contemporary Caribbean canon are those that explore issues traditionally associated with Caribbean literature like displacement/migration (*The Swinging Bridge*), history (*I, Tituba Black Witch of Salem*), Afro-Caribbean spirituality (*Myal* and *At the Full and Change of the Moon*), and cultural memory (*At the Full and Change of the Moon*). The works they cite, however, also explore other themes, like feminism, incest, gender hybridity and homosexuality. These latter themes are absent or treated more covertly in earlier works. A similar survey thirty years ago would most certainly have revealed a list dominated by male writers with maybe Jean Rhys as the only female writer. This very observation is made by Laura Niesen de Abruña (1988) who states:

until the late 1970s very little was written about these [female] authors because the critics' attention was focused on the male writers Wilson Harris, George Lamming, Edgar Mittleholtzer, and Edward Brathwaite. As late as 1979, the popular critical text *West Indian Literature*, edited by Bruce King, mentions only Jean Rhys among the many women writers from this area. (86)

The shift in focus indicates not only the changing nature of canons as stated in an earlier chapter, but also the growing impact of the writing of women from a variety of racial backgrounds on the region's literature. This latter point is indicative of a growing awareness of the true plurality of the region and its discourses, a reality that has sometimes been obscured by the "creole" discourse.

Though the Caribbean is generally recognized as a multicultural space discourses of creolization have served as a two-edged sword. On the one hand such discourses forged nationalistic projects aimed at creating a new hybrid identity for the post-independence citizen, and on the other, they presented a discourse of a falsely universal cultural unity. Recent scholarship has sought to disrupt previously homogenizing discourses by revealing ways in which discourses of creolization in the Caribbean have served to "disappear" or alienate certain groups like those of Asian-Caribbean descent, or of Amerindian descent.¹³¹ Similar discussions are also taking place in the Francophone Caribbean where the term "indianité" has been coined to sometimes contest, and at others to complement, the discourse of "creolité."¹³² As a result, polemics surrounding the Anglophone Caribbean canon have moved beyond calls for its expansion to include the works of more women writers, to claiming a place for gay, lesbian, and transgendered writings, as well as Asian-Caribbean women's writing.

Alison Donnell's *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History*, for example, presents itself as a supplement to the literary

¹³¹ See for example: Alison Donnell, *Twentieth Century Caribbean Literature. Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* (2006), and Shalini Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial. Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity* (2004).

¹³² See: Ernest Moutoussamy, *La Guadeloupe et son indianité*. (1987); Brinda Mehta, *Notions of Identity, Diaspora, and Gender in Caribbean Women's Writing* (2009) ; and Brinda Mehta, "Indianité Francophones: Kala Pani narratives" *L'esprit Créateur* 50.2 (Summer 2010): 1-11.

history of the Anglophone Caribbean. Donnell cites one of her aims in the book as engaging in “a critical recomposition of twentieth-century Anglophone Caribbean writings as a century-long archive of works by both men and women” (4). She sees the foregrounding of this point as important given the “distinct, individual identities” male writers like Derek Walcott, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, V.S Naipaul and Samuel Selvon have retained, while their female counterparts are granted “a collective gendered identity” (4). Her work therefore examines the silences and erasure of the writing and critical practices of the region’s literature and literary criticism. She reflects on whether “the questions that have shaped Anglocreole Caribbean literary histories and traditions [...] remain relevant and productive in our contemporary societies (5).¹³³ The traditional treatments of Anglophone Caribbean literature Donnell challenges are (i) an approach to foundational texts from the perspective of nationalism, and (ii) approaches that focus on the “Black Atlantic” criticism that foreground the works and perspectives of writers who reside outside the region. In addition to highlighting the invisibility of women writers of the pre-1950 era, like Una Marson, Donnell charts the early writing of Indo-Caribbean women, the exclusion of the Indo-Caribbean female subject from feminist discourse in the region, and agrees with Shalini Puri’s “douglapoeitics” as an approach to reading the region’s texts (156-179).¹³⁴ She points also, to deconstructions of traditional hegemonic

¹³³ Donnell uses the term “anglocreole” in order to call attention to the hybrid nature of the linguistic and cultural traditions that inform the region’s literature.

¹³⁴ Shalini Puri outlines her “douglapoeitics” in *The Caribbean Post-Colonial: Social Equality, Post Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity* (2004). In Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana the “douglapoeitic” is a person of mixed East Indian and African heritage. Puri herself sees “douglapoeitics” emerging in certain cultural phenomena in Trinidad and Tobago like “chutney soca” where the typically Caribbean East Indian rhythms are combined with the traditionally Afro-centric soca music. She points out that it is not a concept that could be used across the board in assessing the cultural production of that nation or of any other nation where there is fusion or contact among racial or ethnic groups. She acknowledges too, that it may not always be possible to use the concept in literary analysis.

treatments of gender and sexuality by highlighting the female exploration of erotic writing, the end of silences surrounding issues like rape, incest, HIV and AIDS, and same-sex relationships, and the writing of transgendered subjects (181-245). She does this without neglecting the social and historical realities of the region. If one identifies the hegemonic canon in the English-speaking Caribbean as those works legitimized by scholarship, anthologies, critical attention and inclusion in academic curricula, Donnell's historiography of twentieth-century Caribbean literature is a force that destabilizes the canon by drawing attention to critical perspectives, subjects and texts that writers and critics of Caribbean literature have only very recently begun to treat in their works.

Other discussions on the Caribbean literary canon are concerned with the cross-cultural focus of this body of work. Some notable contributions have come from Antonio Benítez Rojo, Silvio Torres-Saillant and Sandra Pouchet Paquet. Whereas Benítez Rojo and Pouchet Paquet refuse to define fixed boundaries for the Caribbean, Torres-Saillant frames his discourse in the context of a geographical space that extends from "the Bahamas to Trinidad and the continental enclaves of Belize, Guyana, Suriname and, French Guiana" (2). Torres-Saillant does not place geography as the main focus of his discourse, however. The cross-cultural space he defines is not confined to the English-speaking world but takes in the French, Spanish, and Dutch speaking areas of the region as well. He credits the fusion of elements from a variety of cultures, for example European, Asian, African, Amerindian, and similar socio-historical experiences with having created the uniqueness and unity of Caribbean culture and by extension its literature (1-58). For Torres-Saillant the element of cross-culturality of Caribbean literature comes about because the focus is on all the linguistic and cultural areas of the

region and ways in which a Caribbean aesthetic emerges out of this diversity. The importance Torres-Saillant gives to migration as a key element that informs the writing of the region should not be overlooked in his cross-cultural focus.¹³⁵ Indeed, it serves to take his discourse outside the fixed boundaries of the Caribbean space.

Torres-Saillant's unified Caribbean culture is problematic in that it seeks to unite people of different linguistic backgrounds who were colonized by four different European nations. Slavery, and in some cases indentureship, was a historical reality across the Caribbean and is one of the realities of the colonial experience, along with other cultural factors, that unites the peoples of the region. Nevertheless, this unity should not be seen as a cultural fusion. Peter Manuel (2006) provides an example of how the region's music can be unifying even with its diversity. He states:

Son, reggae, soca, and kompa [have the tendency of becoming] integrating symbols, uniting audiences of all communities. In such cases, music serves less as a flame beneath a melting pot than as a dressing poured over a mixed salad, integrating its diverse elements into a coherent whole. (277)

So, even though the peoples of the region may share certain cross-cultural affinities and interests, Caribbean culture is not a homogeneous fusion or seamless blend of all its various tendencies. As I show later in this chapter certain realities of British colonization like absenteeism were generally not issues that obtained in the Hispanic Caribbean. Additionally, even within countries of similar linguistic and colonial backgrounds certain cultural differences exist. Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago seem to be very similar demographically (with East Indians and Blacks as the largest racial groups), nevertheless, some easily recognizable cultural differences relate to the strong French and Hispanic

¹³⁵ In *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae* (2006) Peter Manuel discusses ways in which migration both within and outside of the various linguistic regions of the Caribbean has resulted in the cross-fertilization of certain musical forms.

influences in Trinidadian society. The existence in popular Trinidadian speech of expressions like “*doux doux*”, “*macafouchette*”, and “*mamaguy*” are derived from French and Spanish respectively. “Parang” music, popular during Christmas celebrations in Trinidad, is believed to be of Hispanic origin. The Amerindian element in Guyanese society provides a dimension to that country’s diversity that is not present in many Anglophone Caribbean countries (except Dominica and Belize). Caribbean literature is therefore a reflection of the diversity that exists within the region.

In his Nobel Lecture Derek Walcott likens these disparate cultural manifestations to the uneven, ill-fitting fragments of a broken vase that are stuck together again. He describes these uneven shards as more beautiful in the reconfigured vessel than in their original form (n.pag). Antonio Benítez Rojo sees the socio-economic conditions the plantation engendered as crucial to any study of Caribbean cultures (38). He rejects the notion of a unified Caribbean culture in his statement that: “[a] Haitian or a Martinican feels closer to France than to Jamaica, and a Puerto Rican identifies better with the United States than with Suriname (...) it is evident to me that the cultural panorama of the Caribbean is supremely heterogeneous” (37).¹³⁶ Benítez Rojo uses the term “supersyncretism” to describe the complexity of origins and significations of various aspects of Caribbean culture. He explains that their syncretism did not just begin as a result of their colonial encounters but from previous contact and transferences between cultures (12-16). So the Caribbean is defined by its multiplicity of cultural manifestations that create what Benítez describes as polyrhythms arrived at through improvisation (18, 19). Benítez-Rojo therefore sees Caribbean culture as a coming together of elements

¹³⁶ Peter Manuel (2006). Manuel expresses a similar view to Benítez-Rojo’s with regard to the affinities that exist within linguistic regions of the Caribbean and between those regions and the European nation of which it was (or in some cases, still is a colony).

from pre-Colombian America, Africa, Europe, Asia and elsewhere, not necessarily in their traditional forms, but with transformations and improvisations peculiar to the post-colonial situation.

Although not every aspect of Caribbean culture provides evidence of the variety of elements Benitez-Rojo mentions, the heterogeneity that is characteristic of much of the life and culture of the region is well-documented. The issues of heterogeneity corresponds to my argument that although there may be certain features common to the literatures of the region, there are others peculiar to each specific linguistic area and by extension to individual countries within linguistic zones.

Sandra Pouchet Paquet too refuses to define fixed boundaries for the Caribbean given the role migration continues to play on literary production, marketing, reading, and evaluation (99, 109). For her, the Caribbean canon is “a place in the imagination, a mythic place linked variously to a multiplicity of origins and associations within and beyond the geographical limit of the Caribbean” (109). Pouchet Paquet looks at the teaching of Caribbean literature in the U.S academy, and the increasing presence of diverse Caribbean diasporas that includes writers who occupy both the North American space and that of the Caribbean through their writing and their constant travel (103 -106). Paquet does not overlook the important issues of the pedagogical canon and the role of overseas publishers and ways in which these inform what is taught and critiqued.

Whether one speaks of interculturality, critical multiculturalism, or cross-culturalism, the importance of the heterogeneous nature of Caribbean societies is a well-established fact. So even though one recognizes Belize’s historical and political position as a member of the English-speaking Caribbean, the fact that that country’s cultural and

linguistic ties extend into the indigenous and the Spanish-speaking worlds and beyond are factors that are of optimum importance when one considers its literature. The ways in which Belize's cultural diversity and geopolitical reality affect its literature provide an example of how a national literature can have its own distinctive features even though it shares elements of the literature of the wider regional corpus. Before examining Belizean literature in detail we must look at the impact the British colonial legacy has had on the literatures of the English-speaking Caribbean.

4.2. THE BRITISH COLONIAL LEGACY AND THE CREATION OF A WEST INDIAN LITERARY AESTHETIC

As previously noted those promoting a colonial agenda in the Spanish-speaking colonies, imposed criteria for granting recognition and value to the cultural capital of the colonial elite. The same was true in the British colonies. Language, literature, and cultural values of the metropolis were promoted as the standard to be upheld and local inhabitants in these colonies who aspired to enter the middle class eagerly copied these. Much of this acculturation took place through the educational system so the ones most affected would have been recipients of more than just the basic levels of schooling. In an article on the presence of the French and British colonial systems in works by Patrick Chamoiseau and V.S Naipaul, Roberto Strongman explains that colonial education created an elite among colonial subjects who, though different racially from the colonial masters, were acculturated in accordance with British tastes and standards (84). Commenting on the role education played in the British colonial endeavor, Helen Tiffin concludes:

[c]olonial education in the English Caribbean was designed for, and continued to be promulgated in the service of colonist control. It thus stressed the universal/imperialist at the expense of the local; it fostered and validated the importance, centrality, and excellence of all things English and instilled its pan-colonial observe (sic), the ‘cultural cringe’; and, since its focus was on a social control whose effective mechanism was the spread of English values, it focused disproportionately on the language, religion, and, in the particular, the literary culture of England. (44)

It is therefore no surprise that some of the early literature written by West Indians imitated the styles and trends in vogue in British writing. Though imitative, many of these early writers were taking small steps toward literary independence.

J.E.C.McFarlane in his preface to *A Treasury of Jamaican Poetry* (1949) comments on the ways in which these early writers “adhered to the established traditions of English verse” yet transformed the original use of some verse forms like the *villanelle*, and used imagery and rhythm in ways that distinguished their work from British poetry (6, 7).

Worthy of note is the relative rapidity with which the region’s writers were able to rid themselves of this cultural yoke and move forward in their creation of a literary aesthetic autochthonous to the region.

In *The Pleasures of Exile*, George Lamming asserts that it is indeed a wonder that there could be any “West Indian writers” given the fact that so much of what was British was imposed on the colonial psyche and “those who read and teach reading in [West Indian] society have started their education by questioning [the] very right to write [of the native West Indian]” (27). Another writer of the period, Guyanese poet A.J. Seymour states in the pages of the journal *Kyk-over-al* in 1949 that although West Indians are attracted to English Literature they realize that it was not written for them or with them in mind. They therefore see the necessity of writing their own books for themselves and their people (26). It is this necessity in an environment in which the non- White West

Indian citizen was never in the minority demographically speaking that allowed for the creation of a regional literary tradition.

One factor that marks the Spanish colonial endeavor as different from the British and French is absenteeism. There was no large-scale migration of English and French men and women to the colonies in a way that was characteristic of the Spanish colonies. Even those of European descent who lived in the colonies were affected by this outlook. In *A Century of West Indian Education*, Shirley C. Gordon explains that although the English in pre-emancipation society in the West Indies enjoyed some of the external trappings of “English genteel life”, they still “preferred to enjoy these luxuries in their authentic setting in England; they absented themselves from their estates leaving attorneys and clerks to run the business of sugar production” (14). Kenneth Ramchand describes absenteeism as having become “a psychological phenomenon so that, for the White creoles, England was home; the West Indies was never the loved place ... Since England was the acknowledged and proud center of art and culture, it was not necessary to renovate the sunny slum” (17, 18). This absenteeism is one factor that allowed for the growth of the non-White populations in the region.

Census results from the immediate post-emancipation era in the British West Indies shows for example that in Guyana (British Guiana) in 1851 the number of Europeans numbered 11,558. These included 7,528 Portuguese imported from Madeira.¹³⁷ The total number of inhabitants of the colony was 30,346. It is important to note that at the time there was no enumeration or estimate of Amerindians in the census.

¹³⁷ Because Portuguese/Madeirans were recruited as laborers they were not part of the elite class in colonial Guyana. They were, and still are, viewed as different from Whites (Caucasians). Independent Guyana has referred to itself as “The Land of Six Peoples” - Europeans/Whites, Portuguese, East Indians, Blacks, Amerindians, and Chinese.

In the pre-Independence period (1946) these numbers had fallen to 11, 023 Europeans, of these 8,543 were of Portuguese descent of a total population of 375,701 (Smith 192). In 1970, four years after Guyana gained its independence the total number of Europeans in the population was 7,849. Of these 5,663 were of Portuguese descent. The total population at the time was 699,844. It is my contention that the Caribbean literary aesthetic that developed in the Anglophone region is due in part to the demographic make-up of the population and the nationalist projects that the labor and political leaders forged in their individual territories and in the region as a whole. These movements toward self-government and for improved social and labor conditions began as early as the 1920s. In the 1940s and 1950s they intensified their activities and beginning in the early 1960s many of the countries in the region gained their independence. In Guyana for instance, Gordon Lewis credits the work of early labor and local government leaders, and community organizers like A.R.F. Webber and Hubert N. Critchlow with laying a foundation on which later leaders built (282). He also remarks on the work of local journalists and historians like P.H Daly, whose work in the 1940s and 1950s “bespoke a minor revolution, for they were books written by Guyanese journalism for a Guyanese audience, replacing the earlier tradition . . . of books written for a scholarly audience abroad” (282, 283).

As was previously noted, for many colonists home was across the seas in England. This is quite likely one reason for the tardiness on the part of the British in establishing systems of tertiary education in the region. It was not until the 1940s that secular tertiary education was established in the region with the founding of the

University College of the West Indies in 1948.¹³⁸ This contrasts with the Spanish colonies where at least two universities were established less than fifty years after Spain's initial colonization of the Americas.¹³⁹ To their credit, the British did establish grammar schools. Gordon reports that the rise in the number of denominational schools increased secondary education in the early twentieth century (266). Nevertheless, as late as the 1930s there were still debates and proposals concerning the quality and content of the curriculum and the limited access to education by members of the lower classes (Gordon 266-271). This systematic cultural underdevelopment meant that those colonists without the right personal, class, and financial connections were limited in access to schooling and this affected the quality, and quantity of literary production.

Together with the establishment of tertiary education, the availability of printing facilities generally fosters the promotion of literary endeavors. Printing began in the English-speaking Caribbean in the first half of the eighteenth century on the islands of Jamaica, Barbados, and Antigua. Later on it began in Dominica and Grenada. Newspapers were the first sources of publication for literary works at the time (Tiffin 57, 58). The target audience for these works was largely local and in very limited cases some works first published in local newspapers were republished in London (Tiffin 57-59). A similar trend continued in the first quarter of the twentieth century. One pioneering Jamaican writer Thomas Macdermott established a publishing house, The All Jamaica Library, on that island in 1904. Though short-lived (it only lasted for five years) it

¹³⁸ Established first as a Grammar School in 1748, Codrington College in Barbados began functioning as a theological college for the training of the Anglican clergy in 1830. The University College of the West Indies became the University of the West Indies in 1962. It has three campuses: St. Augustine in Trinidad and Tobago, Cave Hill in Barbados, and Mona in Jamaica.

¹³⁹ Universidad Santo Tomás de Aquino, Santo Domingo, R.D – 1538; Universidad de San Marcos. Lima, Peru -1551.

published four novels (Sander 4). In the decades that followed, journals like *Trinidad* (Trinidad 1929), *The Beacon* (Trinidad 1931), *Bim* (Barbados 1942), *Focus* (Jamaica 1943), and *Kyk-over-al* (British Guiana 1945) took up the mantle of promoting local and regional literary works (Sander 2). Tiffin credits the latter three journals with having exerted significant influence on the region's literature (Tiffin 61). Commenting on these early journals Reinhard W. Sander states that together with the BBC radio program "Caribbean Voices" they "helped foster an awareness among the writers in different islands of creative developments taking place in neighboring territories, and encouraged them to see their work as part of a new regional phenomenon" (2). Apart from such avenues for publication there was the *Caribbean Quarterly* founded in 1949 by the University College of the West Indies.¹⁴⁰ One notes therefore that there was a concerted move toward more literary promotion as the twentieth century approached its mid-point. This was the era when writers like George Lamming, Edgar Mittleholtzer, Jan Carew, Derek Walcott, V. S. Naipaul, A. J. Seymour, and Martin Carter, among others, began publishing their work. Nevertheless, there was a limited readership within the Caribbean region and not much scope for the promotion and distribution of their works. These writers recognized that to advance in their profession they needed to attract a wider audience. Additionally, the aforementioned journals of necessity were limited with regard to the length of the works they published. For example, though *Kyk-Over-Al* published prose works like short stories, extracts from novels and literary criticism and reviews, poetry was by far the principal literary genre exhibited in the pages of this journal.

¹⁴⁰ Though Tiffin (61) says that *Caribbean Quarterly* was a journal that began in the 1960s, the journal's website gives its launch date as 1949. See: <http://www.uwi.edu/cq/>

Therefore, in order to gain the recognition they sought, writers had to publish in the metropolis. As C.L.R. James stated: “If we wanted to write and do something, we had to go abroad. We couldn’t make it at home” (James 1970: qtd in Tiffin 59). And go they did. The foundational writers of AnglophoneCaribbean fiction all established themselves in London (at least initially) and many of their works were published from that location.¹⁴¹

Publishing in the Anglophone Caribbean

The extent to which Caribbean writers have had to depend on foreign publishers is evident in the appendix to the 2004 edition of Kenneth Ramchand’s *The West Indian Novel and its Background*. Of the approximately 810 titles listed of works published between 1854 and 2001, only 109 (approximately 13%) were published in the Caribbean. The vast majority 482 (some 59 %) were published in the United Kingdom, with the U.S.A and Canada in the second place with a combined total of 167 titles (20.6%). The situation has not improved greatly for new writers. Major European publishing houses like Macmillan and Heinemann have provided an avenue through their Caribbean Writers Series. Each of these publishing houses distributes their works through specific bookstores in the region. The British-based Peepal Tree Press was established specifically to promote the writing of works of Caribbean and Black British writers and critics. This small publishing house which began operating in the mid-1980s, is credited with publishing the works of both well-know writers like Wilson Harris, Kamau Brathwaite, and Sylvia Wynter and the not so well-known like Jamaican Diana McCaulay.

¹⁴¹ George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, C.L.R. James, Andrew Salkey, Samuel Selvon, and Edgar Mittleholtzer are among those Caribbean writers who for one reason or another moved to the U.K and published from that location.

The online community and resource site "Caribbean Literary Salon" names other publishers of Caribbean literary works such as Hansib (based in the U.K), Carlong Publishers (U.K and Jamaica), House of Nehesi Publishers Foundation (New York and St. Martin), Ian Randle Publishers (Jamaica), Potbake Productions (Trinidad and Tobago), Caribbean Chapters (Barbados), and Papillote Press (Dominica and the U.K).¹⁴² Papillote Press only publishes works by Dominicans, about the island of Dominica. The Trinidadian based Potbake Productions is not a publishing house per se but a resource site for writers and publishers. Although Ian Randle Publishers has successfully published a wide array of works in fields that include art, music, history, sociology, politics, religion and literary criticism, among others, by writers from the Caribbean and beyond, it has published very few literary works.

Not named in the Caribbean Literary Salon's list are: Belize's publishing house, Cubola Productions, and the recently founded Caribbean Publishing House (Guyana). Cubola focuses on literary and non-literary works by Belizeans or about Belize. Guyana committed itself to the establishment of the Caribbean Publishing House as a result of calls made by some of the region's leading writers at the Caribbean Festival for the Arts (CARIFESTA) in 2008, for a regional publishing house. This institution was launched in 2009. Its objectives include uniting the Caribbean, and bringing an end to writers' dependence on British publishing houses. The company's first venture was the republication of works in the "Guyana classics" series. The regional nature of this institution might be questioned especially since the editor, David Dabydeen (a Guyanese), has suggested that one of the aims of the publishing house is to develop skills

¹⁴² See: <http://caribbeanliterarysalon.ning.com/>

in creative writing among Guyanese youths. He suggested also that preferential treatment will be given to the works of Guyanese writers.¹⁴³

Ian Randle, the founder and president of Ian Randle Publishers feels that in addition to improving the quality of product they offer, Caribbean publishers must also be more aggressive in marketing this product on the global market (2). He sees international book fairs as great resources for the promotion and sale of books beyond the shores of a particular country. Randle also highlights the important role attendance at these events plays in establishing links with other professionals in the field of publishing, thereby creating networks for distribution, co-publishing or licensing (3). So despite the strong literary tradition in the English-speaking Caribbean its indigenous publishing industry is still in the fledging stages. This no doubt is one factor that has impacted on the visibility of works published within the region.

Publishing in the French-Caribbean

In his (January 2010) article “French-Language Writing and the Francophone Literary System” Jean-Marc Moura states that “[f]or Francophone institutions, in particular publishing houses, Paris and France represent the center, even if other regional alternatives such as Quebec and Belgium exert an undeniable influence” (31). Though this may be the case, the French-Caribbean has been taking small steps to develop its publishing industry. Haiti appears to be the country with the largest number of publishing houses. An online list of addresses of publishers and distributors of Haitian

¹⁴³ See: “Guyana Establishes First Caribbean Publishing House.” Caribbean Net News. June 13, 2009. Web.Oct. 17, 2010; and “Caribbean Publishing House Creates an Opening for Emerging Guyanese Writers.”Stabroek News. March 3, 2010.Web. Oct. 17, 2010.

books lists a total of 22 publishers – 12 local and 10 foreign.¹⁴⁴ There is no information available on how the 2010 earthquake has affected this industry. However, it is noteworthy that the National Press of Haiti was represented at the 2010 Frankfurt Book Fair.¹⁴⁵ The French-Guianese publishing house Éditions Ibis Rouge (established in 1995) appears to be thriving. It publishes the works of writers from French Guiana, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Reunión. According to its website it receives 600 manuscripts per year and has published the works of some 243 writers.¹⁴⁶ In Martinique, Éditions Lafontaine (established 1994) publishes a wide variety of works by writers from both Martinique and Guadeloupe.¹⁴⁷ Its catalog lists the total number of works published as forty-five. Educational books and fiction account for the two largest categories. These local operations auger well for publishing in the region even though some still question the viability of traditional publishing. The latter is the focus of an article published on an online news site about Guadeloupe. Catherine Le Pelletier, the author, asks rhetorically whether the existence of the book in its traditional form is in danger in Guadeloupe. The article records the decreasing number of readers. This has resulted in the closing of some publishing houses and the diversification of others (they now also produce CDs, and DVDs). This is not to say that there are no writers. According to the article, writers abound and while some have turned to self-publishing, others have increasingly sought to use the Internet. On-demand publishing and printing, and reduced costs are cited as two advantages of the use of this medium. The just-cited issues with regard to publishing are

¹⁴⁴ See: <http://www.salalm.org/committees/Haiti-publishers-distributors.pdf>

¹⁴⁵ See: Frankfurt Book Fair 2010. <http://www.book-fair.com/en/fbf/>

¹⁴⁶ See: <http://www.ibisrouge.fr>

¹⁴⁷ See: <http://www.editions-lafontaine.com>

not confined to the Francophone Caribbean. As we shall see later, writers and publishers in other parts of the Caribbean and I dare say internationally are dealing with similar concerns.

Publishing in the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America

The publishing industry in the Hispanic Caribbean and Central America appears to be extremely strong although concerns similar to those expressed by Le Pelletier with regard to virtual publishing are also pertinent to the region. The Regional Center for the Promotion of the Book in Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain, and Portugal (CERLALC) in its 2008 publication *El espacio iberoamericano del libro* records a total of 13,325 publishers who registered a total of 66,819 books in ISBN agencies of Latin America (39, 41). Approximately 35% of these titles were literary works (41). The 216 publishers in the Hispanic Caribbean published 2,008 books, while the 706 in Central America published 4,659 works. The Caribbean nation with the largest number of publishers (137) is the Dominican Republic.¹⁴⁸ These establishments published a total of 676 works. In Central America, Costa Rica leads the way with 228 publishers who registered 2,329 books (39). Further, the report indicates that the private sector accounts for 90% of the industry while the public sector occupies the remaining 10%. The number of writers who publish their own work (*autores-editores*) stands relatively high at 36.2%. As is to be expected, the report cites printing in small quantities, small private distribution networks, with only very few works sold in the public commercial sector as a

¹⁴⁸ CERLALC's report does not account for Puerto Rico in its general data on publishing houses and works published in Latin America. The country is included, however, in data that treats (i) international publishing houses with branches in Latin America (102,103), (ii) recipients of books exported from Latin America (179), and (iii) countries in Latin America that imported books from Spain (191).

factor that characterizes these self-published works. CERLALC, however, states that easier access to new technologies will likely result in an increase in self-publishing (40). The foregoing information in addition to giving insight into the state of the publishing industry in Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean also highlights the important role that private publishing plays in the region. It indicates further that publication and sale of literary works commands a significant proportion of the industry. In 2006 more than 19,000 titles were registered in the literature and children's literature categories combined (66, 67).

The report states also that 132 Spanish publishing houses have subsidiaries in Latin America. The majority of these firms operate in Argentina, Mexico, Chile and Colombia. A total of eleven Spanish publishing houses operate in Central America. Panamá, Costa Rica, and Guatemala each have three of these transnational companies, while Nicaragua and Honduras have one each. Nine Spanish companies operate in the Hispanic Caribbean, seven in Puerto Rico, and two in the Dominican Republic (CERLALC 103). The presence of these firms has prompted some critics like Juan E. De Castro to comment on the hegemonic role they play in the region's publishing. In the light of the existence of these large well-established firms, smaller local companies find themselves in a disadvantageous position. De Castro comments also on their possible influence on the aesthetics of the writers whose works they publish (De Castro 93-103).

Since the CERLALC report's focus is on Spanish-speaking countries and Brazil, Belize as an English-speaking Caribbean nation situated in Central America is only featured in sections that treat territories that import books from Latin American countries. As we consider Belize's literature and the concerns that relate to publication and

promotion of its literary works, its relations with the rest of Central America, and its place in that region come to the fore. The contrast between Central America's vibrant publishing industry and the current state of publishing in Belize will become evident. In the sections that follow, I first present an overview of the geopolitical, demographic and social factors that have influenced Belize's literature. I then go on to analyze the works of two Belizean writers, and issues with regard to the publication, promotion and recognition of Belizean literature.

4.4. BELIZE: A LOOK AT THE NATION AND ITS LITERATURE

The independent nation of Belize on the Caribbean coast of Central America was formerly known as British Honduras. Belize holds a unique place in this area of the hemisphere as the only English-speaking nation in a geographical area dominated by Spanish-speaking countries. One of Belize's geographical neighbors, Guatemala, has actively challenged its territorial sovereignty since the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁹ As a member nation of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), Belize's political leadership has been seeking closer ties with the English-speaking Caribbean while not neglecting collaboration with its Central and North American neighbors.

Edgar Pape (1992) records that soon after its independence Belize benefitted from increased bilateral cooperation with the United States and Mexico as a result of the Caribbean Basin Initiative (61). In fact, Mexico was the first Latin America nation to

¹⁴⁹ The online version of Belize's *Amandala* newspaper (June 25, 2010) commented on the constant illegal encroachment on Belizean territory and exploitation of that country's resources by Guatemalans in the area near the Belize/Guatemala border. This indicates that Belize's territorial integrity is still actively threatened.

establish diplomatic relations with Belize after the latter became an independent nation (Kramer 111). Some of Belize's Central American neighbors were slower in granting it such recognition. Kramer states that whereas Belize's relations with the Anglophone Caribbean have always been healthy, its relations with Central America have been unequal. In its early stages of nationhood countries like Panamá and Nicaragua were more supportive while others like El Salvador and Honduras were more cautious about expressing their support (111). The 2010 Commonwealth Secretariat's Country Report on Belize points to that country's efforts to increase its links with its Central America neighbors "through its membership of the 'Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana'" (n. pag.). Belize became a member of this regional body in 2000. Belize therefore exists as a full member of both the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) and the Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana (SICA). This is clear evidence of that country's intention of continuing to foster close ties with the two regions to which it belongs geographically and culturally.

With regard to its racial and ethnic composition Belize boasts a wider variety of groups and cultures than the other Caribbean countries. In addition to the Creoles (Blacks), Garifunas (Black and Carib admixture), East Indians, Chinese, and Whites (mainly Mennonites and North Americans), Belize also includes Mayan Indians, Waiki Indians, and *Mestizos* (people of mixed Hispanic and indigenous descent). Subsequent discussion will focus on how this diversity manifests itself in the nation's literary works.

The October 1993 issue of the journal *Belizean Studies* contains two articles that provide invaluable information regarding the development of Belizean literature at least up to the beginning of the 1990s. Bruce Ergood's article "Belize as Presented in Her

Literature” examines various written sources like journals, historical, sociological, economic, and anthropological monographs, literary works, bibliographies, and the local publishing house “Cubola Productions.” Ergood credits all these sources as having served the purpose of providing Belizean society with an oeuvre (3). Ergood adopts a chronological approach to his study and treats monographs as a single category in which he discusses all book-length studies regardless of genre or subject matter. Two important points in this study are worth recording. Firstly, the study claims that the heart of the intellectual community in Belize is literature, political analysis, and social development. Secondly, it highlights the important role Cubola Productions has played in “making both Belizean authors and Belizean topics available to the growing reading public” (13). The Belizean literary works I analyze and others that have been published more recently indicate that writers are combining social and political issues as part of their literary aesthetic. As regards Ergood’s second point, Cubola Productions has indeed provided Belizean writers with an outlet for their works. However, as the director of this publishing house has indicated, although their books are available for sale on the Amazon website they do not have an established distribution network outside Belize.¹⁵⁰ The result is limited success in their attempts to promote Belizean literature. Later in this section I look at Cubola’s catalog to analyze the extent to which this resource is being put to use by current Belizean writers.

David Ruiz’ commentary “Belize’s Literary Heritage: A 500 Year Perspective” seeks to provide a survey of the development of literature in the country from the time of the colonial encounter to the beginning of the 1990s. Ruiz’s study seeks to show that the country’s literature from its beginnings to the present reflects the struggles among ethnic

¹⁵⁰ Personal interview.

groups and classes (28-31). It begins by discussing the pre-Columbian written and oral traditions before launching into an historical analysis of the nation's literary development. Ruiz's study shows that the genre most cultivated for the major part of the twentieth century was poetry. Prose fiction in the form of short stories also had an early beginning. Ruiz cites one of the publishers of *Among My Souvenirs: An Anthology of National Short Stories* (1963) as stating in the introduction that the work's objective "is to establish a literary heritage in Belize" (32). Ruiz records the role of the short story in representing the country's cultural diversity. He also credits Zee Edgell's first two novels with treating important social and political messages pertinent to key moments in the country's Independence movement (33). Ruiz' article also sheds light on Belize's complex cultural diversity by documenting Belizean works written in Spanish (Ruiz himself is the author of one of these works),¹⁵¹ the use of the English-based creole dialect in the works of some authors, and the various ethnic and class dynamics that inform the writing. Ruiz' article provides a comprehensive overview of Belizean literature up to the beginning of the 1990s. It shows the novel as a genre in its fledgling stage with just two writers, Zee Edgell and Glenn Godfrey. Of the two, Zee Edgell's work has achieved much recognition by the canon-endowing institutions both inside and outside of the Caribbean. Over the past eighteen years since Ruiz wrote his article both Edgell and Godfrey have written other works and more than twenty other prose writers have added their works to the corpus of contemporary Belizean literature.¹⁵² If one adds to their number the fifty or more poets who have published works individually and in anthologies

¹⁵¹ David Ruiz *Old Benque: Erase una vez en Benque Viejo* CUBOLA, 1992 (2000).

¹⁵² In addition to the writers listed in the online "Bibliography of Books on Belize", the works of various other writers are included in the anthologies *Memories, Dreams, and Nightmares Volumes 1 & 2*, *Treasures of a Century: A Collection of Belizean Twentieth-Century Poetry*, and *Snapshots of Belize*.

during the same period it becomes quite evident that Belizean writers recognize literary expression and production as important to the nation's development. In fact one writer, Ritamae Hyde, claims that whereas official state sanctioning of the arts in Belize had been in a state of neglect for some time, recently the Government has been making efforts to invest more in this area. She feels that if there were collaboration between the government and writers, Belizean literature would enjoy more recognition.¹⁵³ Indeed, it does appear as though in a small, developing country like Belize with only a few, privately-owned publishing houses, legitimation from official sources is one possible way of promoting the country's literature. Writers have commented that whereas the country's tourist industry is promoted, the attention paid to its literary culture lags far behind. In the context of a developing country with a Gross Domestic Product in 2009 of approximately 2.5 billion US dollars, one can understand the focus on products that will provide the country with more income.¹⁵⁴

This being the case, contemporary Belizean writers who publish and reside at home lament the limited recognition of Belizean literature in the wider Caribbean.¹⁵⁵ Ramchand's list (mentioned earlier in this chapter) accounts for two Belizean prose writers, Zee Edgell and Zoila Ellis. Whereas Edgell's work was published in the United Kingdom by Heinemann, Ellis' was published in Belize by Cubola. In the final section of

¹⁵³ This information was provided during a group interview I conducted with some Belizean poets before and after one of their poetry slams. One aspect of the recent recognition to which Hyde refers is the formation of the Belize Book Industry Association in 2009.

¹⁵⁴ See: CIA World Factbook "Country Comparison: GDP (Purchasing Power Parity)." From the information presented Belize's economy appears to be the weakest in Central America.

¹⁵⁵ Group interview.

this chapter I treat the varied fortunes of these two writers with regard to their recognition, and that of contemporary Belizean literature as a whole.

Cubola Productions

As mentioned earlier, Cubola Productions is the first publishing house established in Belize. In its mission statement the company states that it provides an avenue for the publication of the works of Belizean writers. Its mission also includes the promotion of these works in Belize and internationally. An examination of Cubola's online catalog reveals three (3) main categories of books with one sub-category. The main categories are: (i) Literature (this is subdivided into (a) Belizean Writers Series, and (b) Other Books), (ii) Education, and (iii) Essay. The catalog lists a total of eighteen titles in the three categories.¹⁵⁶ The literature category lists the largest number of titles published – eleven. Six of the twelve titles belong to the Belizean Writers Series and five to the “Other Books” sub-category. The Belizean Writers Series comprises six anthologies published between 1997 and 2005. Each anthology is dedicated to one of the following genres: poetry, short stories, drama, folk tales, and two volumes of works by women writers. Even though the “Other Books” sub-category falls under the general heading of literature, only 3 literary works are listed: Zoila Ellis' *On Heroes, Lizards and Passion*; Colville Young's *Pataki Full (Short Stories)*; and David Ruiz' *Old Benque. Erase una vez en Benque Viejo*. The other works in this category are: (i) a book of Belizean recipes; and (ii) a compilation of newspaper articles about Belize. There is no record of any publication later than 2005 in any of the categories. Of course Belizean writers are still

¹⁵⁶ The titles listed are those currently in print and featured in the company's catalog.

writing and publishing. Since 2005, I know of at least ten anthologies of poems that have been published.¹⁵⁷ Additionally, the online bibliography of Belizean books mentions at least 8 literary works published between 2006 and 2009.¹⁵⁸ None of these works was published by Cubola. Cubola's director feels that the move toward self-publishing, if well done, could be to the writer's advantage (especially in the field of poetry). She cites the country's small population as beneficial for writers who choose to self-publish as they are likely to have a market for their work within their circle of friends and acquaintances. However, she stresses the importance of promotion of the literary work that takes place when one's work is produced by a publisher.¹⁵⁹ Later in the study I look a little more closely at the question of publication and promotion of Belizean literature.

4. 5 BELIZE'S LITERARY AESTHETIC

The poem that began this chapter, Felene Cayetano's "Heritage" provides a glimpse into the diverse nature of the Belizean identity. Belize's literary aesthetic reflects the country's plurality and its special geographical and cultural position as Central American and Caribbean. We established earlier that although there are certain literary criteria common in the work of writers across the region, each linguistic area has features peculiar to that region that are a direct result of its colonial and sometimes pre-colonial heritage.

¹⁵⁷ These are works by: Adele Ramos, Erwin X, Kalilah Enríquez, Ivory Kelly, Edward Broaster, and Ritamae Hyde.

¹⁵⁸ See: <http://www.belizefirst.com/BibliographyofBelizeBooks.htm>

¹⁵⁹ Personal interview.

The Belizean works I analyze demonstrate how that country's literature is a counterpublic of the Anglophone Caribbean literary canon/public. Zee Edgell and Zoila Ellis are the Belizean women writers who have to-date achieved the greatest degree of recognition in the traditional media by which value is ascribed in the literary field, that is, inclusion in anthologies, and academic curricula. Additionally, Edgell's work has received some critical attention (at least twenty-four articles dedicated to her work are listed on the MLA Bibliography, and she has won two literary prizes. In addition to these two writers, I will also make reference to the efforts by other Belizean writers, particularly poets who are striving to make a name for themselves in the literary field.

To begin the discussion of Belize's contribution to the Caribbean literary aesthetic I return to Torres-Saillant's criteria for Caribbean literature. In *Caribbean Poetics: Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature* (1997), Silvio Torres-Saillant posits a socio-historical and socio-cultural unity of the Caribbean region (65). This socio-cultural coherence, he claims, has resulted in a "common way of looking at the world" (66). This common worldview, he feels, is the basis for the region's literary unity (66). He puts forward four (4) foundational criteria for Caribbean literature:

- A literature that is not divorced from society and that has a unique socio-cultural worldview (74). It is a view that values hybridity and syncretism.
- Use of language that is "nativized." This refers not only to the creolization of language as used by some writers but also to unique ways of exploiting the rhythms of the region to evoke "the uniqueness of the Caribbean environment" (82). "Nativization" is a way of securing "self-affirmation." Writers "share the

compulsion to handle the language inherited from Europe in a way that justifies them culturally and artistically” (81).

- An emphasis on religion and the important role it plays in the everyday lives of the region’s inhabitants. Writers treat religion in various ways ranging from hybrid and synthetic to a questioning of the religion inherited due to the colonial experience (82-88).
- The role history plays in the region’s literature. Writers in the region feel the need to rewrite history. They thus write themselves and the experiences of their people into history (91).

In an essay in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* (Volume 3) Torres-Saillant adds to these criteria the motifs of (i) migration and (ii) musicality. He also recognizes the importance of women writers’ place in re-inscribing the female subject into texts from which they were silenced and marginalized. The importance of the gender-race intersection and the specific tropes and genres women writers favor, given their experiences as against those of their male counterparts, is also the focus of their writing (72, 73).

Though the above criteria tend to be present in many Caribbean literary works Torres-Saillant has failed to treat two key issues present in contemporary Caribbean writing, (i) insularity and (ii) queer themes. Dara E. Goldman brings to light the first omission in her work *Out of Bounds: Insularity and the Demarcation of Identity in the Hispanic Caribbean* (2008). Goldman’s focus is the Hispanic Caribbean. Her unique treatment of this trope moves beyond the traditional treatment of insular experiences and landscape as defining identity and expression to insularity that is not necessarily confined

to the space of the islands (14-17). Her “out of bounds” insularity can rear its head for example, when an unwelcome and unwanted group of “others” exist within the given island space. It can even be generated from a location outside of the island space (by diasporic communities and individuals in other lands and even in the virtual space of the worldwide web) (15 -16). Given what Goldman calls the malleable nature of insularity and its ability to be used in both a positive and negative light (28, 29), it is my contention that when viewed in this way it does constitute a theme that is treated in Anglophone Caribbean literature as well. In areas outside the literary field the negative aspects of insularity are a matter of constant debate in the region. Touted as one of the key reasons for the failure of the West Indian Federation, insularity still plagues the region (Kavalski and Žoić 20-30). Even with the more successful Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) various key projects and initiatives fail to be fully executed because of what appears to be a continuation of the same insular viewpoints. The editorial in the July 9th 2010 edition of the Trinidad and Tobago Guardian newspaper commented on key initiatives of the regional body, like the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), the Caribbean Development Fund, and the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), to which not all member nations are giving full support or the progress of which is stymied due to the actions or lack thereof by some member nations. Even the region’s cricket selectors and team face accusations of insular attitudes.¹⁶⁰ Given the pervasiveness of this issue in the region it is regrettable that Torres-Saillant failed to treat it as a trend in Caribbean literature. This short-coming, however, should not cloud the other salient points he does make regarding the themes and tendencies in Caribbean writing.

¹⁶⁰ See for example the sports editorial: “Insularity rife in WI Cricket”, Jamaica Gleaner 9 June, 2001, and the letter to the editor: “Insularity Hurting WI Cricket” in the 16 December, 2009 issue of the Trinidad and Tobago Newsday.

Secondly, Torres-Saillant's reference to the treatment of gender in Caribbean writing seems to be weighed heavily in favor of the female writer, the female subject and feminine/feminist issues. It fails to consider the growing number of works that treat gay, lesbian, transgendered and queer subjects and themes. The two aforementioned tendencies should not be overlooked in readings of contemporary Caribbean literature. Despite Torres-Saillant's omissions, I have still found it necessary to make reference to the following criteria he names in my analysis of Belizean works: (i) nativization of language, (ii) religion, (iii) history, (iv) feminist concerns. As will become evident, my reading brings to light other aesthetic elements not covered in Torres-Saillant's criteria.

Central America as a bridge between North and South America could also be seen as an important mid-point in the Caribbean, geographically speaking. Belize's location and its demographic makeup for decades have raised questions regarding identity. It seems that despite Belize's current membership in the CARICOM, some Belizeans do not feel an affinity to the English-speaking world. Belizean poet and journalist Adele Ramos states that depending on whom one speaks to in Belize one would receive differing views regarding whether the nation should lean more toward its Caribbean or, its Central American heritage. This, she feels, is due to the country's changing demographics. She states:

very many Belizeans of Hispanic and Maya descent do not feel passionate about their Caribbean ties and reject it (sic) as a legacy of British colonialism. However, there are very many Belizeans of Hispanic descent who are proud to embrace both. (...) Afro-Belizeans are particularly skeptical of any efforts to integrate with Central America, in light of a sustained agenda to Latinize Belize, and encourage mass migration from other parts of Central America, some believe with a specific aim of alienating Belize from the English-speaking Caribbean.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Personal interview.

My own interactions with Belizean teachers reveal that students who live in areas like Corozal where Spanish is the first language, do not see themselves pursuing higher education in the English-speaking world and prefer (and indeed do perform better on) examination questions that require them to express themselves only in Spanish rather than in English. Though this may seem like a small matter, it is certainly not unrelated to the issue of cultural identity in Belize. It points to a segment of the population that feels a closer cultural affinity to the Spanish-speaking world. In fact the recently-formed Belize Hispanic Society (Sociedad Hispana de Belice) has as its main objective the promotion of Hispanic art and culture in Belize so as to promote positive thinking, peace and integration through regional exchanges.¹⁶² The society's manifesto indicates that its focus is on art, culture and literature in Spanish. This points to a desire for a strengthening of the Hispanic tradition in Belize that could possibly lead to closer collaboration with that country's Spanish-speaking neighbors.

The issues raised so far are both socio-political and cultural in nature and they do have direct relevance on the creation of an identity. If one takes Belize's literature as the yardstick for determining how the nation perceives itself in relation to the rest of the Caribbean, one can see evidence of the various criteria Torres-Saillant proposes and more. The multiplicity of influences and tendencies that combine to make up Belizean literature are the focus of the analyses that follow. Language, history, nationalism, feminism, migration, religion and other social and environmental issues come together in Edgell's and Ellis' works to create a Belizean Caribbean aesthetic, one that although

¹⁶² The Hispanic Society of Belize was formed in May 2010. Information about the society and its Manifesto were provided in a personal interview with Leo Obando.

similar in some respects to the works of some of the more well-known writers of the region, diverges in certain respects to reveal a mode of writing that is peculiarly Belizean.

Zee Edgell

Zee Edgell has been described as “the first lady of Belizean letters” (Ergood 6). Her novel *Beka Lamb* (1982) was published just one year after the country gained its independence from Great Britain.¹⁶³ The novel is a *bildungsroman* that treats serious post-colonial concerns specifically pertinent to the 1950s, a period of intense advocacy for independence throughout much of the English-speaking Caribbean. The novel begins on the evening of the day Beka Lamb receives the news that she has placed first in an essay competition at school. That very night, the fourteen-year old eponymous protagonist holds her personal wake for her best friend, Toycie, who had died a few months prior. Her wake is a sustained flashback of her experiences at home, at school, with Toycie, and in the community. Beka, at fourteen, is very politically-aware. This is so because of the activism of her grandmother and the open discussions on the issues of the day which take place in her home.

My analysis of the novel focuses on its treatment of the themes of feminism, nationalism (historical revision), and spirituality. I show that in line with Torres-Saillant’s observations, Belizean literature like that of other Caribbean nations is by no means divorced from society. In fact it presents a socio-cultural worldview that is unique to its location and experiences.

¹⁶³ Referred to in parenthetical documentation as *Beka*.

The pre-Independence society in which *Beka Lamb* is set is in some ways on the decline, and in others, progressing. Beka's winning the first prize in her school's essay competition is a sign of how the society is beginning to progress. This is so, because in the pre-Independence era in which the novel is set, Blacks (Creoles) saw themselves as underprivileged and discriminated against. One way in which the reader learns about the way the colonial society was divided is through the narrator's description of the three separate social clubs that existed for the three main ethnic groups (Whites, Creoles, and Hispanics) who lived in the city (*Beka* 15). Also, before Beka entered the essay competition at her school, her grandmother had tried to dissuade her by telling her that all the prizes would go to "bakras, panias or expatriates" (*Beka* 151). These words reveal that the Black Creoles saw the local and foreign Whites (bakras), and the Hispanic *Mestizos* (panias), as the ones who occupied the privileged places in that colonial society since these were the ones expected to succeed academically. Granny Ivy's surprise at Beka's achievement is accompanied by the words, "Befo' time, Beka would never have won that contest" (*Beka* 1). Beka's success is therefore one indication of ways in which the society has begun to change.

Beka's grandmother's description of colonial Belizean society shows that things and institutions do not last but constantly break down (*Beka* 16). Beka, in one instance, equates herself to this failing society. She tells her teacher: "Sometimes I feel bruk down just like my own country, Sister. I start all right but then I can't seem to continue" (*Beka* 115). Her dream of falling into the excrement-contaminated Haulover Creek accompanied by the jeers and taunts of other citizens (*Beka* 7), bears testimony to her deep-seated fear of failure. It appears that many of the young women in her neighborhood

reflect the broken down state of the society in their roles as unwed mothers. Here Beka reflects on these women and their lot in life:

Now let's see, on this street Miss Flo had a daughter named Miss Glory, and Miss Glory had Miss Ruby, that's the one with the face bumpy like pineapple skin, and now *she* has three daughters. Then there's old Miss Boysie in the alley and she has a daughter named Miss Prudence, and Miss Prudence has two daughters and one son; (...) and then there's Miss Lucretia, that's Miss Dotty's maid, and she has three sons and one daughter, Miss Hortence, and she is pregnant; and then there's Miss Eila's sister who had Toycie and went to America and never came back and then ... (145)

It seems like they all end up unwed, pregnant and with not too much to look forward to in life. By the time Beka comes to the end of her reflections she has made up her mind to leave Belize when she has completed her schooling. Her nationalist grandmother is upset and accuses her of ingratitude for not wanting to remain and help to build the country (147). Beka's decision to leave Belize indicates her desire to escape this fate. The issue of unwed pregnancy that prompts the protagonist to make her decision, however, is close to her because of the experiences of her seventeen year old best friend Toycie.

Toycie's situation highlights ways in which discourses of gender, race, and class intersect. Toycie lives with her aunt in a house that according to the narrator was one step up from a shack:

Toycie's house was not a 'dawg-siddown' or lean-to, but it nearly could have been. What saved it was Miss Eila's industry. The house, darkened grey by many years of rain, stood on several thick posts about two feet off the ground, just high enough, most of the time, to prevent muddy water from sweeping through the floor boards during the years when rain fell for several days in a row. (*Beka* 32)

As a poor, Black girl Toycie's only way out of poverty is through education. In fact, she is academically gifted and even helps to tutor the protagonist. Her relationship with the middle-class *Mestizo* youth Emilio Villanueva though, results in a pregnancy that puts an

end to her dreams of graduating from school, finding a job and buying her aunt a decent house. She is expelled from school, falls into a severe depression, suffers a miscarriage, and eventually dies after wandering outside during a hurricane.

Beka's observation to Toycie that "[p]anias scarcely ever marry creole like we" (47), proves correct in the case of this young couple, even though before Toycie became pregnant Emilio had told her he would do so. Emilio's excuse for not being able to marry her reflects his family's class prejudices when he tells her that "his mamacita would collapse if he married somebody that wasn't a virgin because she's so religious and she raised him to be a modest Catholic boy..." This excuse follows Mrs. Villanueva's suspension of guitar lessons to Toycie when she realizes that a relationship has developed between her son and the poor Creole girl, and her hostile looks and condescending manner directed toward the latter during an encounter in the church yard (102, 103). The fact that Emilio adds to his excuses his doubts regarding whether he could really be the father of the child and calls into question Toycie's morality for "play[ing] around with him" before marriage (108, 109), points to the possibility that Toycie's race and class were factors that contributed to the dishonorableness of Emilio's intentions.

Whereas Toycie loses everything, Emilio is not punished in any way. His absence from the rest of the novel suggests he realizes his ambitions to complete high school before proceeding to university overseas. Toycie does seem to be a victim of discrimination against women. The principal expels her from school with the excuse that her decision is based on rules over which she has no control (*Beka* 119, 120). Her advice to Toycie that "[w]e women must learn to control our emotions ... there are times we must stand up and say "enough" whatever our feelings" (*Beka* 120), could be read in two

ways. On the one hand, Sister Virgil could be seen as endowing the woman with agency to control her body and her destiny. This contemporary reading would contrast with one that considers the context of Caribbean society of the 1950s (and even much later) where men could flaunt their virility with impunity and “decent” women were expected to exercise restraint. In a society where mothers would excuse their sons’ sexual trysts with comments like: “I loose me (my) bull, it’s up to you to tie yuh (your) heifer” the Principal’s comments could more correctly be read as placing the responsibility for morality, modesty, and restraint squarely on the shoulders of the woman. In this context it is no surprise that Emilio shares none of the blame or responsibility for Toycie’s pregnancy. Though Toycie as woman is a victim, *Beka Lamb* also presents strong female characters like the protagonist’s grandmother and her friends.

Nationalistic, historical and feminist issues play an important role in the literature of the Caribbean region. In *Beka Lamb* these themes intersect. The conflicts between Bill Lamb and his mother Ivy regarding whether the country should remain a colony of Great Britain to keep it from being taken over by the Guatemalans, or whether it should fight for its independence, or if it is wise to integrate with other Anglophone countries in the West Indian Federation are political issues that are a part of everyday life and are openly discussed in the family. Beka’s grandmother Granny Ivy and her women friends are actively involved in these debates and are staunch supporters of the country’s independence movement, the People’s Independence Party (P.I.P). Julie E. Moody-Freeman describes Edgell’s work as revisionist because it reclaims women’s contributions to the country’s history (41). She cites certain key works on the country’s social and political history that “have omitted or marginally recorded Belizean women’s

political contributions” (40).¹⁶⁴ The revisionism is tied to the feminist nature of the work. Though Bill Lamb is active and present in his household the work adopts a matrifocal perspective due to its focus on the active roles of women in both the private and public spheres. The young female protagonist is encouraged to follow the example of her female elders not only in matters related to the home like cooking and cleaning. She accompanies her grandmother and her friends to political meetings and is an active part of conversations regarding the country’s political situation. The womenfolk support and work together with the men to bring an end to colonial domination. The activism of even those of the lower classes is evident in the incident that takes place outside the Catholic Church one Sunday after Mass. The newspaper vendor Miss Arguelles loudly accuses the priest of encouraging conspiracy with the Guatemalans in order to “make one big Keatolic nation!” (*Beka* 103). It would appear that Beka’s embarrassment at Miss Arguelles’ behavior is not so much with regard to the sentiments she expresses but the manner and place in which she chooses to express her political views.

The views of Belizean activists, like Beka’s Granny Ivy, extend beyond support of the country’s territorial integrity against the Guatemalan threat. They also oppose joining with other Anglophone colonies to form a West Indian Federation. The house of one supporter of the Federation is stoned. Those against such a move feel it is another colonial ploy to further exploit the country’s inhabitants. Granny Ivy defends their position this way: “The British Government, and the British Lumber company want federation because they would get more cheap labour. I say if there is any federating to

¹⁶⁴ The works Moody cites are: Narda Dobson, *A History of Belize* (1973); Cedric Grant, *The Making of Modern Belize* (1976); and Assad Shoman, *Thirteen Chapters of a History of Belize* (1994).

do, it should be after we are independent and know more about this country. Poor people can't even vote yet!" (*Beka* 55).

Beka's political consciousness is evident early in the novel when she questions her father who works for a trading company: "Importing coffee from Guatemala now, Dad?" Her implied criticism leads into a discussion regarding the political correctness of conducting trade with a possible adversary and whether a take-over of Belize by Guatemala is possible (*Beka* 7, 8). Even though Bill Lamb concludes that the problem is really between the British and the Guatemalans, various incidents in the novel (like Miss Arguelles' tirade) indicate that the matter is inscribed into the psyche of Belizeans and sometimes impacts on attitudes toward its Hispanic population and those perceived to be supporting the Guatemalans. Beka even convinces her friend Toycie that they should replace the "Made in Spain" label on her guitar with "Made in Belize." Her grudge against Spain she explains is because: "Guatemala claims Belize from Britain through rights inherited from Spain" (36). It is the activism of these ordinary women, the open political discussions, oftentimes initiated by her grandmother, that take place in her home, and her exposure to the speeches she hears at the political party meetings she attends with the family's matriarch that foster a nationalistic consciousness in the protagonist and cause her at one point to express the desire to become a politician.

The territorial dispute with Guatemala continues to be of significance to Belizeans. Kalilah Enriquez, a young Belizean writer, addresses this issue not in her poetry or short stories, but in one of the short prose treatises that form a part of her second publication *Shades of Red* (2007). In a piece entitled "I Do Not Trust the ICJ" Enriquez describes the ICJ (International Court of Justice) as a member of the "alphabet

club.”¹⁶⁵ According to Enriquez, various international bodies like the IMF, the UN, and the OAS are members of this club, all controlled by the USI (United States Incorporated). Enriquez makes the following claim: “USI owns and operates the entire alphabet club, and USI has got Guatemala’s back” (147). She is distrustful too because of the non-existence of any enforcement mechanism in the ICJ (148). Enriquez’ concern and the fact that the Guatemalan claim is not just unresolved but actively manifests itself by way of incursions into Belizean territory, indicates that this issue will continue to be addressed in the national literature.¹⁶⁶ It does indeed give a unique nationalist perspective to Belizean literature.

Beka’s mother seeks to foster a spirit of progressive nationalism in her home. She does this not through political activism, like her mother-in-law, but through the dishes she prepares. The narrator explains that she had decided to “master the cooking techniques of every ethnic group from Maya to Carib” (*Beka* 149). In the Lamb kitchen, Lilla forges the country’s multicultural identity as in addition to the national dish of rice and beans, she prepares tamales, tortillas, relleno and various other dishes. She responds to her husband’s complaints by saying: “We’ll have to *get* used to it, Bill. Don’t you hear what the politicians are saying out at Battlefield Park? We must unite to build a nation, learn about our country” (150). Her actions indicate that national unity is a matter not only to be pursued in the public/political sphere. In small ways within the

¹⁶⁵ In 2008 Belize and Guatemala signed a special agreement that would send the matter to the ICJ for arbitration. Before the matter goes to the ICJ, though, each government must receive the mandate of its citizens in a referendum.

¹⁶⁶ Belize’s *Amandala* newspaper (June 15 & 25, 2010) commented on the constant illegal encroachment on Belizean territory and exploitation of that country’s resources by Guatemalans in the area near the Belize/Guatemala border. The March 12, 2010 issue of the same newspaper carried an article entitled “Guatemala Reasserts Challenge to Belize’s Sovereignty.” It is evident that Belize’s territorial integrity is still actively threatened

private/domestic sphere it is also possible to work towards an appreciation and understanding of all groups within the nation.

Despite their activism, however, the colonial women in *Beka Lamb* are still subject to the attitudes of the patriarchal society in which they live. One example of this is seen within the Lamb household. Though Bill Lamb and his mother openly debate their opposing political views, he still exercises a degree of patriarchal control. In addition to the corporal punishment Beka receives from her father about lying concerning being promoted to a new class, Bill cuts down his daughter's bougainvillea bush. The latter act though destructive of life is not permanent. The bush sprouts again later and is re-directed via a trellis that the neighbor's son-in-law constructs. The significance of the re-birth of the plant just when the family receives news of Toycie's death is symbolic of renewed hope. The heavy-handed, tyrannical act of the patriarch is only effective for a short period as new shoots emerge and the plant comes to life again. On a variety of levels the rebirth of the plant symbolizes hope not just for the protagonist but for the nation as well. Beka's subsequent success in the essay competition is the beginning of a new era in her life. As stated earlier, the fact that she has achieved something that was unheard of "before time" shows that Belize is making strides out of aspects of its colonial domination. Given that the work is set in a period of intense pro-independence activism, Beka's triumph symbolizes progress for the ordinary Belizean, a group that felt disenfranchised during the earlier colonial period. As Beka's Uncle Curo states in response to Beka's enquiry with regard to whether the imprisonment of the political activists meant the end: "Belize people only just beginning!" (167). Uncle Curo's remark points to a future of increased activism and progress in Belize.

Another incident that shows Bill Lamb's attempts to exercise his patriarchal dominance is his removal of the blue and white flags (the colors of his mother's political party) that his mother had used to decorate the house for the National Day celebrations, and his replacement of these by the British colors. He supports his actions with the words, "So long as I am the provider of bread in this household, we will continue to fly the Union Jack until *I* decide it is time to do differently" (142). It is noteworthy that the same Bill Lamb who here enforces his patriarchal authority had earlier tried to reason with the school's principal, Sister Virgil, about the injustice and insensibility of expelling the pregnant Toycie. He points out the societal double standard when he reminds her that the young man who impregnated Toycie would be allowed to continue his schooling (119). He continues by defending Toycie's right to compassion with the words: "Toycie needs shelter, not another stick to beat her down ... She needs hope" (119). As discussed previously, Sister Virgil embodies the repressive mores and practices of an imperial power. The Lamb patriarch on the other hand, stands up for the young woman's rights to education and progress. The inability of this patriarchal figure to totally obliterate a symbol of beauty and life (the flowering plant), and his support for the young girl's right to education are signs of the possibility of positive change for Belizean women in the future. The ambivalence evident in issues regarding women in society are in some instances still very much a part of Caribbean society where women of color have indeed broken through the glass ceiling by becoming heads of state and holding high political office but are still the objects of misogynistic and paternalistic attitudes.

The diversity of Belizean society and its colonial heritage are also reflected in religious practices and beliefs. Though the Creole population is "nominally Christian"

with the majority attending one of the many Protestant denominations and a minority attending the Catholic church (Vernon 29), and the *Mestizos* being mainly Catholic (Vernon 8, 29) there is still some evidence that African-derived religious beliefs manifest themselves among some members of this community. The mainstream Christian practices are brought out in various ways in the three Belizean works that form a part of this study. In *Beka Lamb*, for instance the Villanueva's are presented as staunch practicing Catholics. The tensions that sometimes exist between Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church are also evident in the work. Though her family is Protestant, Beka attends a Catholic school. Her grandmother tells her that "long befo' time you wouldn't be at no convent school" (*Beka* 1). Beka gets into trouble at the convent school and her Principal brands her a heretic because she is uncertain about whether heaven and hell really exist. Her hesitance is due to her grandmother's counsel that she not worry about such matters since she could go crazy from guilt (*Beka* 91). Though raised in a Christian household her Protestant background and liberal training seem to put her at odds with the strict conservatism of her Catholic teachers.

As regards the African-derived traditions, Beka's mother tries to stand firm for her Christian beliefs and not be influenced by these traditional practices. These are made evident when the protagonist's great-grandmother dies. Though Beka's parents frown upon the practices surrounding the "ninth night" wake, members of the older generation, Granny Ivy and her friends, bemoan the loss of these traditions. The contrasting views are seen in the following exchange between Beka's mother, Lilla, and grandmother. Ivy:

'Well, whatever else I may say 'bout Tama, I must tell you that she at least don't give up *all* the old ways.'

‘That’s just a bunch of superstition, Miss Ivy. When a person dies, that’s it. No amount of bramming can do a thing more. Granny Straker’s spirit isn’t roaming around trying to hurt a single soul.’

‘It’s only a get-together to remember and pay respect to the dead, Lilla. Tama is cooking, and getting the musicians (...).

‘(...) I don’t want to remember. The old ways will poison the new. I don’t want Beka getting into the habit of those things. She’s having enough trouble right now with school.’

‘Lawd Lill, you actin’ like the wake is obeah.

‘It’s all connected, Miss Ivy. It’s all connected.’ (66)

Mention of the Afro-derived practice obeah brings to mind Vernon’s assertion that “a small amount of obeah” is practiced among Creoles (29). Deculturation could be credited with the loss of these practices among the majority and, in the case of the English-speaking Caribbean, the fact that it is still very much practiced underground. The labeling of this practice (considered by many to be occult) as Carib (Garinagu) is an example of ethnic prejudice. It also reveals that at least at the time in which the novel is set (the 1950s) there seems to have been less cultural assimilation toward Eurocentric norms among the Garinagu than among the Creoles. This point will be treated in greater detail later in this chapter in the analysis of Ellis’ short stories. Beka’s mother seems to have put her finger on the real reason for these prejudices when she says to her daughter:

Maybe it’s because Carib people remind us of what we lost trying to get up in the world. See, in the old days, according to Granny Straker, the more you left behind the old ways, the more acceptable you were to the powerful people in the government and the churches who had the power to change a black person’s life. (70)

In the novel these women take part in the drumming, singing and dancing which sometimes results in spirit possession. Beka’s father’s actions in taking his family away from the surroundings when the traditional activities begin are indicative of his

disapproval and a shift in the sensibilities of the younger generation. The deculturation that resulted from the rejection of traditional practices is superseded by an acculturation toward Eurocentric religious beliefs and practices.

Father Nunez, the local-born Catholic priest who teaches Beka at the convent school, for example, is described as “more pious” and “more dedicated” than the foreign priests who serve in Belize (89). The narrator observes that the students see their teacher as “hypocritical” in his adaptation of “the mannerisms, language, and style of living of his foreign counterparts” (89). His compatriots criticize him for “leaving his poor papa to slash and burn the milpa plot as best he can” (89), thereby rejecting a traditional Belizean *Mestizo* lifestyle.

Edgell’s third novel *The Festival of San Joaquin*¹⁶⁷ (1997) is set mostly in the rural south of Belize in a *Mestizo* community. The novel’s main theme revolves around power relations on a societal level, and brings into focus neo-colonialist and environmental issues of great importance to rural communities and to the nation as a whole. The novel’s protagonist is a young *Mestizo* mother who kills her abusive partner in self-defense. She is released from prison on probation and returns to the community. In her attempts to rebuild her life, she finds herself in a battle for survival against her in-laws, prominent members of the rich land-owning class. As I analyze the way environmental issues and neo-colonialism are treated in the novel, I will also draw attention to language and feminism.

The novel begins with Luz Marina’s release from prison and makes extensive use of the flashback technique to relate episodes in the protagonist’s life before that moment. The protagonist’s introspection as she recalls the past, seeks to make sense of her

¹⁶⁷ Referred to in parenthetical documentation as *Festival*

(common-law) husband's behavior, and plans for the future, is a technique that serves to give the reader insight into the personalities of the main characters and the principal themes the work addresses.

The abuse the protagonist suffers at the hands of her husband (the son of a rich land-owner) is reflective of social class relations in many societies where the poor are oppressed and downtrodden by those who hold economic and sometimes political power. In the same way that his promises of marriage never materialize, the poor in most societies are kept in a state of oppression with promises of betterment and progress that never bear fruit.

In this work Edgell places patriarchal, imperialistic power in the hands of a woman, Doña Catalina Casal (Salvador's mother). She is the embodiment of exploitative, neo-colonialist, capitalist power. Her husband simply leaves one day and never returns and she takes full control of the family business. The men in her household (her sons and employees) are mere puppets who must respond to her wishes no matter how devious these may be. The novel abounds with examples of ways in which Doña Catalina uses these men to her evil ends. Whether it is driving poor peasants off the land, or destroying other's businesses, or attempting to do physical harm to Luz Marina, it is clear that the patriarchal matriarch of the Casal family is the force behind these oppressive acts. At one point towards the end of the novel Doña Catalina reveals that even what her last surviving son, Andrés, thinks he owns, really belongs to her. She uses this information to thwart his plans to make Luz Marina his wife or partner.¹⁶⁸ One wonders whether it was not a similar revelation that caused the marriage between the protagonist and Salvador

¹⁶⁸ Andrés' obsession with his brother's partner is evident even before the two begin living together. At one point after her release from prison he offers her employment and accommodation at his hotel. Much to her horror he subsequently proposes to her that they become a couple.

never to materialize. Such a marriage would disrupt the class dynamic and bring someone of a much lower social class (peasant) into the realm of the land-owning class.

Issues of migration and rural neglect intersect with neo-colonial exploitation in this novel. San Joaquin faces the threat of the sale of a vast quantity of its forested land to foreign companies. The negative effects such action would have on the community include the displacement of some citizens. In fact the protagonist and her parents are forced to move since her former in-laws, whose land they occupy, are in agreement with this business venture. The role of ordinary citizens in fighting to preserve their environment and in combating neo-colonialist maneuvers is seen through their participation in the Belize Environmental Action Group. Through this movement Luz Marina, her mother Mama Sofia and other ordinary citizens voice their concerns over the issue. Their views are recorded and broadcast via radio to the rest of the nation. These ordinary women are active participants in matters regarding their future and that of their nation. They acquire a voice that they use to achieve the unexpected – victory over the destructive neocolonialist endeavors of local and foreign forces. The fact that the efforts of big business owners and foreign companies fail is an indication of the failure of contemporary *caciquismo* in the face of grassroots activism. This failure is personified too in Luz Marina's survival in the attack on her life. Doña Catalina's handing over custody of her grandchildren, and the protagonist's reunion with her children.

Guyanese writer Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale* (1997) expresses similar concerns over foreign or big-company exploitation of the environment and the negative impact of such actions on the lives of rural inhabitants. In Melville's work, an

inhabitant of the region of the country where an American oil company is conducting oil explorations describes the method as follows:

The Hawk Oil men are prospecting in our area. They have divided the land up in grids. Every hundred yards or so they drill and explode dynamite twenty yards under the earth. It is not supposed to break the surface. But sometimes it does and then again some of the oil men does use dynamite to blow up fish in the rivers. (337-38)

The above actions result in the death of an Amerindian child who is engaged in fishing, one of his daily pursuits. The practice of using dynamite to destroy the fish is also an indictment against the wanton destruction of the environment by these entities. It is evident that environmental concerns and their link to neocolonialist tendencies and actions are issues that continue to be part of the aesthetic of writing in the region.

Also important to the Caribbean aesthetic is language. In *The Festival of San Joaquin* the mainly *Mestizo* characters make frequent use of Spanish phrases like “*Ay Dios*”, and there is the occasional use of Spanish words and phrases like *rancho*, *galería*, *relleno*, and *milperos* in the English narration. The linguistic phenomenon of code-switching present in the speech of bilinguals is also evident in a few places in the work. An example of this is when the pastor invites Luz Marina to join the congregation for lunch. He says, “Will you stay and have some *almuerzo*?” (55). Edgell also captures the bilingualism of the *Mestizo* community through literal translations of English expressions in the speech of certain characters. For instance, Andrés Casal’s use of the phrase “A small moment” (*Festival* 114) and Mamá Sofía’s “May we be no more strangers” (*Festival* 130) are quite likely literal translations of the Spanish expressions. In her work Edgell appropriately captures this first language (Spanish) interference in the second language (English), a natural occurrence in the speech of bilinguals. The indigenous

element in the *Mestizo* community is maintained through the use of words from the Mayan language like *milpa* (corn field), *huipil* (blouse), and *caana* (room with a view).

Language in Edgell's work is not limited to the Spanish and indigenous elements. Language in both of Edgell's works under consideration brings to light the sociolinguistic variety in Belize. *Beka Lamb* has a creole setting. Because of this the language is mainly the English-based creole dialect (or kriol, as it is known in Belize). However, even kriol speakers sometimes use Spanish expressions. This is the case with the protagonist, Beka, and her Aunt Tama.

However, as Torres-Saillant explains, nativization of language is not limited to creole languages, but also to ways in which the writer is able to exploit the rhythms of the region in the text, this is one of the many ways in which language is nativized in Edgell's and Ellis' works. The narrator of *Beka Lamb* says about kriol that "[it was] regarded as a language to be proud of by most people in the country" (11). The narrator's declaration with respect to the value of kriol within pre-independence Belizean society finds support in the work of linguists R.B. Le Page and Andrée Tabouret-Keller. They point to the absence of a plantation system during the era of enslavement, the close relationships that were forged between Whites, Blacks, and indigenous inhabitants due to their interactions in the logging industry, and the mitigated institution of slavery as factors that "led to the emergence of a strong communal identity with its own language – the forerunner of today's Belize Creole" (63). Le Page and Tabouret-Keller also state that the Guatemalan claims to Belizean territory and their opposition to that country's move toward independence helped to further consolidate a sense of nationhood within Belize (65, 66). Pre-independence Belize was therefore ahead of many Caribbean nations with regard to

its view of creole English. In places like Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad, creole English, though the main vehicle of communication by the masses, was stigmatized. The celebration and promotion of the linguistic value of creolese in these nations only came about through post-independence nationalist projects.¹⁶⁹

The value of kriol in Belizean society is evident through the cadences and rhythms of Caribbean language that permeate Belizean texts. In *Beka Lamb* the special nativized use of certain parts of speech is seen in the example below where Beka uses as a verb “frighten” instead of “to startle” or “surprise”: “You frighten me, Mr. Phillip” (*Beka* 78). Colloquial sayings and proverbs like “Every day bucket go to well, one day the bottom fall out” (*Beka* 74), are constantly on the lips of the older women. Youngsters like Beka and Toycie too use kriol in their conversations among themselves and with family and friends. This contrasts with *The Festival of San Joaquin* in which the English is for the most part standard, with the inclusion of some linguistic phenomena peculiar to *Mestizo* and indigenous communities as discussed above. Language in Edgell’s works therefore provides a glimpse into Belize’s multi-linguistic reality. At the same time it suggests the existence of a mutual enrichment of cultures within the nation-space.

In *Bilingual Aesthetics* Doris Sommer points out that the world has “outgrown a one-to-one identity between a language and a people. Individual people have also added one identity to another in ways that strain against the very concept of identity” (xv). At the beginning of this chapter I commented on contrasting expressions with regard to identity within Belizean society. Cayetano’s poem and Edgell’s novels highlight the

¹⁶⁹ Richard Allsopp makes this point in the introduction to his *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (1996 : xvii) ; See also : Dennis Craig’s “The Use of the Vernacular in West Indian Education” in Hazel Simmons-McDonald & Ian Robertson eds. *Exploring the Boundaries of Caribbean Creole Languages* (2006).

plurality of Belizean cultural and linguistic identity. As I proceed to analyze Zoila Ellis' work I will consider other aspects of the nativization of language peculiar to Belizean literature.

Zoila Ellis

Zoila Ellis' collection of short stories is entitled *On Heroes, Lizards, and Passion*.¹⁷⁰ This collection of seven stories treats themes of migration/exile, spirituality, love, and colonialism among others. In my analysis of five of these stories I will focus on the areas of migration, neo-colonialism, spirituality, and nativized language.

Ellis' "The Waiting Room" and "And the Subway Takes me Home" both treat the theme of migration. Whereas the latter story is set in Brooklyn, New York, the former takes place in the U.S embassy in Belize. Both stories highlight the lengths to which people are prepared to go, and the sacrifices they choose to make in their pursuit of opportunities overseas (in the US particularly). In the first of these two stories, the leveling nature of the impersonal space of the waiting room at the U.S embassy and the aloofness of the officer are disconcerting to Elisa Barker, a light complexioned, creole woman with little else to recommend her than her looks and her recent marriage to a wealthy businessman. The privileges she enjoys because of her color and wealth in Belizean society disappear when she enters this alien space. Though she tries to assume an air of aloofness her ignorance and lack of experience soon become evident. The ordinary citizens exhibit knowledge of what is required that is superior to hers. The

¹⁷⁰ Referred to in parenthetical documentation as *Heroes*

leveling that takes place in this alien space is highlighted as applicants of differing social classes and ethnicities are denied non-immigrant U.S visas.

The desperation that marks efforts to migrate is brought out in various ways. One older woman whose application and that of her grandchildren are denied explains to a friend, “The poor girl [her daughter in the U.S] did want to see them. This last one, Charlie, was only three months when she left. I raise all three for her. Now, I think dey need dem mother” (99). Her friend suggests that if the children’s mother is not able to get herself “fix up” (legalize her status in the US) she may have to “send for dem through de back” (pay for them to enter the US illegally via Mexico) (99). The conversation of these two women even reveals that some resort to the occult in their desperate quest to obtain a US visa. The following exchange between two women, Ruthie and Miss June bears this out:

“I hear you could go down to Stann Creek and get dat lady to bathe you and say prayers. It take three days.”

“Ruthie, you think dat work? I never hear ‘bout dat. I must try it.” (99)

The protagonist of “And the Subway Takes me Home” is one of the “fortunate” ones who made it from Belize to the United States. She is proud that she is working hard and “making it” in the US despite the fact that she had to leave her four children back in Belize and has not seen them for some nine years. She, like so many migrant women, works hard as a domestic laborer and care-giver to the well-off elderly and endures the indignities of the racist attitudes of others in society like the immigration lawyer’s secretary (*Heroes* 54), and having to clean the bodily emissions not only of her employer but also the latter’s feline companion (*Heroes* 52). She is proud that she is able to work

hard to provide not just for herself but also for her family back home. Belize invades the U.S space through letters and phone calls with news that is constantly on the protagonist's mind. Though she has left Belize, the protagonist is not totally divorced from her society. She is particularly perturbed to learn that her son has a girlfriend of a different ethnicity (a "kerub" – derogatory term for Black Carib/Garifuna). The relative power she exercises within her U.S space (her knowledge of certain aspects of the society in which she resides, her assertiveness in her relationship with her Trinidadian boyfriend and in the home of her aged employer) dissipates in the face of disturbing news from Belize. Her son marries his Garifuna girlfriend. The anguish she experiences on hearing this news only compounds the pain of her separation from home and loved ones. The mixture of sensory images emphasizes the pain she experiences when her son delivers the dreaded news about his marriage:

Carla stared dumbly at the mouth piece, the sounds coming from it seemed like sharp needles of ice hitting her skin, making it grow colder and colder. She watched the pink receiver dangling from side to side and prayed for the pain to burst her heart (61).

Carla's plight emphasizes her alienation from Belizean society not only in a physical sense but also sociologically. Her son, who lives in Belize, symbolizes ways in which that society has progressed with regard to ethnic relations. Carla's ethnic prejudice, however, reflects the attitude of someone who is stuck in a generational prison.

Internal migration in the form of the rural exodus and its effects on a community is treated in Ellis' "A Hero's Welcome." The fact that this form of migration does not always result in betterment for the individual is another issue this story highlights. It also points to issues with regard to the dependence on external investment that still dominates the psyche of the post-colonial subject. The neglect to which the rural village of Cotton

Tree has descended is blamed on the effects of the war (World War II), the demise of the US-owned chicle industry, and the fact that there were no longer enough young men in the village to work at mahogany logging. The narrative voice says, “[t]he bush had sucked the old men dry and the young ones that were left were unable to take the strain of mahogany work” (108). Toward the end of the story the village is described as populated only by old people and children (129). Though no explanation is given it would appear that the decreased number of young men in the village is because they, like Mas’ Tom the young villager who is drafted to aid the war effort overseas, have left and did not return. Though Mas’ Tom does return briefly, the majority of villagers are not aware of it, and his physical appearance, makes it evident that his life away from Belize has not improved his socio-economic situation.

The villagers of Cotton Tree revel in tales of the past glory of their village. This was the period when “the chicle industry had boomed and all the men used to go into the bush to bleed chicle to sell to the Americans. Now that the Americans were not buying plenty of chicle, the men just did not farm the land anymore. They wanted back their dollars” (*Heroes* 110). As one villager says, “Ever since the chicle business gone down, this village gone down with it” (*Heroes* 111). The villagers’ hope for an external savior is pinned on the person of Mas’ Tom, the villager who is drafted into the war effort. They look forward to his return as they see this as their hope of salvation from their difficult economic straits. News of his impending arrival spurs the villagers to action and all cooperate in restoring, cleaning and preparing food and entertainment. However, as this hoped-for arrival never takes place the village falls back into its depressed state:

People still spoke about Mas' Tom's Welcome with nostalgia and regret. If only, they were heard to say, if only Mas' Tom had come back. Things would not be like this, you know. He was our hope. He was going to be our leader. He made us pull together, unite, cooperate, achieve. (*Heroes* 130)

The irony of the story is that Mas' Tom does return but they do not recognize him. This is because he is not in the guise of the hero they would have expected. Tom's contribution to the war effort was as a laborer who felled trees. When his cousin Miss Hetty sees him with his missing teeth, ragged clothing, and unshod feet, and hears his tale she thinks: "[t]his was the worst, something she had never imagined. No decent clothes, no wife, no medal, no teeth and worst of all, no English accent. Who would look up to a leader like that?" (*Heroes* 127). Unaware of his return, the other villagers are told that Tom's ship was lost at sea. The irony of the tale also lies in the fact that the people did pull together and achieve on their own. They really did not need a Mas' Tom to lead them. However, the story seems to be criticizing the colonial psyche that fosters a dependence on that which is foreign rather than looking to local efforts and creativity as a means of achieving progress.

The story "The Teacher" is set in a village in rural Belize. In this story a rural school master who had previously been a priest, is forced to come to terms with the demons in his past. Spirituality, liberation and the triumph over imperialistic forces are the main themes of this story. As is to be expected, the kriol speech of the rural characters of the story contrasts with that of city dwellers. One can contrast Miss Mangar's speech for instance, with that of the school teacher who for the most part uses Standard English or a variety of kriol much closer to the cultured norm. Before encountering his neighbor the teacher's mental response to her crowing rooster is: "Miss Mangar rooster noisy jus' like she" (*Heroes* 11). His verbal response to her news, "Teecha yu yer sey Mista

Ramsey deh ‘pon dying?’ (*Heroes* 15) is, however, in Standard English: “But weren’t they expecting it?” (*Heroes* 15).

News of Mr. Ramsey’s death is soon followed by his daughter’s request for the teacher to officiate at the burial “since no parson de” (*Heroes* 20). As a priest working among the indigenous peoples, the protagonist’s efforts at community mobilization had incurred the ire of the Church hierarchy. The narrator describes the time of the beginning of his career as a clergy man as “the fifties” a time when the “mood of the country had been violently anti-British and nationalistic sentiments were aroused” (*Heroes* 17).

Nationalism and spirituality intersect in the person of the protagonist. He recognizes that his decision to become a priest was due more to his mother’s gratitude for the Catholic education he had received than from his own personal conviction. His reflections cause him to recognize too that his ordination also served the purposes of the colonial authorities: “A native priest had seemed an excellent idea. He had been an excellent idea –loyal, black, grateful” (*Heroes* 17). The two sentences just quoted indicate the manipulative power of imperialistic patriarchy as personified in the Church leaders.

The priest’s efforts at teaching his rural parishioners independence and self-sufficiency is interpreted as rebelliousness by the Church. One can equate the priest in this story with the leaders of the PIP (People’s Independence Party) in Edgell’s *Beka Lamb*. In the same way that the leaders of this movement, Pritchard and Gladsen are imprisoned for sedition, the priest is removed from his rural parish and imprisoned in an urban church where he finds himself under the close scrutiny of his superiors. Their heavy-handed attitude results in his psychological break-down. Instead of granting his

request to leave the Church, however, they send him to serve as the school master of this rural village.

It would appear that the teacher is content to bury his past here. Miss Maisie's request for him to officiate at her father's funeral, however, forces him to exhume it. The teacher's true liberation comes about through his interaction with the simple folk in this rural environment. Initial evidence of his movement toward freeing himself from the past is his admission to Miss Bella that it was a crisis of faith that had caused him to stop praying and believing in God (16). Miss Celia's soliloquy on the importance of members of the community to support one another especially in the face of the inevitable force of death has a profound effect on the protagonist and motivates him to plan and conduct Mr. Ramsey's funeral service. After the funeral, he again feels the need to confess to Miss Bella. This time he tells her of his previous profession. Instead of interrogating him, she expresses her understanding with the words: "betta yu stop something than yu eena it with only half yu hart" (23). These words serve as the force that finally breaks his shackles, freeing the teacher from the burdens of his past. Though the teacher feels that it is Miss Bella's simplicity and truth, and the river that have set him free, I would add to that equation Miss Celia's selflessness, her sense of justice and her manner of expressing the lessons she had learned from nature. The simple unpretentious women in the community stand in stark contrast to the hierarchy of the Church who instead of providing empathy and support only caused alienation in one of their own. Ellis endows her female characters with agency. They are the ones who bring about the liberation of the priest, a traditional symbol of patriarchal power.

Garifuna spirituality in the form of the *dugu* ritual is the focus of Ellis' second story, "My Uncle Ben." Ellis, who is herself a Garifuna, seems to be paying homage to her ethnicity in this story set in a Garinagu community in Belize. The narrator describes the events of the ritual in detail and makes use of the appropriate Garifuna names and words *duna* (water), *Buye* [sic] (female shaman), and *sisera* (maracas). The story reveals that even within Garifuna households there are individuals like the father who are opposed to the traditional religious practices. The narrator relates how her parents enact this conflict: "[a] relative held a *Dugu* . . . we all took part. All except Pa who said he was a Christian and did not believe in such heathen practices. Ma sucked her teeth, dressed us and marched us off to the *dabuyeba*" (*Heroes* 30). The family's actions bring them into conflict with the Catholic priest who threatens to have them ex-communicated for devil worship (*Heroes* 38). This religious conflict raises questions in the mind of the young narrator who wonders: "[w]as something wrong with the drums and the music and the things that we did at the temple?" (*Heroes* 39). The narrator's question may at one time have been asked in other Caribbean societies like Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica and Guyana where indigenous beliefs and Afro-centric religious practices sometimes found themselves at variance with a dominant religion.

The religious duality present in many Caribbean societies is highlighted in this story. Though the majority of the family subscribes to the indigenous religious practices, they are members of the Catholic Church and they join the priest in the Catholic rosary ritual. This practice stands in contrast to the Garifuna *Dugu*. Though there are those like Pa who stick rigidly to the Christian religion, others like Ma and the other relatives

participate in both rituals. They are comfortably inscribed in both spaces and use each as necessary.

Where language is concerned, this story reflects the truth of Vernon's report about the use of a mix of Kriol and Garifuna among the younger Garinagu (34). The dialogue is mainly in Kriol. Uncle Ben, for example, relates an experience of a supernatural encounter:

One fella in my squad –dat's my workmate Abraham- he picks up a bottle by the river. One pretty bottle it was, He take the bottle to camp and everyone admires it and touch it. But me, I no touch dat, not me Benigno Joseph Martinez. I see dem tings already an' I 'fraid bad. So I shet me mout', don' say notting, but don' touch. (*Heroes* 30)

On at least two occasions different characters make use of Garifuna words. For instance, speaking of her uncle's mutterings on his death-bed, the first-person narrator reports: "Once I caught the word *duna* and almost tripped over my little brother Joseph in my haste to give him the water he wanted" (27). She reports too that her uncle's mutterings included "cursing in Spanish" (*Heroes* 27). This indicates that this character is fluent in at least four languages: English, Spanish, Garifuna and Kriol.

Such linguistic variety reflects the reality of Belizean society. The additional languages spoken in Belize as reflected in its literature is one factor that creates an element of difference with the rest of the Caribbean where there is for the most part two linguistic traditions (English and English-based creole, French creole and French, or Dutch and Papiamentu, or Dutch and Sranan).¹⁷¹ In the case of Belize there have been attempts to promote literature written in Spanish. David Ruiz' *Old Benque: Erase una vez en Benque Viejo* (1990) is a book of Belizean folk and historical tales written in Spanish.

¹⁷¹ In Dominica and St. Lucia English is the official language but French patois/creole is widely spoken.

Ruiz has also written *Got Seif De Cuin!* (1995).¹⁷² Additionally, there is now a Spanish-language edition of Ellis' short story collection published by a Spanish publisher. Poet Brenda Ysaguirre, whose work is available via the Internet, writes in both English and Spanish. With Spanish as the native language of forty percent of Belizeans and the second language of twenty percent of the population (Vernon 6) it seems possible that this literary tradition is ripe for expansion. However, Montserrat Casademunt, Cubola's director has made the observation that despite the large percentage of Belizeans who speak Spanish, many of these do not read the language. This she says has affected the sale of the above-named Spanish-language publications in the country.¹⁷³ Belizean writers are making attempts to demonstrate the cross-cultural nature of the country's literary traditions and the potential exists in Belize for growth in its literature written in Spanish. However, only additional research will reveal whether a Belizean Hispanophone literary counterpublic is imminent.

The foregoing discussion has revealed that just like in the literature of the rest of the Caribbean, Belizean literature is rooted in issues close to the society. It bears reiterating, however, that the features of this national literature different from that of the rest of the Anglophone Caribbean are:

- reflections on the multilingual nature of the country's inhabitants
- treatment of the Guatemalan threat to the country's territorial integrity
- exploration of issues of national identity that points more to interculturality rather than to one particular ethnicity.

¹⁷² The former work was published by Cubola, and the latter by a Guatemalan publisher.

¹⁷³ Personal interview.

Zee Edgell and Zoila Ellis' works treat issues close to Belizean society and can therefore be seen as a model of the nation's literature. The criteria that link it to the corpus of Caribbean literature are present, albeit with its particular peculiarities as discussed above. As one reflects on the issue of publics and counterpublics one can indeed make a case for Belize's national canon as a counterpublic within the field of literature of the Caribbean, and also of Central America. To illustrate the place of Belizean literature in the corpus of Anglophone Caribbean literature one could adjust figure 1.1 in chapter 1 as shown below:¹⁷⁴

Figure 4.1 The Caribbean Literary Corpus



The diagram illustrates that the literatures of the Anglophone Caribbean region share certain common traits but they have their own specific peculiarities.

¹⁷⁴ The four countries named in the Figure 4.1 are only examples. Clearly works from countries such as St. Lucia, Grenada, and Antigua among others also form part of the Anglophone Caribbean literary corpus.

4.5. ON PUBLISHING, PROMOTION, AND RECOGNITION OF BELIZEAN LITERATURE

Zee Edgell is certainly the most recognized Belizean writer to date. More than any other Belizean she has succeeded in attracting the attention of major international publishing houses. All her novels were published by Heinemann.¹⁷⁵ Experts in the field of Belizean and Caribbean literature feel that Edgell's success is due to the publisher of her works as well as the feminist and postcolonial issues she treats in her writing.¹⁷⁶ Edgell's works have also won literary prizes. In 1983 *Beka Lamb* won the British Fawcett Literary Prize. Her short story "My Uncle Theophilus" was awarded the Canute A. Brodhurst Prize for short fiction in 1999.¹⁷⁷ Additionally, Edgell's work has attracted the attention of the school and university curricula in the English-speaking Caribbean. *Beka Lamb* has been included on various versions of the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC)¹⁷⁸ syllabi and one literature professor at the University of the West Indies Cave Hill campus has said that she has used the novel in her classes on Caribbean Women Writers.¹⁷⁹ Edgell's continued dedication to writing and to training of young writers through her position as a professor of Creative Writing at a U.S university, along with her

¹⁷⁵ *The Festival of San Joaquin* was first published by Heinemann in 1997. Macmillan also published the same novel in 1998 as part of its Caribbean Writers Series.

¹⁷⁶ Responses to questionnaire (Professors from the University of the West Indies and the University of Guyana), and Personal interview.

¹⁷⁷ The latter prize was awarded by *The Caribbean Writer*, an annual literary anthology published by the University of the Virgin Islands.

¹⁷⁸ The Caribbean Examinations Council (established 1972) administers school-leaving examinations in more than 15 subjects for secondary school students across the region.

¹⁷⁹ Dr. Evelyn O'Callaghan of the University of the West Indies (Cave Hill) provided this information in March 2010 in response to a questionnaire I sent her.

presence on the editorial board of *The Caribbean Writer*, a literary anthology published by the University of the Virgin Islands, are all factors that have aided in her visibility.¹⁸⁰

Though Zoila Ellis has only published one volume of short stories she has enjoyed some measure of success. Among the many contrasts between her and Edgell are: (i) her work was published by the local publisher Cubola, (ii) apart from her collection of short stories and two poems in an anthology of Belizean poetry, she has not published any other literary work, (iii) whereas Edgell has won two literary prizes, Ellis has not won such a prize to date, (iv) her career is not in the literary field.¹⁸¹ Though Ellis' stories are not included in the CXC syllabi at least one of her stories is included in an anthology of Belizean literature especially compiled for secondary school students in that country.¹⁸² Additionally, the same story "The Waiting Room" is now a part of *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories* (2002). This latter publication and the Spanish - language publication of Ellis' work may result in a greater degree of recognition of her work in the future.

Edgell, and to a lesser degree Ellis, are contributing to the visibility of Belize's literature in the Caribbean and beyond. Nevertheless, many younger Belizean writers still feel that their country's literature is marginalized in the regional corpus. For the up-and-coming Belizean writer, lack of access to publishing, and official advocacy are factors that stifle their growth as writers. In recent years some writers have started their own publishing houses to first publish their own works and then the works of others. Adele

¹⁸⁰ Edgell has now retired from her position at Kent State University. Ohio, USA.

¹⁸¹ Ellis is a legal professional who currently serves as a Magistrate in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In an e-mail interview she indicated that she has done some writing over the years but her busy schedule has not permitted her to publish.

¹⁸² Deryck Satchwell ed. *The Alchemy of Words*. Cubola (2008).

Ramos, Felene Cayetano and Kalilah Enriquez are examples of this phenomenon. A journalist by profession, Ramos founded Ramos Publishing in 2005. Through this company she published her own poetry, a volume of Belizean poems by a number of the nation's poets, as well as anthologies by individual poets (Ivory Kelly, Ritamae Hyde, and Anne K. Lowe). Her company has also published a book on sports in Belize by Evan X. Hyde. Kalilah Enriquez has used her company Excellence Publishing to publish her own literary work.¹⁸³ Other writers do their own type-setting and pay to have their work published. Of course, in small Third-World countries, self-publishing is often a necessary first step for first-time writers. One recalls that Derek Walcott self-published his first book of poems with two hundred dollars he had borrowed from his mother.¹⁸⁴

It appears too, that ignorance of the realities of the world of publishing is also a hindrance to those who are inexperienced in the field. One Belizean poet expressed dismay at the 30% offered to him by a local publisher as royalties for his work.¹⁸⁵ This clearly shows unfamiliarity with the workings of the publishing industry. An offer of 30% as royalties is much more than is generally given by major publishing houses in the United Kingdom and North America. The standard rate for royalties is 10%.

The question of mediation with regard to publication and promotion of their works is another reality of the industry that serves as a deterrent to some writers. The issue of promotion cannot be overly emphasized. Silvana Woods recalls that an avenue for the promotion of the works of Belizean writers was made available at the "Book

¹⁸³ Cayetano's Wadigidigi Publications Inc., (established 2004) in the U.S.A is no longer operational.

¹⁸⁴ Jeremy Taylor, "Walcott's Nobel Works" *Caribbean Beat*. 5 (March/April 1993).

¹⁸⁵ Harley Burn a.k.a "River of Fire" during group interview with Belizean poets.

Week” exhibition (2009).¹⁸⁶ She relates that the only publishers at the exhibition were the University of Belize (with a journal display), Cubola Productions, and Angelus Press.¹⁸⁷ Only two self-published authors had their works on display. Woods states further that in addition to government recognition, teachers and writers themselves should lobby for more Belizean literature to be taught in schools in that country and be included on the syllabi of the regional examining body (CXC).¹⁸⁸ It would appear that in the absence of recognition from official sources some writers are turning to the Internet. Through this virtual space some seek to make their work more visible. One Belizean writer who at the time of our meeting had not yet published her work said that she was considering using the Internet to get her work out to a wider readership. She cited the existence of the site www.belizeanartwork.com.¹⁸⁹ The aforementioned site invites individual artists or groups desirous of producing CDs and publishing books to submit their work for review with the promise of free publishing. A perusal of the site reveals that Ritamae Hyde is the only Belizean poet registered. Another site www.belizeans.com invites writers to post their work on the site. Several poems are posted by seventeen Belizean poets. The site also carries six short-stories by one Belizean writer. However, no works have been posted on the site for the past seven years. Others like Felene Cayetano-Swaso, Angela Gegg, and Brenda Ysaguirre have their own websites on which they

¹⁸⁶ Silvana Woods is a Professor of Literature at the University of Belize. She is currently acting as Public Information Officer at the University of Belize

¹⁸⁷ Angelus Press is a wholesaler and retailer of stationery, books, school supplies, computer equipment and business machines. It also offers printing and publication services. The online bibliography of Belizean books lists Kathy Esquivel’s work of fiction *Under the Shade* as published by Angelus Press. No publication date is given.

¹⁸⁸ Personal interview.

¹⁸⁹ Information provided by Ritamae Hyde during a group interview with Belizean poets. Hyde has since published her anthology *Mahogany Whispers* Belize City: Ramos Publishing, 2010.

promote their writing and through which their published works can be purchased.¹⁹⁰ Ysaguirre writes in Spanish and English and claims to have authored more than 200 poems.¹⁹¹ The level of recognition these writers achieve through these sites is yet to be determined. Felene Cayetano-Swaso claims that so far she has sold about two books per year through her website. She states further that most of her sales have taken place after live poetry readings.¹⁹² Cayetano's experience suggests that the Internet may provide a limited degree of recognition. At this time though writers who are virtually unknown still need the assistance of mediators to help them gain recognition in literary circles beyond their country's borders. Ian Randle recognizes the important role that publishers and agents play in promoting writers' works. He feels that a lack of entrepreneurial skills is a major obstacle to small publishers. He asserts that in order to grow internationally publishers must be "innovative, bold and . . . self-confident even to the point of brashness" (6).

The online site, Caribbean Literary Salon, mentioned earlier in this chapter, serves as a place where Belizean writers can achieve some visibility through interaction with a wider range of writers and critics from within the Caribbean and its diaspora. Through this site they can get access to resources for publishing. It is regrettable however, that up to the time of writing, no Belizean writer has become a member of this literary community.

¹⁹⁰ See Cayetano's site: www.felene.com. Gegg's site is: www.angelagegg.com, and Ysaguirre's blog is: <http://belizeantothetbone.blogspot.com>

¹⁹¹ See: <http://brendaysaguirre.galeon.com/cvitae>

¹⁹² E-mail response.

We have seen that the Belizean literary counterpublic while sharing much in common with the corpus of canonical literature in the Anglophone Caribbean, has peculiarities - its linguistic variety, treatment of the threat to its territorial integrity, and promotion of an intercultural national identity- attributable to its historical, linguistic and geopolitical realities. These are differences that can only enrich the Caribbean literary tradition. As the foregoing discussion has shown, promotion, publication by recognized publishing houses, literary prizes, and inclusion in academic curricula outside of Belize are all factors that legitimize writers. Only time will tell whether the new virtual avenues some writers are pursuing will evolve into agencies of legitimation, and thus provide the visibility and recognition writers desire.

Given Belize's situation as the last Central American nation to gain its independence and its small demographic size in relation to the rest of Central America and the Caribbean, that country's literature displays the potential for setting the pace with regard to intersecting counterpublics. The Belizean works analyzed show that their writers are intent on forging interculturality in the local literary field. They are supported by local publishers, and academics. Indeed, as one compares Belize with Uruguay and Costa Rica there is evidence that instead of promoting the nation's cultures as separate and distinct, the Belizean works analyzed promote the concept of cultures that mutually enrich one another.

Conclusion: Afro-Hispanic and Belizean Literature: Current Challenges and Future Research

The foregoing discussion has provided answers to some questions asked at the outset of this project. It has also raised additional questions that will form the basis for future research. This study has provided evidence that Spanish American literature is a diverse body of work. It is clearly not opposed to plural aesthetics. Works like Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, and *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* by Carlos Fuentes are examples of two hegemonic Spanish American works that in their own ways highlight aspects of Mexicanness. An overriding feature in Rulfo's work is the role of indigenous and Catholic religious beliefs. Both works also treat important historical moments in Mexico, gender, class and political issues, and confront in different ways the national discourse on *mestizaje*. It is clear that the Afro-descendant works in this study do not enjoy the same degree of recognition. As I pointed out in chapter 2, the region's literary history indicates that some writers of the early colonial period sought literary independence from the colonial standard both in their subject matter and in their mode of expression. My discussion on the Afro-descendant literary aesthetic in Spanish America generally and particularly its manifestation in Uruguayan and Costa Rican literatures presents this counterpublic as a means of enhancing even further the region's literary plurality. Writers from both countries display variety in their subject matter and styles of writing. The Afro-descendant aesthetic is very evident in much of their work. Some of their work provides evidence of interculturality through their bringing together of Afro-descendant aesthetics, religious syncretism, intertextuality, avant-garde and post-avant-garde tendencies.

It is evident that there are several areas of overlap with other aesthetics that create sites for dialogue with other canons or countercanons. For instance, historical revisionism is certainly not unique to Afro-descendant literature. As noted earlier, other Spanish American writers who subscribe to different literary traditions have seen the need to contest official versions of history or to engage in a fictional re-writing of historical events. A case in point is Teresa Poniatowska's historical revisionism of the Mexican Revolution in which the feminist perspective is foregrounded in the testimonial novel *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* (1969). Such works provide rich spaces for dialogue among canons. As mentioned in previous chapters such dialogue fosters the growth of interculturality when citizens become aware of the heterogeneous nature of their national cultural identities.

The treatment of feminist concerns is another of the aesthetic criteria that provides the basis for dialogue and contestation among literary traditions. The works analyzed in this study highlight various roles the woman plays. These include: mother, teacher, spiritual leader, lover, and combatant. Even though Third-World Feminisms share some features, social class and race intersect with gender to create certain differences. Whether the dialogue is between the middle class writer who addresses the concerns of the lower classes, thus making them part of the imaginary, or the often unpublished voice of the lower classes, this particular aesthetic presents much room for dialogue and contestation. This is so because there are quite possibly cases in some Spanish American countries where working class Afro-descendant women feel even more disenfranchised than their indigenous compatriots of the same class. Juliet Hooker points out that even in countries where Afro-descendants were officially granted rights as a group, "in almost no instances

did they gain the same rights as Indians” (286).¹⁹³ She names only three Latin American countries in which Afro descendants and Indians have the same collective rights:

Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua” (286). Female writers who create female personae find correspondences in contemporary literature regardless of race, ethnicity, and social class.

Another aesthetic criterion that is quite likely to generate both dialogue and contestation is the orality that is still very evident in much Afro-descendant writing. Oral traditions are very often equated with the folkloric tradition. Indeed, the argument that both the oral nature of Afro-descendant literature and its tendency to invoke aspects of ethnic memory, and Afro-centric spirituality, has been advanced by some of the region’s prominent thinkers. As discussed in chapter 2, Ángel Rama (1974) highlights the folkloric nature of indigenous and Afro-descendant literatures.¹⁹⁴ He asserts that these traditions had not been viewed as valuable by intellectuals and were not the subject of critical attention. However, he acknowledges that ways of forging dialogue between hegemonic literature and the oral traditions should be pursued either directly or through intermediaries (121-22). As we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, the time is ripe for such dialogue. Indeed, the very concept of orality and its use in Afro-descendant writing, as discussed in chapter 3, and the definitions of what constitutes folklore, could generate much debate both within and outside the academic community. The development of performance poetry as an increasingly more popular genre in

¹⁹³ Hooker states that Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua extend only some rights to Afro-descendants.

¹⁹⁴ The article referred to is part of the work: *Literatura, cultura, sociedad en América Latina*. It is a compilation of Rama’s essays and speeches from the 1940s to the 1980.

Spanish America and the Anglophone Caribbean also indicates the existence of another counterpublic that is rooted in orality. This too provides room for dialogue.

Although it is easy to recommend such dialogue, its implementation and maintenance may prove more problematic. In the first instance, the writers under consideration have not published their works in large quantities. One thousand print runs of Cabral and McDonald's poetry were published. Campbell printed 500 copies of *Naciendo*. For its first edition, 1,000 copies of *Rotundamente negra* were printed, and 500 for the second edition. These numbers indicate a small readership. If one adds to this the fact that poetry as a literary genre does not enjoy as extensive a readership as other genres, like prose fiction, then the challenges these writers face to reach a wider audience becomes even more evident. If, as some Uruguayan writers state, they find it difficult to get adequate air time on radio or television to promote their works, it is clear that one of the means of generating awareness and dialogue is lost to them.¹⁹⁵ In addition to the foregoing, the point was made in this study that the Afro-descendant cultural product in Spanish America, that is in demand, and thus readily legitimized, is their folkloric and performance cultural production. This increases the challenges those who attempt to have their literary product legitimized face.

Chapter 4 revealed an interesting difference with regard to literary legitimation in the Anglophone Caribbean. In that region, where Afro-descendants constitute a demographic majority, a strong literary culture remains, and new voices and genres continue to receive legitimation. This is not to say that performance culture is not in high demand in the region. It does appear though, that the literary tradition that was fostered by these people of color in the 1950s and 1960s has continued to receive support from

¹⁹⁵ Personal interviews.

regional educational institutions like schools and universities, regional examining bodies, and institutions that award local and regional literary prizes. In the specific case of the legitimation of Belizean literature, the problem seems to be a lack of access to more extensive mediation and publishing networks.

Academic institutions in their roles as canon-endowing agencies provide traditional means of fostering dialogue through their curricula, and the critical attention they give to texts. In both Spanish America and the Caribbean the academy has played a role in the legitimation of texts. Both production and distribution are major factors in the uneven playing field of literature; and this becomes more evident when one observes the interconnectedness of the various canon-endowing institutions (Bourdieu 78). Some who are engaged in the struggles for legitimation of their literary works may be in a disadvantageous position even before they enter the fray. This is certainly the position of small publishing houses and authors who publish their own works. It appears as though individuals and groups who have organized various Internet blogs and virtual literary spaces are making attempts to foster dialogue. It is difficult, however, to measure the success of these initiatives. At this time, it does appear that they have not shaken the firm foundation upon which the traditional canon-endowing institutions stand. So the dialogue these virtual sites generate, while useful, may not be sufficient to legitimate texts to audiences beyond those engaged in these small circles of discourse.

As previously discussed, quite a large number of international publishing houses operate in Spanish America. Juan De Castro (2008) expresses concern with regard to the role that major Spanish publishing houses play in the legitimation of Spanish American writers. His research indicates that some large institutions like Planeta “have entered

smaller local markets, publishing local fiction and nonfiction, including school textbooks, the bread-and-butter source of income for small local presses throughout Latin America” (Solé n.pag., qtd in De Castro 95). Further, he suggests that the hegemony of the Spanish publishing houses means that those writers whose work they publish write in conformity with market demands of what appeals to the wider “Spanish-speaking readership regardless of nationality or region” (96). Of course, this is not a new phenomenon.

In chapter 2 we saw how *negrismo* had European beginnings. It grew out of artistic primitivism and made its way to the Caribbean and other parts of the world. It then became part of the Spanish American avant-garde. It is clear that current hegemonic trends and market demand are not for the kinds of works Cabral, McDonald, and Campbell have written to-date. McDonald’s inability to attract a transnational or large national publisher for *La cofradía cimarrona* is evidence of this reality. She has indicated that she will most likely resort to contracting a small publisher for the project.¹⁹⁶ The CERLALC 2008 report discussed in chapter 4 certainly corroborates De Castro’s findings. These studies reveal the complex networks that are involved in the process of legitimation. Local writers without adequate representation and mediation find it difficult to enter the race and much more to compete in it. This raises the question of what has to be done to initiate, and foster dialogue among canons.

Anglophone Caribbean literature appears to be open to the diversity of that region’s aesthetics. The academy as a canon-endowing agency has led the charge in granting legitimation to a wider array of texts in the past fifteen years or so. Of the five writers whose works were analyzed, only Zee Edgell has received the legitimation of international publishing, inclusion in anthologies, academic criticism, inclusion in

¹⁹⁶ E-mail correspondence.

academic syllabi, and the winning of literary prizes. Some individuals I interviewed felt that the timing of Edgell's first novel (published the year after Belize gained its political independence), together with its nationalist sentiments is among the reasons for its success. They do not hesitate to mention the legitimation her work received from its publisher (Heinemann) as an added reason for the writer's success.¹⁹⁷ This shows the validity of what was stated previously in relation to the role international publishers and the international market play in the promotion and legitimation of works. As mentioned in chapter 4, some in the literary field in Belize feel that if the government were to play a role in granting recognition to writers and their works it would go a long way toward promoting that country's literature at home and abroad. In a small country like Belize, this form of official legitimation may aid in recognition locally and to a limited degree in the Caribbean.

The role of the Belizean schools and its university in the promotion of that country's literature is indeed commendable. However, it does appear that more needs to be done by Belizean academics in the matter of literary criticism. Their contributions on Belizean literature in international literary journals will go a far way in advancing the recognition of that country's literature. Additionally, it is possible that if writers seek affiliation with writers' associations outside Belize they could benefit professionally from their interactions with others in their field.

As cited earlier, Caribbean publisher Ian Randle calls on other publishers in the region to come together in order to forge stronger professional ties. He also feels they should seek to establish publishing and distribution networks with firms outside the region (3). This is certainly one way of globalizing the region's literary product.

¹⁹⁷ Personal interviews

However, globalization and expansion in this sense, while it has its advantages, may prove detrimental to some writers. The same concerns De Castro expresses with regard to the operation of international publishing houses in Spanish America will most likely become a reality. Indeed, some may argue that it is already happening to some extent in the Anglophone Caribbean with the Caribbean Writers Series of Macmillan and Heinemann.¹⁹⁸ Such factors highlight the challenges writers face in the quest for legitimation. If, as the Afro-Uruguayan writer Jorge Chagas states, it is only through winning an international literary prize that his fiction could possibly gain recognition; one would want to see to what extent prizes do affect the value placed on the winners' works.

As was mentioned above, Zee Edgell has so far received two literary prizes (one British, and one Caribbean) for her fiction. Literary prizes as legitimizing agents play a role similar to that of publishers. In fact some prizes are awarded or funded by publishing houses (De Castro 96). Therefore if writers are not published by a major firm, how could they possibly hope to receive these awards? Additionally, whether or not a work receives greater recognition after the writer has won a prize depends on the prestige that particular award enjoys. A case in point is the Guyana Prize for Literature. Even though this prize is recognized as one of the most important literary awards in the English-speaking Caribbean, some locally-based writers like Ruel Johnson who won the prize in 2002 are still relatively unknown in the literary field outside Guyana. In fact even though he won this prize (his submission was an unpublished manuscript), Johnson subsequently had to self-publish his work with the financial assistance of local business firms. The above-

¹⁹⁸ The recently founded (2009) Caribbean Publishing House in Guyana is the subject of controversy with regard to, among other matters its selections of works for its "Guyanese Classics" publication. See the letter to the editor: "The Guyana Prize for Literature Has Gone Missing." *Stabroek News* 25 April, 2010.

named prize is not without controversy. Many local writers and ordinary citizens have criticized the fact that the prize winners are most often overseas-based Guyanese, many of whom are established writers whose works had won other prizes abroad before they entered and won the Guyana Prize.¹⁹⁹ So in both Spanish America and the Anglophone Caribbean, international (and sometimes national) literary prizes, although recognized as a means of legitimizing works, seem to be beyond the reach of locally-based writers whose works have not already received some degree of legitimation .

In this project I was able to highlight ways in which the Afro-descendant aesthetic has created a counterpublic in Uruguayan and Costa Rican literatures. Of these two countries Costa Rica seems to be taking some initial steps toward interculturality in the literary field. In my examination of Belizean literature I have become aware of a literary aesthetic that seeks to foster interculturality. I expect that this body of writing will grow in its diversity with the growth of its Hispanic population. If this does become a reality Belizean literature will then take its place as a counterpublic in the Central American literary corpus. The project brought to light some of the major challenges writers in these countries face in their attempts to write, publish, and receive recognition for their efforts.

The following are areas that warrant further research. Firstly, I will conduct more in-depth interviews and surveys among the academic communities in a greater number of Spanish American countries. This will be with the aim of determining the extent to which the works of Afro-descendant writers are taught in literature classes, and also the level of critical attention these works receive in the region. The role the translation of literary works plays in legitimation is another area that I was unable to address in the present

¹⁹⁹ See the following letters to the editor: “Former Judges of the Guyana Prize for Literature Should Not Be Allowed to Submit Entries.” *Stabroek News* 29 April, 2010; and “The Guyana Prize for Literature Has Gone Missing.” *Stabroek News* 25 April, 2010.

study. It is one I intend to include in my future research. Scope exists also for more in-depth research into and documentation of the Spanish-language literary counterpublic in Belize. Such a project will not only identify writers and their works, it will examine also the publishing networks to which they have access and their market success. Many writers seem to be making use of blogs, Internet sites, social media, and other virtual spaces and events to exhibit their works. More comprehensive research is required to determine whether or not writers are really receiving recognition through these media. Additionally, in some countries much literary criticism is published in literary supplements or special sections of newspapers. Special television and radio programs dedicated to literary discussions also play an important role in promoting the works of local writers. This is an area of the process of legitimation and mediation that I was unable to research for the present study. It can certainly be pursued in a future expanded version of this project.

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